

# **parkview**DNA

## *STUDY GUIDE*

A resource of Parkview Church

Iowa City, Iowa

*parkviewchurch.org*

All Scripture quotations from the English Standard Version Bible (ESV)

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Welcome to a 9-week study of what it looks like to be a follower of Jesus! We invite you to this study we are calling the DNA of Parkview. **Our mission is to follow Jesus together every day**—and this study will take us to the essential callings of a follower of Jesus, drawn from Jesus’ life, teaching, and interactions with His disciples.

**THE FIVE TRAITS OF A DISCIPLE WE WILL EXPLORE ARE:**

**ENJOY** God’s Presence

**LIVE** God’s Story

**LOVE** God’s People

**SHARE** God’s Gifts

**SERVE** God’s World

**Over the next ten weeks these traits will be taught through:**

**SUNDAY SERMONS:** *September 9<sup>th</sup> through November 18<sup>th</sup>*

**COMMUNITY GROUP STUDY AND INTERACTION**

**PERSONAL STUDY** (*this booklet*)

**SCRIPTURE MEMORY**

**PERSONAL SKILLS** *such as...*

*How to Pray*

*How to read the Bible*

*How to share your spiritual story*

*How to live in community*

*How to care for one another*

*How to contribute to our gospel movement*

*How to be a Christian neighbor*

At the end of this series, our desire is that the people of Parkview will have a common commitment and a common set of skills that will unleash us to be a church to help more and more people enjoy the life that Jesus died for them to have.

Thanks for jumping in...now...**LET’S GO!**



**Doug Schillinger** | *Lead Pastor*  
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## **Acknowledgements**

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# ENJOY GOD'S PRESENCE

*Introduction*

*September 9-22*

**Enjoy God's Presence** (*Worship*) A people who hunger for God's presence, regularly spending time with God, simply standing in awe of who God is. (*Psalm 16:11; Matthew 22:37-39*)

Kickoff time! We're ready to jump into our first two weeks of study—and our theme is Enjoying God's presence! Jesus often withdrew from the crowds and busyness of life to be with His Father. The times of prayer and solitude with His Father gave Jesus encouragement and direction. As we follow Jesus, one of the essential rhythms in our lives is enjoying being in relationship with God. Our God has graciously made Himself available to us through Jesus and His work for us to the cross. So, we live our lives with God—we are not alone! We have a God who has pursued us, who longs to be with us, and who wants us to walk confidently in this life enjoying His presence.

There are four personal studies that you can read through over the next two weeks to draw you more deeply into this profound concept of enjoying God's presence!

In this section of the study guide you will also be given two Bible verses to memorize: Psalm 16:11; and Matthew 22:37-39. Cut out your verse cards and follow the practical tips on how to memorize the Bible given in this study.

Finally, you will also be given some practical pointers on prayer.

May God use these two weeks of focus on enjoying His presence to unleash us as a people who live boldly, courageously, and compassionately as we are continually reminded that God is with us and for us! Enjoy this study! And don't hesitate to send your questions, comments or stories of how God is at work in your life during this series to the office at [office@parkviewchurch.org](mailto:office@parkviewchurch.org).



# ENJOY GOD'S PRESENCE

Week 1 | Study 1

*"But when we are faithful  
to keep ourselves in His holy presence  
and to make him absolutely central in our lives,  
this not only hinders us from offending Him  
or doing anything that displeases Him  
(at least willfully),*

*it also gives rise to freedom- a divine  
freedom- and, if you will not  
misunderstand me,  
a familiarity with God  
that makes possible  
asking  
and  
receiving  
the graces we need."*

-Brother Lawrence, Practicing the Presence of God. Ed. Donald E. Demaray.

There is nothing greater to the Christian than simply enjoying the presence of God. To know and be known by our Creator, basking in His presence and experiencing the warmth of His love is the supreme good for disciples of Jesus. As Parkview begins to dream about the future of the church in our changing environment, some things will never change. In the near future, the 2020 vision campaign will come to fruition, Faith Academy will expand to become a full K-6 school, and the North Campus will be inaugurated. In the midst of all these changes, how will Parkview keep its footing? By looking to our DNA- the stuff that makes us, us!

## **What is DNA?**

Biologically, DNA is the basic building block of an organism. Hidden away in almost every cell in your body are the essential components of repair, maintenance and growth. It is not "exclusive" information for the "best" cells but is simply what every cell needs to both maintain itself and be a functional unit of the larger whole. The analogy to life in the church is clear. Not every cell needs to be able to transmit signals from the brain. And not every person needs to be able to preach, lead a team of ushers



or teach toddlers. **The question is, what are the essential things that every part of Parkview (you!) must know in order to be a healthy and helpful member of the church?** With our eyes toward the future of Parkview, we seek to answer that question through this DNA series and accompanying book which you hold in your hands.

## *What?*

So, what is the DNA of Parkview? We're glad you asked...

At Parkview we follow Jesus together in everyday life, becoming disciples who...

## **ENJOY God's Presence** (*Worship/Prayer*)

A people unleashed by the Gospel to pursue God, our loving Father, through Jesus the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 22:37-39; John 15:5, 8; Psalm 16:11)

## **LIVE God's Story** (*Bible*)

A people hungry to learn and live out the Bible—the true story of the Gospel, which is God's redeeming work in Jesus that equips us for every good work. (John 8:31-32; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

## **LOVE God's People** (*Community*)

A people devoted to love one another as Jesus has loved us—proving that we truly follow Him. (John 13:34-35; I John 4:9-12)

## **SHARE God's Gifts** (*Generosity*)

A people who sacrificially share our lives, including our money, time, and abilities for the good of others—proving that we are cared for by a generous God. (Matthew 6:19-21; 33-34; Philippians 4:19; Luke 14:33)

## **SERVE God's World** (*Evangelism and Justice*)

A people sent as Jesus was sent, to declare and display the Good News of life in Jesus as we seek the flourishing of our neighbors and the world. (Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 19:10; Mark 10:45; John 20:19-23)

## Why?

By the end of this series, we hope to set ourselves firmly, **with one mind and with a unified vision for how Parkview makes disciples in Iowa City, North Liberty, and beyond**. This book is meant to guide you through the series with personal equipping to ensure that as a community, we are strong in each element of Parkview's DNA.

## How?

Each study in this book is oriented around a particular skill or concept that will help you to be a healthy and helpful member of Parkview. Some will be more devotional in nature and others will be especially practical. Each week there will be two studies to go through, and each one will have special value for you, so we hope you can intentionally set aside time, so we can grow as a community together. It might be helpful to set a certain day and time or even location where you will do each study. We encourage you to commit to talking through this study with your spouse or a friend from your community group.

## What is this book for?

The focus of the book is to have a set of **common commitments** and **common skills**. It will therefore be very application-driven. We also want to have a set of **common Scriptures** that drive our mission forward. To that end, one of the goals is that we would memorize one verse each week. This might sound a bit intimidating, but in this first study we'll give you some tips to help you along the way. If you're the planning type, take a look at the table below to see everything that's coming your way over the next 9 weeks:

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Trait</b>	<b>Memory Verse</b>	<b>Study Topic</b>
September 9-22	Enjoy God's Presence	Psalm 16:11	#1: Scripture Memory
			#2: Prayer
		John 15:5	#3: Setting good rhythms
			#4: Stirring your heart

September 23- October 6	Live God's Story	John 8:31b-32	#1: How to read the Bible I
			#2: How to read the Bible II
		2 Timothy 3:16-17	#3: Telling your story
			#4: The Word of God
October 7-20	Love God's People	John 13:34-35	#1: Belonging to one another
			#2: One another's of Scripture
		1 John 3:16-18	#3: Soul care tools I
			#4: Soul care tools II
October 21-27	Share God's Gifts	Matthew 6:19-21	#1: Spiritual gifts inventory
			#2: Jesus and money
			#3: Irrational generosity
October 28- November 10	Serve God's World	Matthew 28:18-20	#1: Local missions
			#2: Global missions
		Isaiah 1:16-17	#3: Christian neighboring
			#4: Seeking Shalom

Never memorized scripture before? Here are some tips:

### **Commitment is Key**

Memorizing scripture is easier for some than others, but the main ingredient is not excellent retention but the commitment to put in the

time. Effective scripture memory doesn't happen by sitting down once a week to "cram"- it happens by revisiting the passage many times each day during the week.

This first week, the passage that we will memorize together is Psalm 16:11:

*You make known to me the path of life;  
in your presence there is fullness of joy;  
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*  
--Psalm 16:11 (ESV)

## Memory Verse

### Use your Tools!

Included with this book is a sheet of scripture memory cards. Take a moment now to cut out these cards. These cards are the method that will work for most people in memorizing scripture, because they enable you to carry your scripture memory verses wherever you are. You can keep them in your wallet or purse or in your pocket and always have them available.

- Read through the verse slowly, reading it aloud
- Break the verse down into manageable pieces (in this case, there are three short lines that can be considered individually)
- Work to internalize each line by reading it carefully and slowly in your head (or aloud), then looking away from the card and seeing if you can remember the words. Do this until you have internalized each line and then *include* the next line when you're ready to move on.
- The key to this approach is **repetition**. Establish a time that you will work through your scripture memory. The best way is to pick a time that you already do something consistently and just add this to it.
  - *Example:* Everyone uses the mirror to get ready in the morning. Post the verse on your mirror and while brushing your teeth or drying your hair, practice reading through the verse.
  - *Example:* Everyone eats. Run through your weekly cards during mealtime by yourself or with your family.

- *Example:* BE SAFE with this one but everyone gets stuck at red lights. If you can safely glance at a memory card to get the verse in your head, this can be an easy way to redeem what feels like wasted time.

# ENJOY GOD'S PRESENCE

Week 1 | Study 2

*"Prayer is the only entryway into genuine self-knowledge. It is also the main way we experience deep change- the reordering of our loves. Prayer is how God gives us so many of the unimaginable things he has for us. Indeed, prayer makes it safe for God to give us many of the things we most desire. It is the way we know God, the way we finally treat God as God. Prayer is simply the key to everything we need to do and be in life.*

*We must learn to pray. We have to."*

*-Timothy Keller, Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*

If we were to take a poll of what it means to enjoy the presence of God, prayer would almost certainly be among the top responses. Most of us know that God wants us to pray to Him. Many of us have frequently made resolutions to pray more often, more effectively or more persistently.

Yet prayer eludes many of us. We don't know where to start. We feel awkward. We fall asleep.

Perhaps these are the same feelings that Jesus' disciples felt when they approached Him and asked Him to teach them to pray. This episode is recorded for our benefit in Luke 11:1-13. Read through this passage and respond to the questions below:

*<sup>1</sup>Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." <sup>2</sup>And he said to them, "When you pray, say:*

*"Father, hallowed be your name.*

*Your kingdom come.*

*<sup>3</sup>Give us each day our daily bread,*

*<sup>4</sup>and forgive us our sins,*

*for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.*

*And lead us not into temptation."*

<sup>5</sup>And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, <sup>6</sup>for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; <sup>7</sup>and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? <sup>8</sup>I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. <sup>9</sup>And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>10</sup>For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. <sup>11</sup>What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; <sup>12</sup>or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? <sup>13</sup>If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (ESV)

## **Learning to Pray**

One initial observation we can make is that when Jesus responds to His disciples' request to teach them to pray, He doesn't say, "It's impossible, you just have to have a knack for it." In fact, the assumption is that it is possible to learn to pray. So, take heart- it can be done!

The prayer that Jesus offers is closer to an outline for prayer rather than an example to be copied. We can learn much about how to pray by observing the elements that Jesus includes in this prayer. Work through the prayer on your own below, noting what we can learn from each section.

### ***"Father, hallowed be your name.***

*Note: "hallowed" is a word we don't use in today's language. The word could also be translated, "sanctified," "beautified," or "blessed."*

Write out this first phrase in your own words:

Let's pause for a second to realize the privileged position that Jesus places us in with this first phrase. Many of us are accustomed to the idea of God being a *Heavenly Father*. But through the Old Testament and into Jesus' time, the image of God as a *Father* was nowhere near mainstream. And to Jesus' disciples who were Jews living in the 1st century, the thought of approaching God with such intimacy was unthinkable and

borderline blasphemous (see John 5:18). Yet this is exactly what Jesus calls his followers to do here. That Jesus offers this invitation to deep intimacy with His Father in juxtaposition with God's holiness is a picture of the Gospel- in the midst of our insufficiency we are invited into the perfection of God's presence by the voice of our Savior. How beautiful!

***Your kingdom come.***

What is this phrase asking God to *do*?

***<sup>3</sup>Give us each day our daily bread,***

What is this phrase asking God to *do*?

Why do you think Jesus encourages his disciples to ask for *daily* bread, rather than *monthly* bread, or just plain bread?

***<sup>4</sup>and forgive us our sins,  
for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.***

This is the only part of Jesus' example prayer that includes a second sentence explaining the request. What do you think is the significance of this?

***And lead us not into temptation."***

*Note: sometimes readers struggle with this line- certainly God does not tempt Christians, so why would we have to ask him not to tempt us? However, this verse does not imply that God himself tempts, but it does assume that we will face temptation. The request that Jesus encourages is that as we follow God's leadership, we will be empowered to not enter into temptation and give in to sin.*

What kind of relationship to God does this request assume?



Take some time to pray through this passage, expanding on each phrase using the insights that you gained in the previous section.

### **Could you Share it?**

Imagine a curious co-worker or neighbor approached you and asked you to write a "more understandable" version of the prayer for her- without all the words she doesn't understand. Try your hand at writing a paraphrase that would help your friend to understand how Jesus taught us to pray:

After offering this sample prayer, Jesus also uses two analogies to explain prayer to His disciples. Fill out the table below to explore the meaning of these for us today:

Verses	Those who pray are like...	This analogy teaches us to pray...
5-10	A friend who visits in the middle of the night and incessantly asks for help.	
11-13		...expecting God to hear us and give us what we need.

Jesus' stories also contain promises about who God is that should greatly impact the way we go to Him in prayer. Fill out this table below to solidify what you have learned:

Verses	Statement about God
5-10	
11-13	

If you fully trusted these promises, how would your prayer life change?

### Learning Requires Commitment

It's one thing to think conceptually about prayer, but another to really grow in prayer. Clearly, we see both through Jesus' sample prayer and through the stories He uses that He wants us to come to him persistently. This is a key to growing in prayer- if you wait until you *feel like it* or until you *need it*, you are unlikely to grow in prayer. Instead, if we are going to grow, we need to be consistent in prayer. Ideally, we will find prayer to be more like a natural, conversational, continuous part of our lives, rather

than a once daily event. But to begin with, it is helpful to set aside a time to intentionally seek God in prayer.

In order to grow in prayer, I commit to pray at \_\_\_\_\_ AM/PM, every day, for \_\_\_\_\_ minutes.

### **Tips:**

- It would be helpful to set not only a time and duration for your goal (as you have above) but also a **location for prayer**, if possible. You want a dedicated place and time that reduces distractions and helps you focus on God. Add something you naturally enjoy like a nice candle, a hot cup of coffee, or some quiet instrumental music.
- Especially as you begin the discipline of prayer, you will find many thoughts infiltrating your mind and drawing you into other, seemingly vital trains of thought. A good technique is to **keep a notepad and pen nearby** so that if you think of something that needs to be done, you can write it down quickly and then immediately get back to focusing on prayer without worrying that you will forget.
- It can be especially helpful, when you are just beginning, to **have a "script"**, something to help you pray. This could be a list of concerns or requests for yourself or others, or a Psalm to pray through, or a rich prayer that has been written by someone else. Over time, prayer will flow more naturally.
  - A couple of helpful resources are *The Valley of Vision*, edited by Arthur G. Bennett, and *A Way to Pray* by Matthew Henry.

### **DS Wrap up thoughts on Prayer:**

One of the most helpful books I have ever read on prayer is called *The Praying Life* by Paul Miller. Early in the book he mentions that 90% of people in our churches today do not have a praying life. One of the big takeaways from the book is that a praying life flows out of a place of desperation--a place of radical dependence on Jesus. Here is a summary of what Miller says about this need for dependence in our lives...enjoy!

## **Learning a Praying Life: Be a Child** *(taken from [desiringgod.org](http://desiringgod.org))*

How do you begin to develop a life of prayer? The feeling of helplessness is necessary. Feeling that you are completely unable to do life on your own, without Jesus. God needs to be active in all of the details of your life. I think that is a big reason why Jesus tells us to be like little children. Here are some passage regarding this call: Mark 10:13-16, Mark 9:33-37, Matthew 7:7-11, Luke 10:21, Matthew 21:14-17, John 5:19, Matthew 6:9-13, and Mark 14:36.

The gift of the Spirit is to bring the “Abba, Father” cry into our hearts. Jesus is the most helpless human in history; he was completely unable to do anything on his own. He was profoundly enmeshed with the Father and dependent upon him like a child. To enter into a praying life is to enter into this heart of Jesus.

What does it mean to come like a child in your prayer time? You get out of bed and start praying. It is not long until your mind begins to wander to the problems that you have. You think there is something wrong with you, and there is! You need Jesus. Being a child in prayer means to just come. Children are not tied up in all the details when they come to their parents. They just come.

Jesus says those are weary and heavy laden are to come to him. He doesn't call the organized and fixed up but the broken. Why do we forget that when it comes to prayer? The dirty, muddy you is the real you. Don't try to put on the spiritual façade in prayer. You can talk to God about whatever is on your heart, so just come as you are. Be weak and open in prayer before God. It is the same as the gospel. I'm just applying the gospel to your prayer life. We need to learn helplessness. That is what a child reflects.



# ENJOY GOD'S PRESENCE

Week 2 | Study 1

*"If you can't take time to do nothing, you're a slave to doing.  
Doing nothing is a radical, revolutionary act.  
It frees you from the universal slavery of our age: slavery to the clock.  
The clock measures doing but not being."*

- Peter Kreeft, *Christianity for Modern Pagans*

*<sup>5</sup>I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*

--John 15:5 (ESV)

**Memory  
Verse**

## **We live in an age of noise**

From our screens and our cars and our families and our jobs, we are inundated with noise. In addition to this daily chorus, most of us are constantly plugged in to some sort of noise making device whose interrupting chimes, alerts, and notifications beckon us to noise somewhere else that we're currently missing out on.

## **We were not made for so much noise**

To turn down this noise, *we need to slow down*. Jesus models for us a way of slowing that invites us to enjoy God's presence. We are told in the Gospels that Jesus withdrew from the noise regularly. In one instance, He withdrew in face of a crowd who wanted to make him famous:

*"But now even more the report about him went abroad,  
and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities.  
But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray."* (Luke 5:15-16 ESV)

## **Slowing resists pride**

Jesus' seems like a busy guy. The spirit of our age tells us that important people are busy people. But Jesus knows those factors are unrelated. Our worth is not in our work. Even more, He knows that fame and business are some of life's many noises. So, He withdraws.

Consider the words of **Luke 5:15-16**.

***Why do people seek Jesus? What do they hope to find?***

***What do the people find in Jesus?***

***Why might He regularly withdraw from this attention?***

***To what kind of place and activity does Jesus withdraw?***

***How do you respond to moments of success in your life?***

## **Slowing aide's perspective**

If we never turn our focus toward God, we will never have a right perspective of our lives, calling, witness, or worship. The phrase "slow to anger" occurs in the Bible nineteen times reminding us of the merciful love of God and our calling to imitate Him every day.

*"The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, **slow to anger**, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.""*

(Exodus 34:6-7 ESV)

*"Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God."*

(James 1:19-20 ESV)

***What kind of character does Exodus 34 say God possess that might allow for Him to be slow to anger?***

***Following the instruction of James, what kind of godly character might you need to develop to also be slow to anger?***

## **Slowing invites presence**

We can't concentrate or be fully present with someone unless they are the sole object of our attention. The Psalms speak of a stillness in conjunction with God's presence.

**Psalm 23:2** *"He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters."*

**Psalm 37:7** *"Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!"*

**Psalm 46:10** *"Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"*

## **Life Rhythm Inventory**

So, if slowing is one important way that we can create necessary space for worship, how do we go about creating that space? Here are a few ways you might slow down by identifying and limiting the noise in your life, so that you can fill it with delight in God's presence.

### **Assess the noise in your life.**

- Sit down with your calendar or planner. What are you spending your time on? Are you working more than you should? What are you doing (or not doing) in your time outside of the workday?
- Most of our noise comes from our inability to seize even small, unplanned moments of downtime. Keep track of your screen time for one day. How many times do you look at it? What apps do you use most when you use it? Consider downloading an app that will track your time for you.



## **Limit your noise**

- Write a list of what you have committed to do in this season. Decide which of these you will say yes to and start practicing saying no.
- Practice a digital sunset & sunrise. Set a time at least an hour before you go to sleep and after you wake up where you don't look at your phone. If possible, charge your phone overnight in a room other than your bedroom.
- Practice humility. Let something go (start small). Watch others take it in a direction you might not prefer. Note the positive outcomes they achieve. If it goes poorly, consider how to help the people achieve better outcomes rather than taking over the task and fixing it. It's slower, but this way is ripe with lessons in patience and humility.

## **Create and guard places of slowing**

- Schedule your priorities as non-negotiable events (i.e., family, church, date night, quiet time in the Word and prayer, etc.). Writing down your priorities reinforces their importance. If possible, schedule these events first when planning out your calendar so all the other options have to work around them.

## **Make everyday rhythms meaningful.**

- Sit at the same table with your family and eat supper regularly. If you need help with conversation, pick up a table talk guide outside of Room 100 at the Central Campus or contact the office to receive one at [office@parkviewchurch.org](mailto:office@parkviewchurch.org).
- Bookend your day with prayer. As you lie down for sleep, thank God for the day and commit yourself to His sustaining hand through the night. As you rise in the morning, thank God for His sustaining hand and commit yourself to live for His glory throughout the day.
- When you send emails, pause before you send them and give a quick prayer for the recipient.
- Look for and seize the mundane empty spaces throughout your day (e.g., commute, showers, mowing, etc.). Fill them with silence, reflection, or prayer.

# ENJOY GOD'S PRESENCE

Week 2 | Study 2

*"We can draw no deadlines for God. He hastens or He delays as he sees fit. And his timing is all-loving toward his children. On, that we might learn to be patient in the hour of darkness. I don't mean that we make peace with darkness. We fight for joy. But we fight as those who are saved by grace and held by Christ. We say...that our night will soon- in God's good timing- turn to day."*

-John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God*

## Insta-Worship

A woman slips into the local coffee shop, with no children, nothing to do, and plenty of time. The barista briskly chauffeurs her drink (white chocolate mocha, sprinkle of cinnamon) over to her table as she fishes her Bible, leather journal, and assorted highlighters out of her bag. As if in a trance, she slowly begins to weep as she opens her Bible and spends the next 6 hours reading, praying, journaling, sometimes bursting into spontaneous hymns.

Sound familiar? This scene may exist in the world of social media or in our imagination but not in reality. For many of us, our time spent with God can feel laborious and lifeless rather than sweet and life-giving. As we discuss the DNA trait of "Enjoy God's Presence," maybe you are feeling this tension. **If disciples love spending time with God, why do I so often feel frustrated and bored when I read my Bible and pray?** Don't worry: the answer is not scary or even surprising. In this study we want to discuss this vital question: what do I do when I don't find myself naturally enjoying God's presence? We'll start by asking why this happens and then give some suggestions for how to respond.

## *Why Don't I Sense God's Presence?*

First, let's be clear about what we're talking about.

- **We're not talking about** being unable to *find a time* to be present with God. (That's a matter of priorities: we all find time to do the things that really matter to us, even if we only have the briefest moments.)

- **We're not talking about** being unable to *understand* the Bible (read the next two studies for help with that!)
- **We're not talking about** being unable to *apply* the Bible (again, read on!)

**What we're talking about** is that feeling when you've made time to be purposefully present with God through Bible reading, meditation and prayer, and you flip open your Bible or you begin to pray and... nothing.

No sense of bliss.

No sense of overwhelming peace.

No sense of power.

No sense of His presence.

What gives?

## **The Good News**

Well, the first thing to say is that you're not alone. The mere fact that this study has been written is evidence enough of that. In fact, believers over the millennia have been asking and answering this question. There are a number of possible answers, and the point of this study isn't to explore them but to cure them. However, there is one big question that must be answered: "Is there an ongoing pattern of sin in your life that needs to be addressed?"

The only time the Bible explicitly tells us that God will withhold a feeling of His pleasure in us is in order to discipline us as a loving Father toward repentance. It is worthwhile to examine yourself and ask God to reveal any sort of impurity that is particularly displeasing to Him and possibly a source of the sense of deadness in your spiritual life.

## **The Normal Christian Experience**

The most common reason why we sometimes don't sense God's presence in our spiritual life is simply because of the normal ebb and flow of walking through life with God. There are days where God lavishes us with pleasures unspeakable. And there are days where we languish, feeling like God has left us alone. And yet, this is the way that God is maturing us in our faith and purifying our love for him. Will we persevere toward Him

when all the pleasant sensations that accompany Him are removed? Or in the end, will we prove that we loved the sense of God more than the reality of a real relationship where He is the leader? A quote from C.S. Lewis is particularly helpful as we consider this, and worth reading at length: (note: in this writing, the story is told from the perspective of devils who are trying to tempt humans. I will put some notes in to demonstrate this):

*"You must have often wondered why the Enemy [God] does not make more use of His power to be sensibly present to human souls in any degree He chooses and at any moment. But you now see that the Irresistible and the Indisputable are the two weapons which the very nature of His scheme forbids Him to use. Merely to override a human will (as His felt presence in any but the faintest and most mitigated degree would certainly do) would be for Him useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo. For His ignoble idea is to eat the cake and have it; the creatures are to be one with Him, but yet themselves; merely to cancel them, or assimilate them, will not serve. He is prepared to do a little overriding at the beginning. He will set them off with communications of His presence which, though faint, seem great to them, with emotional sweetness, and easy conquest over temptation. Sooner or later He withdraws, if not in fact, at least from their conscious experience, all those supports and incentives. He leaves the creature to stand up on its own legs-- to carry out from the will alone duties which have lost all relish. It is during such trough periods, much more than during the peak periods, that it is growing into the sort of creature He wants it to be. Hence the prayers offered in the state of dryness are those which please Him best."*

-C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, letter IX

God wants to make us real partners in His plan to renew this world to His glory. Therefore, we must experience these fluctuations in our sense of His presence and persist, despite our emotions, despite our logical answers, despite our intuition. When all that is melted away and only naked faith remains, our steps forward delight Him more than a baby's first steps, taken in faith that her father will catch her no matter what.

## *What Can I Do When I Don't Enjoy God's Presence?*

### **Don't give up!**

As we learned above, the fluctuations in our sense of God's presence or our enjoyment of seeking Him are to be expected as it is in any other relationship. **God has not abandoned you. God has not disappeared.** He is there. In fact, take extra courage in the face of moments like this, because bearing through these hard times will lead to more sweetness in

your relationship with Him. Like a weightlifter who endures the pain of the crushing weights but finds that as time goes on, he can endure more and more. Your endurance is *doing something*- so keep it up!

### **Change your routine**

We are creatures of habit. We like our routines. And establishing routines in your spiritual life is important! But **when our routines become mere routines, they can become meaningless**. Be a dutiful listener in prayer as you try some new things. This is where being in community is helpful- ask your Christian friends not only to pray for you but also to share what enlivens their relationship with God when things start feeling stale. Here are a few ideas of our own:

- *Varying the amount of the Bible you read*- if you are used to reading 1 chapter, try reading as little as a few verses to really hone in on something specific.
- *Varying the order of your routine*- if you usually read the Bible and then finish with meditation and prayer, try beginning with prayer or bookending your time with prayer.

### **Do something totally different**

It can be helpful to go completely outside of the box when you find yourself in a rut spiritually. Instead of sitting to read and pray for 30 minutes, go for a walk with just one verse written on a card, and as you walk, try to converse with God, asking Him to make one simple truth clear to you. **Find something that you already love doing**- cooking, hiking, knitting, eating out- and try to dedicate that time to the Lord, infusing it with new meaning by intentionally praying and even singing to Him.

### **Take care of yourself**

Finally, we have to realize that God has made us as creatures. We need Him for existence. But He has created us to need some basic things, without which we won't function well, even spiritually. If you're exhausted, **sometimes the most Christian thing to do is to take a nap**. If you're hungry every time you open your Bible or pray, don't be surprised when your hunger overwhelms your other feelings. If you are sick or in a period of high stress, give yourself a break. Press into God's mercy and realize that things will get better. Take care of your body- it's one of God's gifts

for us to steward, and we need to give more thought to the way that our physical life can impact our spiritual life.

### **Make a plan**

If you're in a rut, feeling unaffected by your time with God, write out some ideas from what you've learned in the past or through this study for how you can take steps to persist in seeking God daily:

### **Plan ahead**

If you're **not** in a rut, even better- write down what you will do when you get there (you will!):

No matter where you find yourself, spend some time praying, asking God to help you and to reveal Himself to you. And ask also for the peace and comfort to accept the times when He feels far, and that He would use those times to bring growth to your soul for His name's sake.



# LIVE GOD'S STORY

Introduction

September 23-October 6

**Live God's Story** (*Bible*) A people hungry to learn and live out the Bible—the true story of the Gospel—God's redeeming work in Jesus that equips us for every good work. (*John 8:31-32; 2 Tim 3:16-17*)

These next two weeks we will turn our focus to a statement Jesus made about His followers: *If you abide in my word, then you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free* (*John 8:31b-32*). **A disciple is committed to living by the Word of God, the Bible.**

The Bible is a powerful book. It has changed millions of lives, and It has an amazing potential to change your life in this next year ahead. Studying and living by the Bible is not an option if we truly want to follow Jesus! Jesus had a high view of the Bible. He made it clear in His ministry that He did not come to abolish the teachings of the Bible, but rather He came to fulfill them. When tempted by the Enemy in the wilderness, Jesus didn't use common sense or wisdom from His day to fight off the Enemy's lies, instead He quoted the Bible. (*Matthew 4:1-11*). Jesus came as the very Word of God to proclaim truth from God.

As a people who are pursuing Jesus together, we strive to love the things that Jesus loved, and clearly Jesus has a love for the Word of God, the Bible. The Bible communicates the story of God loving, rescuing, and redeeming the world through the work of His Son Jesus. And the Bible equips us and prepares us for every good work as a people who are ready to effectively serve God.

And what Jesus especially loves is when His people obey His teaching. He said in *John 14:21* and *23* that the way we show Jesus that we really love Him is when we obey Him. As Dann Spader says, "Jesus' love language is obedience!"



In the next two weeks, you will memorize two more sets of Bible verses: John 8:31b-32, and 2 Timothy 3:16-17. These are foundational verses that will be great to memorize and have stored away in your heart and mind.

You will also receive some practical training on how to read the Bible and learn from God on your own.

You will also receive training and be given an assignment on the topic of **Telling Your Story with Jesus as the Hero**. This training will help you think through the story of your life and point you to how your story meshes with God's story and the Gospel—the Good News is that Jesus died and rose again to set you free from sin and death and give you new life in Him. Take your time on this section and pray that someday this year God will give you the chance to share your story with someone who has never heard about Jesus and what He has done for us!

Keep going strong. And if you have any questions or comments for us about this study, connect with us by emailing us at [office@parkviewchurch.org](mailto:office@parkviewchurch.org)!

# LIVE GOD'S STORY

Week 3 | Study 1

*"At the end of the day, there is simply no replacement for finding a regular time and place, blocking out distractions, putting your nose in the text, and letting your mind and heart be led and captured and thrilled by God himself communicating to us in his objective written words."*

-David Mathis, *Habits of Grace*

<sup>31</sup>So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, <sup>32</sup>and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

--John 8:31-32(ESV)

## Memory Verse

At Parkview, we really do want to help one another grow in pursuit of Jesus! But what does it mean to follow Christ together? In other words, what are the important traits of followers of Christ seeking to help one another grow? Well, earlier in this study we defined five key characteristics in this pursuit. We **Enjoy God's Presence, Live God's Story, Love God's People, Share God's Gifts, and Serve God's World**. In order to grow in these traits, we need to commit to such things as worshipping together on Sunday, using our gifts to help others flourish in Christ, and reaching out to a needy world. The next four studies focus on the second trait: **Living God's Story**.

What does it mean to live God's story, the Bible? Let's break down each word a moment.

- *Live*. This implies that we are doing something to act upon the things we know.
- *God's*. It's all about who God is and what He has done for us. His story of glory, not ours.
- *Story*. We connect our lives with what we find God doing in the world. What a privilege.
- *Bible*. This story lived-out is founded upon knowing and loving Scripture. It's amazing that we have the very words of the creator God at our fingertips!

Yet in order to live God's story we must understand how the Bible describes God, His work in the world, and what it means to plug our lives into this grand story.

There are many ways to grow in our understanding of God's story in the Bible:

- Consult commentaries and books.
- Listen to sermons.
- Take a Bible class.
- Participate in a group study of the Scriptures.

For the sake of focus, we'll concentrate on another way to grow in this pursuit - personal Bible reading.

## **For Starters**

Jot down a few reasons people don't read their Bibles.

List a few benefits of regular Bible reading.

In order to live out God's story, what attitudes should we cultivate as we read our Bibles? Four come to mind: 1) read **expectantly**, 2) read **regularly**, 3) read **carefully**, and 4) read **in community**.

## **Open my eyes! Reading the Bible expectantly**

The Bible is filled with God's very words to us. God wants to work in our lives and speak to us as we read the Bible. So, we read the Bible prayerfully, expecting God to open our eyes as He reveals His will to us. Read the following verses about this.

*<sup>18</sup>Open my eyes, that I may behold  
wondrous things out of your law. (Psalm 119:18)*

*<sup>7</sup>The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;  
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; <sup>8</sup>the precepts of the  
Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;*

*the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;*

*<sup>9</sup>the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;*

*the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.*

*<sup>10</sup>More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.*

*<sup>11</sup>Moreover, by them is your servant warned;*

*in keeping them there is great reward. (Psalm 19:7-11)*

According to these verses, list all of the things we can expect God to do in our lives as we read the Bible Which of these stand out to you as especially meaningful or important?

Jesus was so passionate about His followers being able to understand God's word that He sent His Spirit to live within us, and **one of the Spirit's roles in our lives is to help us understand and apply God's Word.** We can read the Bible with great expectation and joy as the Spirit will reveal God's will to us and help us make practical applications to our lives. Read the following verses on this topic and how it also relates to Jesus' teaching.

*<sup>15</sup>"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup>And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, <sup>17</sup> even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. (John 14:15-17)*

*<sup>13</sup>When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup>He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup> All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:13-15)*

As we read the Bible and study Jesus' words, what is the role of the Holy Spirit? What does He do for us as we read the Bible expectantly? (also see 1 Corinthians 2:9-16)

## **Day by Day! Read the Bible regularly**

Regular, day-by-day Bible reading is essential to Christian growth. Read the quote from David Mathis at the beginning of this study and also reflect on his words here:

"If you feel uncomfortable in the Scriptures and inadequate in the art of Bible reading, the single most important thing you can do is make a regular habit of reading the Bible for yourself. There is no substitute for a few focused minutes each day in the text. You may be surprised how much the little bits add up over the long haul."

-David Mathis, *Habits of Grace*

Write out a summary of what these two quotes teach about regular Bible reading:

Read the following verses about the importance of getting into the Bible consistently:

<sup>8</sup>*This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.*

<sup>9</sup>*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."*

(Joshua 1:8-9)

*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;*

<sup>2</sup>*but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.*

<sup>3</sup>*He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season,  
and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. (Psalm 1:1-3)*

<sup>97</sup>*Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.*

<sup>98</sup>*Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies,  
for it is ever with me.*

<sup>99</sup>*I have more understanding than all my teachers,  
for your testimonies are my meditation. (Psalm 119:97-99)*

How do these verses describe getting into God's Word regularly?  
According to these passages, what are some benefits of regular Bible reading and meditation?

## **Application**

Many people find it important to have a routine of planned Bible reading. Simply setting up and sticking to a daily time of Bible reading and prayer can do wonders for your spiritual life. In order to do this, answer the following application questions.

- *Plan* - **What** will I read?
- *Place* - **Where** will I read?
- *Time* - **When** will I read?
- *Encouragement* - **Who will help me** stay on top of these goals?

## **Resources for Bible Reading**

Google search one of these and see what you can find!

- Discipleship Journal's Read the Bible in a Year
- ESV Reading Plans or Gospel Coalition Bible Reading Plans
- Read the Bible for Life by George Guthrie
- Read Scripture by [the Bible Project](#) (check out their [app](#) too!)



# LIVE GOD'S STORY

Week 3 | Study 2

So far this week we have looked at how to live God's story through reading the Bible expectantly and regularly. We have made specific goals for consistent Bible reading and meditation. We can interact with God's Words in great expectation that He will speak and work! **In this study, we will look at two more attitudes related to Bible reading - reading the Bible with care and reading the Bible in community.**

## Handle with Care! Read the Bible carefully

Often times when reading the Bible, we need to slow down and handle the words with a little more care. Handling Scripture with care helps us in a number of ways,

- It helps us see the original meaning before we make our personal applications.
- It gives the Holy Spirit more space to help us understand what we are reading.
- It allows God to use Scripture to impact our hearts as we prayerfully meditate on its truths.

Read the following verses about people who took great care as they interacted with God's Word:

*<sup>10</sup>For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel. (Ezra 7:10)*

*<sup>10</sup>The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. <sup>11</sup>Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. (Acts 17:10-11)*

*<sup>15</sup>Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. (2 Tim 2:15)*

How do these verses describe someone who handles the Bible with great care?



## Remembering the Big Picture

Another way we can handle the Bible with care is to read it with the overall story of God in mind. Check out this quote from James Hamilton about the overall plot of the Bible.

“The Bible’s plot can be summarized in four words: *creation, fall, redemption, and restoration*... We make sense of our days in light of this overarching narrative. The big plot of the Bible, with its guarantee of resurrection and new creation, gives confidence even in the face of death. The Bible’s big story opens the windows on stale, stuffy rooms of deadlines and due dates, deaths and disappointments, and fresh winds of the creation-to-new-creation breezes blow through.”

-James M. Hamilton Jr., *What is Biblical Theology?*

Hamilton is saying that knowing our place in the big plot of the Bible not only gives us a sense of purpose, but also provides confidence in an amazing and glorious future. **The Bible is one unified story of God’s redemption that centers on Jesus Christ** from Genesis to Revelation. Living God’s story through Bible reading helps us see our lives in the context of God’s plan for the world. And context is key!

## Context is Key

Reading the Bible in the context of God’s past, current, and future work in the world helps us know how we can live God’s story each day and find hope for the future. To help you in this task, ask yourself the following questions as you read:

- *Where am I?* Is this passage focusing on creation, fall and sin, redemption through Christ, or the future restoration of all things—the new creation?
- *What has happened so far?* How does what has happened so far in the biblical story inform what I am reading right now?
- *Where do I see Jesus?* What people, events, and themes in the Old Testament me point toward Christ or, in the New Testament, help me understand his person and work in deeper ways?

One final approach to help us handle reading the Bible with care is applying the inductive method to the passage. This method helps us understand what the author intended to communicate to the original

audience, which becomes the foundation for our personal applications. There are three steps:

1. *Observe* - what does the passage **say**?
2. *Interpret* - what does the passage **mean**?
3. *Apply* - **how** do the truths of the passage work in my life?

### **Step 1 - Observe: What do I see in the passage?**

- Ask and answer the "who, what, when, where, why and how" questions.

- Mark up the passage by identifying all verbs, finding key words or phrases, and highlighting all connecting words such as: like, as, but, so that, in order that (ask yourself, "how and why are these being used?").

- Write out 2-5 observations per verse. Write out everything that you see. Look for things that are emphasized, repeated, related, alike or unlike, and true to life. Look at the passage and re-look at it. Jot down everything.

### **Step 2 - Interpret: What does the passage mean?**

- Record questions you have that will help you get at the meaning of the passage.

- *Who is...* the author talking about? Accomplishing the action?
- *What is...* the meaning of this word or phrase? Implication of this statement? Meaning of this figure of speech? The author's flow of thought and tone?
- *Why did the author...* choose this word? Include this phrase or statement? Not include or mention something? Connect these ideas?

- Look up cross references and find other places where words and topics are used.

- Compare multiple translations such as ESV, NIV, NAS, NKJV. This can help give you a feel for the meaning.

- Look up background information in a Bible Dictionary or Encyclopedia.

- Compare your findings with ideas in commentaries.

- Summarize the passage in a big idea statement, chart, drawing, or summary paragraph.

### **Step 3 - Apply: How will it work in my life?**

- List universal principles and life lessons from the passage. These are statements of truth from your study of the meaning of the text that can be applied to any situation at any time.

- Write out a specific application: "I will..."

Remember to make sure it is specific. To help you with this, ask yourself a couple questions.

- Is it **measurable**— can I track this?
- Is it **attainable**— a realistic goal?
- Is it **relevant** to what I need in my life to obey?
- **How will I know** when I have completed my application?

- Who will keep me encouraged and accountable to do what I plan to apply?

**Now**, try out the three steps on a Bible passage you are reading and see how God works!

### **We're in this Together! Read the Bible with others**

One final attitude to remember when reading the Bible is humility. Avoid being a Lone Ranger Christian at all costs! We grow in Christ when we do this together. It is vital that we read the Bible with others, in community.

**We need one another to help us mature in our walk with God and to aid us in understanding His Word.** Involve other believers in your life consistently. This will do wonders to help you understand and apply what you are reading in the Bible. Read the following passages.

<sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Colossians 3:16)

<sup>12</sup>Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. <sup>13</sup>But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

<sup>14</sup>For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. <sup>15</sup>As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." (Hebrews 4:12-15)

<sup>23</sup>Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup>And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, <sup>25</sup>not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:23-25)

How do the principles you see in these verses apply to reading the Bible in community?

## Summary

The last two studies we have learned how to apply four attitudes to our Bible reading.

1. **Read with great expectation** that God wants to speak to you and work in your life.
2. **Read in a consistent, regular pattern** to help you grow strong in Christ.
3. **Read with great care.** You will see new and amazing things.
4. **Read in community** to help you understand and apply spiritual truths.

Jot down an idea or two on how you might apply these principles of Bible reading to your life and watch God work as He helps you live God's story!



# LIVE GOD'S STORY

Week 4 | Study 1

*"The church has become the theater of the gospel, and in this theater, there are no passive spectators, only engaged participants, acting out what is in Christ."*

-Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine*

*<sup>16</sup>All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

--2 Timothy 3:16-17(ESV)

## Memory Verse

### Jesus is the Hero

Anyone who has been to a wedding reception has probably had the privilege of hearing a Best Man's toast. Hopefully, the young man has given this moment some thought and doesn't say the words that cause everyone to squirm- "I didn't really prepare anything but..." He has the opportunity to share the things that most endear him to the Groom and make everyone feel more connected through him.

Some of the lessons learned from a Best Man's toast can frame the way that we think about and express the story of our own spiritual journey. **We want to share our story in a compelling manner.** We want to make others feel connected to the one that we're talking about. **And most of all, we want to shine a light on the hero of the story, Jesus.** In this study, we'll learn how to do just that.

Let's look at an example from the life of Jesus. Read through this passage from Luke 8 that details Jesus' encounter with a man who was plagued by supernatural oppression.

Luke 8:26-39

<sup>26</sup>Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee.

<sup>27</sup>When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had

demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs. <sup>28</sup>When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me." <sup>29</sup>For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many a time it had seized him. He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert.) <sup>30</sup>Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him. <sup>31</sup>And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. <sup>32</sup>Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. <sup>33</sup>Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.

<sup>34</sup>When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. <sup>35</sup>Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. <sup>36</sup>And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. <sup>37</sup>Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. <sup>38</sup>The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, <sup>39</sup>"Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him. (ESV)

## Evaluating this man's story

Try to pay special attention to the last two verses. Jesus tells the man to return to his home and declare how much God has done for him. The man does just that, telling everyone about Jesus' mighty works. This passage gives us a good **template** for how to share our story, as well as a good case study **to frame our own stories**.

First of all, we have to recognize that this man's story is among the most dramatic in the entire Bible. Many of us, especially those from a Christian family, can feel as though our story lacks drama. This man, I am sure, never felt that way. Can't you imagine sitting down with this man and doing everything in your power to avoid blurting, "What does it feel like to have 2000 evil spirits leave you at once?" Yet Jesus has commanded him **to declare what God has done for him**, not just gory stories from his past.

Now, on the other hand, it isn't really possible to tell a story of God's redemption without in some way explaining what God has saved us from. **The task before us, then, is to tell our story in such a way that God's triumph in our life magnifies God's goodness**, rather than glorifying our past circumstances or, even worse, glorifying our own ability to navigate life's tough patches.

**Brainstorming threads of your story**

To begin with, think of some of the ways that Christ has changed your life. These could be elements of God's redemption when you first trusted Christ, or they could be very recent changes. Take some time to reflect on the ways that God has changed you. Use these questions as a launching pad for reflection:

- *What fears used to control you that no longer have the same power over you?*
- *What sinful patterns of thought or behavior used to enslave you that no longer have the same power over you?*
- *When was a time that you felt immensely close to God?*
- *How is your life different when you are walking closely to God compared to when you neglect your relationship with him?*
- *When was a time that you saw the beauty of Christ in a new way?*

**A pattern to follow**

Now, select one of these elements of God's redemption in your life- this is the story that you will develop to show Jesus as the hero. The goal is to have the ability to share this story in a way that is compact, clear, and focused. The story will be composed of three acts and might look something like this:

	<b>Act I</b>	<b>Act II</b>	<b>Act III</b>
<b>Element</b>	My problem	God's solution- Jesus	The result
<b>Narrative</b>	"I couldn't break myself free from my need for control..."	"But then I saw that Jesus offered me peace through his power and love..."	"Now, instead of being dominated by fear, I..."



Emphasis	Portraying my problem as one only God could fix.	Showing how Jesus offered what I needed by sheer grace.	Explaining how life is different than it was before God transformed me.
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## Act I: My Problem

Take some time to think more deeply about the area of your life that was in need of God’s help. Basically, take the element that you selected above and flesh out exactly what was wrong. **This is where it helps to be focused in your description.** It’s easy to make our story about our problem rather than about our Savior.

The best way to start down the right path is by framing your story in a way that shows your need for salvation, not just mild spiritual help. **God’s redemption is a story about dead people coming to life, not just needing a quick spiritual pick-me-up or, even worse, a story about you pulling yourself up by your bootstraps.** Tell a story of God saving you. If you can’t honestly tell your story in this way, it might help to select a different element from the brainstorming session you did earlier or seek out someone in your community group (or join one) to help you process your story well.

Now, briefly, write out how you would describe the ‘problem’ you were in, in a way that shows your need for salvation. By the end of this part of the story, the tension should be at its highest as the listener wonders, “what’s going to happen next?”

## Act II: God’s Solution

The second act is **making the connection between your problem and God’s solution.** Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection from the dead accomplished many things. First and foremost, it canceled the spiritual debt that kept us from dwelling with a holy God. It also brought peace in our relationship with God and with one another, accomplished victory over Satan, sin and death, and took away all of our shame by absorbing it Himself.

**The key here is to make a firm connection between your specific need for salvation and the salvation that Jesus provided for you.** Knowledge of

scripture is especially key here, and the best stories of redemption will include a brief citation of scripture that relates to the way that Jesus transformed your life. Here are some ideas of how to connect your problem with God’s solution (Jesus):

I was...	I needed...	Jesus...	Verse(s)
Afraid	A defender	Conquered all my enemies on the cross	Colossians 2:15
Ashamed	A <i>sympathetic</i> savior	Suffered my shame on the cross	Hebrews 12:2
Guilty	A perfect record	Exchanged his perfection for my sin	2 Corinthians 5:21
Lonely	A God who is <i>near</i>	Put on flesh to know exactly how I feel	Hebrews 2:17

In the space below, write out how you would express the way that Jesus was the answer to your “problem” that you wrote down in Act I:

**Act III: The Result**

Finally, a good story shows the listener not only where you were (problem) and what God did (solution), but also what is different now (result). If you end the story at Act II, the listener will probably think, “That’s very nice, you’ve had a spiritual experience. So, what?” Act III shows them the answer. Jesus has saved you, and now life doesn’t look like it used to. Now, it looks like this:

Here are some tips for expressing this section of your story:

- Be careful to show, even in this section, that God is the hero, not your own self-control or faith.
- Express how this transformation affects your day-to-day life. Not everyone can relate to your specific scenario. But everyone can relate to the daily stresses and strains and how the gospel gives you resources to deal with them well.
- The ending of this section is key, and maybe the most important part of telling your story. A good method is to recap the entire story in a nutshell: "I praise God that rather than leaving me stuck in \_\_\_\_\_, he sent Jesus to \_\_\_\_\_, and now I'm not controlled by \_\_\_\_\_."

Write out your "result" here:

Sample:

"Thanks for sharing your parenting struggles with me. I struggle too. A few years ago, I realized I was in real trouble. I found myself getting angrier and angrier with my kids. Every day, I would say something hurtful to them, and I can't tell you how guilty and hypocritical I felt. Here I was, trying to teach them how to be kind to one another, but when they failed, I exploded on them. I felt like a total failure as a mother. I'm so glad I opened up about this with some women in my Community Group. They showed me that I had burdened myself with the expectations of perfection, and that in a way I was right. I should be perfect- but I'm not... no one is. But even more importantly, they showed me that I don't need to bear the burden of perfection or expect it from my kids- because the requirement for perfection has already been fulfilled- not by me, but by Jesus. 2 Corinthians 12:9 says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I saw that instead of wearing myself out trying to control their behavior and make the perfect response, I could

remember that I can't control my way to perfection- and I don't need to! Jesus has already done it! Now when I feel myself getting frustrated, I ask God to remind me that His grace is sufficient, and I feel peace come over me. I still make mistakes and have to ask for forgiveness- from God and from my kids- but I know that He has saved me and is making me a new person."





# LIVE GOD'S STORY

Week 4 | Study 2

*"Whenever we encounter the speech acts of Scripture, we encounter God himself in action. The Father presents himself to us as a God who makes and keeps his covenantal promises. The Son comes to us as the Word of God, knowable to us through the words. The Spirit ministers these words to us, illuminating our minds and hearts, so that in receiving, understanding and trusting them, we receive, know and trust God himself."*

-Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God*

Disciples don't **Live God's Story** primarily through the *information* that Scripture offers, but through the *transformation* that God accomplishes through Scripture. If we are going to experience this kind of transforming power in our lives, we need to understand the nature of Scripture itself. This will be the focus of our study today. What is the Bible?

## A chronological approach

Rather than approaching this question with a pre-formed answer in mind, it seems best to let the Scriptures speak for themselves. In the end, this will feel like nothing more than a guided tour through the Bible to see what God has to say *about* His Word, *in* His Word.

## Creation & The Fall

Genesis 1:1-5

<sup>1</sup>*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup>The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*

<sup>3</sup>*And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. <sup>4</sup>And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. (ESV)*

What do we learn from this passage about God's word? (Need a hint? See Psalm 33:6-9)

Genesis 2:16-17

*<sup>16</sup>And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, <sup>17</sup>but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (ESV)*

Genesis 3:1-4

*<sup>1</sup>Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.*

*He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" <sup>2</sup>And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup>but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" <sup>4</sup>But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. (ESV)*

What does the serpent do to try to tempt Eve? What is his strategy?

## **In Redemption**

Genesis 15:1-6

*<sup>1</sup>After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." <sup>2</sup>But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" <sup>3</sup>And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." <sup>4</sup>And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." <sup>5</sup>And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." <sup>6</sup>And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness. (ESV)*

This is the first time in the Bible that the phrase "the word of the LORD came to..." is used.

What do we learn about the Word of God from this passage? (Especially in verse 6?)

Exodus 19:1-8

<sup>1</sup>On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. <sup>2</sup>They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, <sup>3</sup>while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: <sup>4</sup>'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. <sup>5</sup>Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; <sup>6</sup>and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."

<sup>7</sup>So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. <sup>8</sup>All the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD. (ESV)

What does this passage teach us about the connection between God's people and God's Word?

## In Praise

Psalm 103:20-21

<sup>20</sup>Bless the LORD, O you his angels,  
you mighty ones who do **his word**,  
obeying the voice of **his word!**

<sup>21</sup>Bless the LORD, all his hosts,  
his ministers, who do **his will!** (ESV)

What does this passage teach us about the relationship between God's Word and God's will?

In total, we have learned that God's Word is powerful, following God's Word is a righteous action, and that God's Word is His will. Now let's move on to the New Testament.



## Through Jesus

John 1:1-5, 14

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. <sup>4</sup>In him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

<sup>14</sup>And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (ESV)

Hebrews 1:1-3

<sup>1</sup>Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. <sup>3</sup>He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, (ESV)

What do these passages teach us about Jesus' unique role in God's communication to us?

## In Obedience to Jesus

John 8:51

<sup>51</sup>Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." (ESV)

1 Peter 1:22-25

<sup>22</sup>Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, <sup>23</sup>since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; <sup>24</sup>for

*"All flesh is like grass  
and all its glory like the flower of grass.  
The grass withers,  
and the flower falls,  
<sup>25</sup>but the word of the Lord remains forever."*

*And this word is the good news that was preached to you. (ESV)*

What do these passages teach us about the relationship between God's Word and the Gospel?

## **In the End**

Revelation 19:11-16

*<sup>11</sup>Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. <sup>12</sup>His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. <sup>13</sup>He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. <sup>14</sup>And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. <sup>15</sup>From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. <sup>16</sup>On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. (ESV)*

What does this passage teach us about the role of the Word of God in bringing about final justice and peace on earth?

By taking a chronological approach, we have seen a wide-angle view of what the Bible says about the Word of God. But the Word isn't given to us just for information- it's given for transformation. If you fully believed everything that we just learned about the Word of God, how would your life look different today? Try to come up with at least 2 concrete results.



# LOVE GOD'S PEOPLE

*Introduction*

*October 7-October 20*

**Love God's People** (*Community*) A people devoted to love one another as Jesus has loved us—proving that we truly follow Him. (*John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:9-12*)

This week's topic is absolutely mind blowing! Brace yourself for this thought...Jesus loves you with the same love that He receives from His Father. He tells us this in John 15:9. Look it up if you don't believe me! That means that day after day, the Savior of the world, the Lord of Creation, Jesus, who rules heaven and earth, loves you with the perfect, flawless, limitless, unending love of God Himself. And just to be sure you don't miss this, or to be sure it doesn't just bounce off you, the Bible says that God sends His Spirit into the lives of His people and one of the Spirit's roles is to pour God's love into our hearts. BOOM! This news should rock us, and should unleash us from fear, worry, and shame. It should empower us to be the most loving people on the planet.

This is our topic: **A disciple loves others in the same way that Jesus loves them.**

Our study will break into two themes: 1) God's love for us, and 2) How God's love propels us to love others. The bottom line is that a person is revealed to be a follower of Jesus by how he or she loves the people in his or her life.

This will point people to the importance of living in community with other believers and give practical steps to participate in community. It will also give you ideas to truly love the people in your life as you bask in and enjoy the love of God being poured into your own life.

This topic has the potential to totally change your life, this church, and our city!

You will memorize two verses this week—John 13:34-35 and 1 John 3:16-18. Powerful verses that will help you remember and live out this key theme.

If you have any questions or comments, please reach out to us by emailing us at [office@parkviewchurch.org](mailto:office@parkviewchurch.org)!



# LOVE GOD'S PEOPLE

Week 5 | Study 1

*"Let me begin by acknowledging that building gospel-saturated community is not an easy task. Cain made it clear that the effects of the fall would throw a wrench in community and relationships in general. Starting with a poor biblical foundation increases that labor significantly. Lifeless community begins when we don't have a clear understanding of why we are in community in the first place."*

-Brad House, *Community: Taking your Small Group off Life Support*

*<sup>34</sup>A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

--John 13:34-35 (ESV)

## Memory Verse

### Community in the recent past

In many times and in many places, experiencing strong community life in the church happened naturally. The local pastor was seen as a fixture of public trust and moral authority, and the building itself was a hub of public life. Societal expectations were based, to some extent, on Biblical norms. Citizens were, in a certain sense, *disciplined into* Christian community. But as we survey our own time and place, we have to conclude that the situation has changed in a number of radical ways.

We cannot assume that our neighbors share our faith. We cannot expect societal norms to conform to the Bible's standards. Tragically, the sum of these shifts has led us away from robust Christian community. We are instead *disciplined into* individualism and often find it easy to make friends on our computers, but difficult to connect in "real life." Where do we go from here? God's Word gives us the answer. **But swimming against the tide isn't easy.** If we're going to push back against the cultural trends that are taking us toward loneliness and me-ism, we have to have a strategy. **Community Groups are our strategy at Parkview Church.** In this study, we'll consider the *why*, *what* and *how* that keep us going toward the Bible's vision of community.

## The Why

When we think about the word, "Community," what comes to mind for most of us is not 'why?', but rather 'what?' or 'how?'. That is, we don't primarily think about why God has called us to live in relationship with other believers in the institution of the church. We think about what we're going to do—study the Bible—and how—meet biweekly and drink coffee. **But if we want to experience all that God has planned for us as His people, we need to know why He calls us to be a people, not just persons.**

The first and most significant reason why God has called us to community is discovered in Genesis 1:26a-

*<sup>26</sup>Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..*

Not long afterward, God sees that the man He has created is alone and declares that it is "not good" that the man be alone. This inspires God to create community, by giving the man and woman to one another.

The primary answer to the question, "why community" is that community is not something we *do*. We are created in the image of a God who is not only *one*, but *three*. The Father, Son and Spirit, existing in perfect and eternal *community* create humankind in their image. **Out of love we are invited into the family of God. Community was, before time began.**

This means that to exert the full meaning of who God has created us to be means living in community. **We simply cannot live the Christian life alone, thinking that we are expressing all that God has called us to be as His image on earth.** We are called to be a people because God Himself is a communal God. In a certain sense, community isn't something we *do*—it's something we already *are*. To express this aspect of our identity is the most natural thing in the world. To suppress or reject it is as harmful as trying to live without breathing.

## The What

So far, we have established that in order to display God's image on earth, we must live in relationship with others. To reveal what God is like, we have to embrace the fact that we can't do it alone. We need other believers. But *what* does it look like to live in community with believers in a

way that expresses our identity as those who are created in the image of a triune, communal God?

In a classic description of Christian community found in Romans 12, Paul commands the Roman church to “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” The call of community is a call to be present in the lives of others in a way that we are not used to. **Not many of us feel so connected with the daily struggles and triumphs of other believers that we could say that we have fully submitted to Paul’s call for us to rejoice with those who rejoice, or weep with those who weep.** This doesn’t simply mean that community is defined by pure emotion or that gatherings should all be emotionally intense. But to be able to weep with those who weep, you have to know one another. You have to spend time together. You can’t cultivate that kind of relationship in an afternoon.

In the next study, we’ll spend some time working through the “one anothers” of scripture- the 100 or so different times in the New Testament that the Apostles instruct us how to behave toward one another. A brief preview-for the sake of understanding the “what” of community-is this:

*Love one another with brotherly affection. (Romans 12:10)*

*Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2)*

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another... (James 5:16)*

*Stimulate one another to love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24)*

Clearly, this is much more than can be done by attending a Sunday morning service each week. So how are we going to live out this call to community? We’re glad you asked...

## **The How**

It’s one thing to say that humans were made to live in community with one another. But it’s another thing to say *how* that will happen. As we mentioned in the first paragraph, at a certain time in the not-so-distant past, Christian community happened all the time, attending a worship service was the only formal structure, and the community could be sustained just through that one weekly rhythm.



In the time and place that we find ourselves now, that simply won't work. We're going to have to be more calculated in our pursuit of community, both as individuals and as a church. At Parkview, that means being part of a Community Group.

## **What is a Community Group?**

In a church with Parkview's size, connecting with people can be difficult. Community Groups give us the space to commit ourselves to one another in a way that a large Sunday gathering can make difficult. In a Community Group, we gather around three main principles: Word, Care and Mission.

### *WORD*

We are families of the Word. With a desire to follow Jesus, Community Groups strive to study and apply God's Word (Jn. 14:15).

### *CARE*

We are families who care for one another. With a desire to follow Jesus, Community Groups are families who love one another (Jn. 13:34-35).

### *MISSION*

We are missional families sent to the world. In an effort to follow Jesus, Community Groups strive to live on mission as a family (Jn. 20:21).

While Community Groups all look a little bit different, you can expect to find a place where you commit to life together, orient yourselves to living in accordance with God's Word, and labor together to make disciples of your coworkers, friends, and neighbors.

Not yet in a Community Group? The next step for you to take to develop as a disciple who Loves God's People is to join a Community Group. Visit the Parkview website and fill out the Community Group contact form (under the ministries tab, click on "[community groups](#)"), or contact Thomas Hoak directly at [thoak@parkviewchurch.org](mailto:thoak@parkviewchurch.org).

If you're already in a Community Group, here are the top three things you can do to help your group:

## **1. Show up**

Community Group is about commitment to one another. The most basic thing you can do is just show up to group each time they meet. If you can't come for a particular meeting or your schedule won't allow you to be consistent, communicate that to your groupmates or leader.

## **2. Come to Serve**

When you come to group just for what it can do for you, community is destroyed. When you come with the mindset of serving, you will find that your needs are met as you are meeting the needs of others.

## **3. Go Outside the Group**

Have you ever gone to a social event for work that you were required to go to? It doesn't do much to bind people together. Merely having a group doesn't create community. *People* create community. If your leader is the only one holding the group together, they will soon burn out. Meeting with members outside of group or asking if you could host a gathering yourself builds community by going outside of the pre-established structure to show others that you're not just there to check the box, but that you really care.





# LOVE GOD'S PEOPLE

Week 5 | Study 2

*"The Christian, however, must bear the burden of a brother. He must suffer and endure the brother. It is only when he is a burden that another person is really a brother and not merely an object to be manipulated. The burden of men was so heavy for God Himself that He had to endure the Cross. God verily bore the burden of men in the body of Jesus Christ. But He bore them as a mother carries her child, as a shepherd enfolds the lost lamb that has been found. God took men upon Himself and they weighted Him to the ground, but God remained with them and they with God. In bearing with men God maintained fellowship with them. It was the law of Christ that was fulfilled in the Cross. And Christians must share in this law."*

-Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*

## Our human problem

The Bible tells us that apart from a relationship with the glorious God, we will look to satisfy our needs by... "exchang[ing] the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator..." (Rom 1:25). Instead of receiving all that we need through a life-giving relationship with a gracious God, we look elsewhere.

One of the primary consequences of this sinful heart-orientation is that rather than loving and serving our fellow creatures, we mistreat them. We often find ourselves looking to others as a means to an end- draining them of all the affection and comfort and meaning they can give us. On the other hand, we can see our fellow creatures as a disposable obstacle to the things we really want, whether it's a feeling of control, a promotion, or just a comfortable life without outside demands.

## God's human solution

The Gospel of Jesus changes all of this. Previous to God's saving work in our lives, we were like bottomless vacuum cleaners, sucking up every scrap of meaning and love that we could get our hands on, never having enough. But **when our bottomless need meets God's endless grace, we are transformed from glory-hogs into conduits of God's grace.** The vacuum is put into reverse, and rather than sucking meaning, love, and

control out of every relationship, we can breathe life and love *into* every relationship.

It was with this principle in mind that the Apostles wrote their letters to the churches in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Time after time, the leaders of the early church encouraged Christians in their relationships with *one another*. **The manner in which Christians interacted with one another was enormously significant because it is one of the primary ways that Christ commands us to display God's character to the world.** As we have been learning this week, Jesus tells us, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35).

The final words of Jesus' command in John 13:35, "one another" is actually just one word in Greek. And this word (or words) is used a full 100 times in the New Testament to express the way that disciples of Jesus ought to treat each other, for the glory of Christ on earth. So, it seems like it would be helpful to review these verses and get a picture of how Jesus envisions his people behaving in His Kingdom. And that is what we will do in this study.

## **Learning the "one anothers"**

For each of the "one another" statements, you'll first write a short paraphrase, and then write a concrete way you can obey the "one another."

In Romans 12:9-21, Paul poetically describes the Christian life, and he incorporates three "one another" statements for us to meditate on. Two of them come to us in verse 10. We'll use the first as a sample and then set you loose on the second one!

*Love one another with brotherly affection.*

For this first verse, we'll offer an example of what we're asking you to do. First, write a paraphrase. A paraphrase is a rewording of a phrase, often using more words, to express meaning more plainly. When you paraphrase, you are trying to express the verse in a way that would immediately make sense to you, or to someone you are sharing the verse with. Often, the Bible uses language and phraseology that we aren't

accustomed to, and paraphrasing can be a way to make sure that we actually understand a verse and aren't just parroting it thoughtlessly.

**Paraphrase:** Treat your fellow believers with the kind of love that you would show your own flesh-and-blood.

**Application:** The next time I see Beth, my friend from community group, I want to ask her about her hobby, fly fishing, to get to know her better and show her that I have been listening.

Or...

Beth seemed pretty quiet at CG last week...I'm going to drop her a note this week/text/email and let her know I appreciate her and am praying for her...

Your turn!

*Outdo one another in showing honor.* (Romans 12:10)

**Paraphrase:**

**Application:**

The third "one another" of Romans 12 comes in verse 16:

*Live in harmony with one another.*

**Paraphrase:**

**Application:**

Hebrews 10:24 has a unique "one another":

*And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works...*

**Paraphrase:**

**Application:**

Galatians 6:2 tells us,

*Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

**Paraphrase:**

**Application:**

1 Thessalonians 5:15 says,

*See that no one repays anyone evil for evil,  
but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.*

**Paraphrase:**

**Application:**

James tells his hearers in James 5:16,

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may  
be healed.*

**Paraphrase:**

**Application:**

Finally, Ephesians 4:32 tells us,

*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

**Paraphrase:**

**Application:**

These "one anothers" were chosen because they give a fairly comprehensive view of the topics that the "one anothers" cover in the Bible. They are:

- loving one another
- being unified with one another
- showing humility toward one another
- serving one another
- telling the truth to one another

Take a few minutes to revisit each of your applications and paraphrases and ask God to empower you to believe His promises, love His people, and show His love through you.







# LOVE GOD'S PEOPLE

Week 6 | Study 1

*"Each of us is in need of help and each is called to help, that is, to function daily as one of God's instruments of change in the lives of others."*

-Paul Tripp

*<sup>16</sup>By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. <sup>17</sup>But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? <sup>18</sup>Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.*

*--1 John 3:16-18 (ESV)*

## Memory Verse

### An Abrupt Crisis

A long-term friend asks you to come over to his house after work. He asks you to come alone. This is somewhat unusual, but you agree to it. As you enter the house, you immediately sense that something is wrong. He is alone, looking exhausted and unwell. He leads you to the kitchen table and as you sit down next to him, he breaks down. Through mingled sobs and silence, he barely ekes out, "She's leaving. I blew it."

Over the next hour, the story pours out of him. He was lonely. He was stressed. Home life didn't come naturally. He felt incompetent. But there was this coworker. She respected him. She listened. She understood. Things got out of hand.

You can't help but ask yourself, "how did this happen?" Why hadn't he said *anything* to you the dozen or more times that they had seen each other in the last few months? Now that you think about it, there had been little signs that something was wrong. When we prayed for one another, he had asked, "just pray that I can make it." What had that meant? You didn't think about it in the moment. He had made some off-color comments about his wife, and you had told him he shouldn't say stuff like that, but that's where the conversation had ended. This situation surely

isn't your fault, but **you can't help but wonder whether things would be different if you had pressed a little deeper at an earlier stage.** Now you're sitting with your sobbing friend as he asks you if you know a good attorney. Surely this is just a bad dream.

### **An all-too-familiar scenario**

Unfortunately, situations like this are all too common. We are in a hurry. We don't want to be nosy. We aren't sure what to say. We don't feel ready. What began as an impulse became a thought, then a habit, then a pattern, and finally one explosive act. Instead of encouragement, counsel, and confrontation happening at its roots, we are left to pick up the pieces of this destructive cycle.

On the other hand, any number of issues in our lives are fraught with difficulties, sin, and discontentment that lead us away from what God has for us, and even though they might not upend our lives in the way this story describes, they still inhibit us from honoring God, loving our neighbors, and experiencing the life he has for us. What can be done?

### **A solution**

When we read the Bible, we see that God, through His Spirit, has equipped ordinary Christians with the ability to intercede in the lives of our fellow believers and unbelievers in a way that can direct us on the path toward personal wholeness. While some will be more gifted in the area of what we call "Soul Care," **every believer has the ability to be a part of what God wants to do in the lives of those around us.** We're not talking about formal counseling or even setting aside a special time to stage an intervention in the life of another person. What we are mainly encouraging is that each of us would see ourselves as having the responsibility and capability to intervene at a deep level in the lives of those around us- to encourage, to inquire, to correct, to train, and overall to help this person to look more like Jesus.

In this study and the next one, we will discuss what it looks like to be a conduit of truth and grace in the lives of those around you- what Paul Tripp calls "An Instrument in the Redeemer's Hands." Today's study

will discuss some basics, and the next study will zero in on some tools to use.

## **What does it mean to be a tool of God's redemption in the lives of others?**

### **You are a needy person, and you are needed by others.**

Unless both of these realizations come together, it will be difficult for you to be used by God to help care for those around you.

As a created being, you need to be oriented and connected to your Creator. We see this need met as we learn how to live as God's image-bearers (Gen. 1:26), the way we have been designed to flourish. As a broken sinner, you need Jesus. You need Him to heal your fractured relationship to God and begin restoring areas of unbelief in your heart. This takes time and is part of the Spirit's work in your life.

Our need is pervasive and must be recognized and addressed before we can be useful to others. It also guards us against becoming conceited and self-righteous when we remember we are just as in need of grace as the person you are ministering to. In order to be used effectively, we must realize that we share the same fundamental problem as every person that we minister to. Truth without compassion is cruel- that's why Jesus didn't do it. Compassion without truth is empty consolation- Jesus didn't do that either. To love people in a way that helps them see where they are and where they need to go, we must have true sympathy for them at the deepest level. We need Godly humility to be his tool of healing.

Spend some time reflecting on this: Are you growing in an awareness of your neediness? What are some areas in your life that God is helping you grow and change?

## **The Heart is the Target**

As we learn to address our own need and the need of others, we must identify the proper goal of God's care to our hearts. This truth is revealed to us in a story that Jesus shares in Luke 6:

### **Luke 6:43-46**

*"For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.*

### Unpacking the metaphor

In this parable, Jesus equates fruit with our behavior. Fruit is what the tree produces, just as our behavior is what our hearts produce. This means that when we yell at our kids or lie on our taxes, our problem is not a behavior problem. It's a heart problem.

Consider an illustration from *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*:

Pretend that I have an apple tree in my backyard. Each year it buds and grows apples, but when the apples mature, they are dry, wrinkled, brown, and pulpy. After several years I decide that it is silly to have an apple tree and never be able to eat its fruit. So, I decide that I must do something to "fix" the tree.

One Saturday afternoon you look out your window to see me carrying branch cutters, a staple gun, a stepladder, and two bushels of Red Delicious apples into my backyard. You watch as I carefully cut off all the bad apples and staple beautiful red apples onto the branches of the tree. You come out and ask me what I am doing, and I say proudly, "I've finally fixed my apple tree!"

The target of our ministry into their life is the heart. The heart is the place where all things flow from. Our thoughts, our loves, our desires, our secret rage, our deepest dreams, our long-held resentment- all of them are in the heart. And therefore, if we want to see true, lasting, God-honoring change in the lives of those around us (and in ourselves) we must aim for the heart.

## Look for the heart

One of the most basic tools of an individual practicing Soul Care is simply listening and watching well. Listen especially for words and phrases that go beyond the surface. Humans are made in the image of God and we are always making meaning out of our circumstances- we just can't help but interpret our lives. Take note of the way your friends interact with their family, the way they describe their day, and develop a natural curiosity about them.

Listen especially for...

- God talk- often we say more about our beliefs through offhand discussion than we do with doctrinal statements. Do you get the sense from that God loves them, that God is powerful, that God is holy?
- Self-talk- Christian self-esteem is based on what God says about us through Jesus, not how well we're performing lately. Christian humility isn't self-loathing. Always being down on yourself or always seeming high on yourself are postures worth noticing.
- Meaning making- unlike other creatures, we don't just experience our existence, the facts of our lives. We interpret them constantly. Listen for phrases like, "why does this always happen to me?" "It just *had* to happen like this, didn't it?" "Things are never going to change."

## Aim for the heart

Next time, we will talk more about some concrete practices that we can embrace to help us minister to others. For now, frame your thinking around the heart. Every intervention is meant to get to the heart. One of the main ways that we do this is simply by asking good questions. There are different levels of questions and caring for others requires the ability to read a situation and know which kind of question is right for a given situation. But that's getting ahead of ourselves. For now, we'll consider a test case and think of some good questions to ask.

Case: In your Community Group, you are talking with a friend who mentions to you how frustrated they are with their job. They tell you that half the time they are at work, they just browse the internet to deal with the frustration.

What is the *fruit* in this situation?

What do you think God wants to do in your friend's life?

Let's think of some questions to get to the root of the matter- the heart:

### **Surface-level**

### **Deep**

Here are some ideas:

What sites do you go to? What do you like about them?

What is it about browsing the internet that relieves stress?

What would you point to as the source of your stress?

"Stress" is a pretty general term. How would you describe the way you feel in these situations?

Take some time to ask God to help you develop a caring heart to see people in the way He does.



# LOVE GOD'S PEOPLE

Week 6 | Study 2

*"Four words represent four aspects of a personal ministry relationship, four ways to serve as an ambassador in someone's life. The words are **Love, Know, Speak, Do**. These words do not represent a four-step process. They are not phases of a personal ministry relationship, as if you start at the first (Love) and push people through until the last (Do). They are simply four important elements of biblical ministry. Although there is some logic to the order, you will be doing all of these things simultaneously as you seek to be the Lord's ambassador."*

-Paul Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*

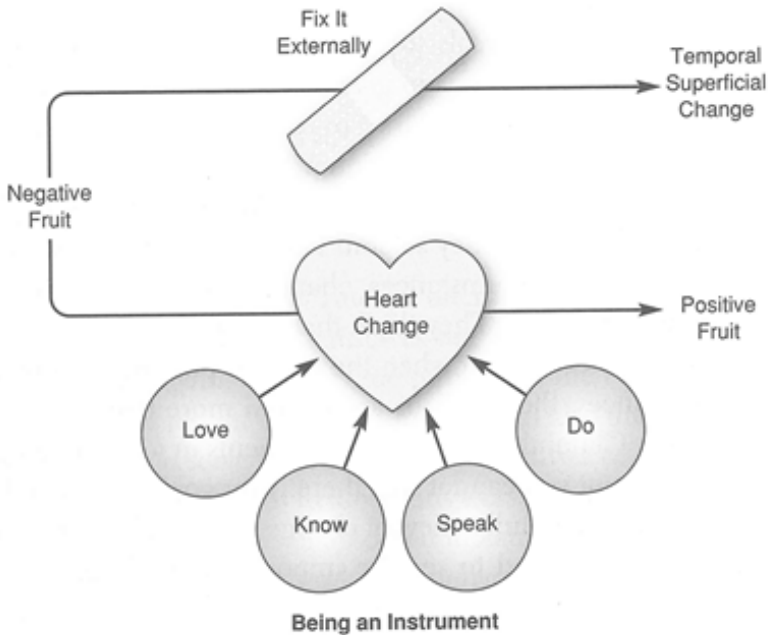
In our last study, we introduced the concept of being tools of healing and care in the lives of those around us. We talked about how God has equipped and empowered every one of us with the ability to care for one another. We declared that God intends to use simple, every day, Spirit-filled believers to bring about deep change in the lives of his people. In this study, we'll give you a model for soul care that will help you to think clearly and simply about how to minister to others in this way. This model has been borrowed from the book *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* by Paul Tripp.

## **Love, Know, Speak, Do**

As we discussed in the previous study, God's goal is to see hearts transformed at a deep level. It's not hard to spot negative "fruit" in the lives of others. Angry outbursts, overspending, addiction, family strife, and other examples all come to mind. But small-scale examples abound as well. If we want to be transformed by God and experience the life He is offering us more deeply, we must be changed at the deepest level- the heart. Negative fruit is the result of a heart problem. Fixing it through external change won't fix it, and it won't honor God. Soul care means reaching to the deep levels. We can do this through a four-part paradigm, illustrated below, called "Love, Know, Speak, Do." As was indicated in the opening quote, this isn't a four-step, sequential process, but four aspects of one ministry of Soul Care.



FIG. 6.1  
**Serving as an Instrument of Change.**



- LOVE is building relationships in which God’s work will thrive.
- KNOW is getting to know people and discovering where change is needed.
- SPEAK is speaking the truth in love.
- DO is applying change to everyday life.

**Practical Implications for real relationships**

As we work through each component, identify a specific relationship in your life. It can be a family relationship (spouse, or child), a friendship, or a ministry relationship. As you learn about each of the four components of serving as God’s Instrument of change, you will be asked to apply each component to your specific relationship.

My relationship: \_\_\_\_\_

## LOVE

Love is building relationships in which God's work will thrive. With Jesus as our model, one great way to consider building relationships of love is incarnation. Incarnation is a concept related to the way we think about Jesus becoming a human, the divine taking on human flesh. In this way, Jesus embodied divine love as a human. He brought the love of God near to humanity.

### **Putting into practice**

When we think about functioning as God's instrument of change, one important aspect is to think of ourselves as incarnating God's love to another person. Think about the relationship you identified. Do you think this person would view you as the embodiment of God's love? What are specific ways you could cultivate this type of presence with this person?

## KNOW

Know is getting to know people in order to discover where change is needed. This is one of the hardest ways to serve as God's instrument because our tendency is to make assumptions and think we already have the right answers. Assuming you understand a person's situation before hearing them must be avoided at all costs. "Wise people are not only the people with the right answers but people who ask the right questions. We cannot get to the right answers without asking the right questions." (*Instruments in the Redeemers Hands: Study Guide, p. 68*)

### **Putting into practice**

The next time you engage with your specific relationship, practice asking questions and just listening. Try hard to not say anything in response, just ask questions and listen. See some categories of questions you might ask below:

### **5 Classes of Questions:**

- What? - most basic. Uncover general information.
- How? - reveal the way something was done.
- Why? - uncover a person's purposes, desires, goals or motivations.
- How often? Where? - reveal themes and patterns in a person's life.
- When? - uncover the order of events.

### **SPEAK**

Speak is speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) and learning how to engage in healthy confrontation. Typically, we tend to engage conflict in the wrong ways. Either we avoid it entirely (passivity) or we engage in hurtful ways (aggression). Though one seems worse, they are both unhelpful to human flourishing.

If we think of ourselves as God's instruments, then it becomes less of a personal issue. The goal is to begin viewing yourself as an "instrument of seeing," where people see themselves in the mirror of God's Word and see areas of sin and unbelief.

### **Putting into practice**

How do you wrongly engage conflict? Passivity or aggression?  
Can you think of specific examples in your relationship?

### **DO**

Do is applying change to everyday life. Real change = lifestyle changes. Helping people make these kinds of changes requires loving accountability. Accountability is essential in helping people change and grow into the person God has called them to be. It takes forethought and consistency in reminders, encouragement, and honest confrontation.

### **Putting into practice**

What does accountability look like in your relationship?  
Are there specific areas you are keeping this person accountable?

Are there ways you were supposed to be keeping them accountable and have lacked consistency? Write them down and consider having a conversation about it.





# SHARE GOD'S GIFTS

*Introduction*

October 21-27

**Share God's Gifts** (*Generosity*) A people who sacrificially share our lives—including our money, time, and abilities- for the good of others, proving that we are cared for by a generous God. (*Matthew 6:19-21; 33-34; Philippians 4:19; Luke 14:33*)

We are a blessed people...more than we even realize. Yet there is something in us that causes us to focus on those who have more than we do than on those who have less than we do. It's our nature.

Think about our financial blessing. If you've never done this before, go to the website [globalrichlist.com](http://globalrichlist.com), and enter your annual salary, and see where you stack up compared to the rest of the world. It's staggering. The average income from a resident of Johnson County, when entered into this site, is in the top 2% in the world!

Think about the spiritual blessings that we have in Jesus. Just from our last study we were reminded that we are loved by the Creator of the Universe. Two studies ago we were reminded that God has given us the Truth, truth that liberates us from believing lies that lead to discouragement and fear.

**A disciple is generous with his or her time, treasure, and talents, knowing that all they have has been generously given to them by our faithful and generous God.**

The way we spend our time, use our gifts, and spend our money is a reflection of how deeply we understand who our God really is.

There are only three studies for this theme, so jump in and enjoy them, but be ready to be challenged as well.

The verse you will memorize this week is Matthew 6:19-21—very honest and revealing words from Jesus. Jesus doesn't really want your money. But he is deeply concerned about who or what owns your heart!

If you have any questions or feedback, please reach out to us at [office@parkviewchurch.org](mailto:office@parkviewchurch.org)

Enjoy this study!



# SHARE GOD'S GIFTS

Week 7 | Study 1

*"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."*

-The Apostle Paul, *First Letter to the Corinthian Church*

*<sup>19</sup>"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup>but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup>For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

--Matthew 6:19-21 (ESV)

## Memory Verse

God's vision for the life of His people is beautiful. Out of billions and billions of rebels, God assembles a group of ragtag rejects who, composed properly, form His church. They aren't the best-of-the-best, they aren't the smartest, or the people who "figured it out." Yet God has uniquely enabled each and every one of them with certain abilities that make the whole-body work in harmony.

## God the General Manager

Like a brilliant team manager, God knows that if everyone in the church has the same gifts, we won't function together well. A football team made up of 11 punters would be very unsuccessful. Learning what gifts God has blessed us with is not as simple as noting our height or observing our strength on the field. If we want to be a church that experiences and expresses the beauty that God has designed for us, **it is critical that we understand and determine the ways God has blessed us.** Today's study aims to be highly practical in helping you discover the gifts God's Spirit has given you, as well as how you can use them to serve the church.



Visit [parkviewchurch.org/resources](http://parkviewchurch.org/resources) to read through "Unwrapping My Gifts". As you read through this list, check off your initial impression concerning yourself. Remember you can have many gifts.

## **The ultimate purpose of God's gifts**

In the Apostle Paul's discussion of the Spirit's gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14, one point is made abundantly clear; the gifts that the Spirit bestows on us are to be used in service to others. Paul makes this point clear in 1 Corinthians 12:7, when he says, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit *for the common good.*" [emphasis mine] What this means is that when we think about the gifts and abilities that God has given us, we should think primarily about how we can use them to bless others.

This is one of the reasons that we encourage you to be part of a Community Group at Parkview. Not only will you be able to express the gifts of God's Spirit in your group, but you will also discover your gifts with more clarity and be able to express them in other areas of ministry.

If you had unlimited time and resources and knew you could never fail, which of the gifts would you most like to personally develop?

Which of the gifts in the survey above do you feel most confident about?

Which of these gifts have others noticed in you that you may not have been aware that you possessed?

What are some ways you have expressed your gift(s) in the past/present?

Take some time to pray about taking one of the following steps toward developing and expressing your gifts at Parkview:

- Join a Community Group if you aren't yet a part of one. Contact Thomas Hoak at [thoak@parkviewchurch.org](mailto:thoak@parkviewchurch.org).

- Ask your Community Group or Community Group leader what gifts they see in your life.
- Ask your Community Group or Community Group leader how you can serve them with the gifts the Spirit has given you.
- Explore the various ministries of Parkview church and contact the leader of a ministry where you think you could find a place to serve. If you would like help, please contact our office at [office@parkviewchurch.org](mailto:office@parkviewchurch.org)





# SHARE GOD'S GIFTS

Week 7 | Study 2

"...if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

-C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

## Untouchable topics

The old saying says that to maintain polite company, you should never raise the topics of politics or religion. These are topics that touch our most deeply-founded beliefs. Maybe a third could be added- money. What we do with our money, how much of it we have, and how we got it can function as a convenient measuring stick for personal value. It's hard to think of *net worth* as a moral as well as financial category. And yet, **the core questions of identity and meaning are the exact questions that God wants to address through His Word.** Indeed, 42 percent of Jesus' parables dealt with how we handle money and possessions. We can't tell ourselves we are following Jesus while ignoring a subject to which he dedicated almost half of his recorded parables.

## Jesus and money

We will approach the subject of money and possessions through the thread of the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5-7. The Sermon on the Mount was Jesus laying out His Kingdom agenda. Like a new CEO taking the helm and announcing sweeping changes to company values and vision, Jesus paints a beautiful picture of life under the one true King. In Matthew 6:19-21, He focuses in on the way that citizens of His Kingdom will interact with money and possessions:

<sup>19</sup>"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup>but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

<sup>21</sup>For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (ESV)

There are two commands given by Jesus in this passage. What are they?

“Laying up treasures” is not a phrase that we would normally use in our day-to-day speech. How would you explain this phrase to someone who is new to the Bible?

What are some examples of things that people “treasure” in the way that Jesus mentions “treasure” in verse 19?

What are some things that you treasure in this way?

What do you think Jesus means when he commands us to “lay up treasures in heaven?”

Jesus gives reasoning to go along with each command in the first two verses. What is it?

Jesus also gives an ultimate reason for this pair of coordinating commands in verse 21. What do you think Jesus means when He says, “there your heart will be also?” What connection is Jesus making between the way we use possessions and our true allegiance to Him?

## One important question

This is a tough question, but it's the question that this passage makes us ask ourselves; what does your use of possessions and money say about your allegiance to Jesus? The goal here is not to see if we "measure up," but to allow the Holy Spirit to show us what we really look like. Not many of us would pass muster on this test. So many features of our present world encourage us not toward contentment and compassion, but toward discontentment and greed. **As Christians, admitting our shortcomings is not hopeless- it's the only way to change!** Praise God that He measures us not on our performance, but on that of His perfect Son. God loves when we come to Him with a soft heart and renewed will, ready to serve Him in a new way.

What are some ways that you can practically "lay up treasure in heaven?"

## Jesus and tithes

Lest we think that the ultimate thing Jesus is after is financial allegiance, we have another story in the Gospel of Matthew that addresses this very thing.

<sup>23</sup>Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. <sup>24</sup>You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!

--Matthew 23:23-24 (ESV)

## Tithing and the heart

In this passage, Jesus addresses the religious leaders of the day, those who ostensibly lead God's people. Yet Jesus is full of rebuke for them. This passage is just one of seven "woes" that Jesus pronounces against these leaders.

The essence of Jesus' complaint against these leaders is a matter of imbalance. On the one hand, they are meticulous in their observance of the Prophet Moses' command to offer 10 percent of all they produce (see Leviticus 27:30-34). Their concern is so deep that they actually pull down the spice rack and start counting out the infinitesimally tiny granules, in an effort to offer perfect religious service to God. But at the same time, they have neglected to practice justice, mercy and faithfulness.

We might think that in order to correct this imbalance, Jesus would command them to stop their fussy tithing. But He doesn't. What does Jesus' command them to do in order to remedy this situation?

What does this teach us about Jesus' expectations for His followers in regard to tithing?

What does this teach us about Jesus' expectations for His followers in regard to all of life?

Spend some time praying about your heart in relation to money. The word tells us that this is one of the most common places that we put our trust apart from God. And unlike other areas of our lives, a lack of generosity is often hard to spot, especially by ourselves. Ask the Lord to transform your heart to be like His generous heart.



# SHARE GOD'S GIFTS

Week 7 | Study 3

Giving at Parkview Church

## **Our gracious God**

The core of the Gospel message is that we have a God who has been astonishingly gracious and generous with us. While we were sinners, God responded to us by graciously giving us His Son, Jesus, to die for our sins and to give us eternal life. We deserve God's wrath, and instead, we are recipients of His love. We were enemies, and God made us heirs with His Son.

A hallmark of the early church was radical generosity. Transformed by the Gospel, these people sacrificially gave their money and their abilities to serve Jesus, to care for the needs of the poor, and to expand the spread of the Gospel.

Here are some key passages from the Bible that undergird a Gospel-centered understanding of money and generosity. Read through each of these passages and keep a list of principles you observe in them, using the space below:

### **I Chronicles 29:10b-12**

*And David said: "Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever. <sup>11</sup> Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. <sup>12</sup> Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all.*

### **Romans 8:31-32**

*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*



## **2 Corinthians 9:6-11, 15**

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. <sup>7</sup> Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. <sup>8</sup> And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. <sup>9</sup> As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." <sup>10</sup> He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. <sup>11</sup> You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

<sup>15</sup> Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

## **Philippians 4:10-19**

*And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

## **Malachi 3:1**

*Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, and see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.*

**Principles on Biblical giving and generosity you observed in these passages:**

### **Four key takeaways from Biblical teaching on money and generosity:**

1. God owns everything.
2. God is our provider. He meets all of our needs.
3. God's grace and generosity transforms us from being selfish hoarders of what we own to being generous givers.
4. God blesses those who give generously—we will never outgive God.

### **It's these passages and others that have informed the Parkview Church statement on radical generosity.**

#### **Parkview Embraces Irrational Generosity.**

Irrational generosity is an appropriate response to the Gospel which displays God's great love which is freely, generously, and sacrificially given to us. We are convinced that "Irrational Generosity" changes lives—ours, and the lives of the people we're reaching. Irrational Generosity applies to all aspects of our spiritual walk; yet Jesus indicates that there is an undeniable connection between our heart and how we handle our treasure.

#### **Sign in to give**

Our giving is a very important aspect of Irrational Generosity. The New Testament commands that giving should be an act of worship, a source of great joy, proportionate, regular, done willingly, generously, and sacrificially!

### **Giving at Parkview: A Historical Perspective**

Throughout the history of Parkview, there have been many examples of God's people giving generously and sacrificially from their finances, such as....

\*A small congregation in faith moved from a small church in Coralville to build a church on Foster Road

\*Sending out over 40 global workers to countries all over the world.

\*Sharing hundreds of thousands of dollars providing for the needs of local families in crisis situations

\*Launching a college ministry to the U of I campus that has reached 1000s of students over the past 20 years

\*Renting space for an outreach center on the Southeast side of Iowa City (the Spot) that sits in the middle of a 6-block radius in which 80% of the poor in Johnson County live.

\*Forming a private, Christian school (Faith Academy, that serves underserved students, has grown to a K-6 school, serving nearly 100 students and their families, a school with an \$800,000 budget, 93% of which is funded by Parkview people.

## **Our current step of Faith: 2020 Vision Campaign**

Parkview's 2020 Vision is rooted within our DNA and in our desire to see people in Johnson County, and around the world, enjoy the life Jesus died for us to have. Three key facility initiatives will help us foster a disciple-making movement in our area.

**East Campus-** In June 2018, Parkview purchased the "L" at Pepperwood Plaza. This will provide more space for our growing East Campus and a permanent home for Faith Academy.

**North Campus-** In June 2018, Parkview Church and Heartland Community Church voted to officially partner in an effort to better reach North Liberty with the Gospel together. The former Heartland Community Church became Parkview Church's North Campus in September 2018.

**Central Campus-** Key improvements to audio/visual equipment will be implemented Fall 2018 to enable us to better reach those that worship with us online and provide a better experience for those who worship at Central Campus. Necessary repairs and cosmetic improvements to our facility will help this location be a blessing to the community for years to come.

## **Your response**

As you look at your current level of giving, how would you say it compares with the principles you have read in the Scripture? Are you giving like you really know God is your provider, that all you have belongs to God, and that you cannot outgive God?

Visit [parkviewchurch.org/give](http://parkviewchurch.org/give) for further description on generous giving, tithing, frequently asked questions about money and giving.



# SERVE GOD'S WORLD

*Introduction*

October 18–November 10

**Serve God's World** (*Evangelism and Justice*) A people sent as Jesus was sent—who declare and display the good news of life in Jesus as we seek the flourishing of our neighbors and the world.

(*Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 19:10; Mark 10:45; John 20:19-23*)

Two more weeks to go! If you were a cross country runner, you'd be approaching your final half mile, and I'd be on the course urging you to finish strong, encouraging you that you have done so well...keep going!

These weeks will open your eyes to the purpose of your life. You are here on this planet at this time in history for an amazing purpose. **A disciple lives as a person sent for the same reasons that Jesus was sent—to declare and display the Good News of the Gospel to the nations and the world.**

In these next two weeks, you will be introduced to how you can be involved in the global expansion of the Gospel. Your life can influence and impact people who live on completely different continents, in different parts of the world! And this study will give you some practical ways you can impact and influence your neighbors—I'm especially excited about introducing you to the concept of hospitality—and how this can open many doors for you to share Jesus with the people around you.

You will be introduced to the **3 Friends** concept, which is a focused discipline of praying for people in your life who don't know Jesus yet. You will also be given very practical ways to engage with Parkview's Global Workers and with opportunities to care for the underserved in our area.

The book will provide some examples of how to pray for and support Global Workers. It will also provide some practical ways to serve and pray for our friends and neighbors who do not know Jesus.

Your memory verses this week are Matthew 28:18-20 and Isaiah 1:16-17.  
Finish strong! These are the final two passages to memorize!

Have a great two weeks in this study!

If you have any questions or feedback, please reach out to us at  
[office@parkviewchurch.org](mailto:office@parkviewchurch.org)



# SERVE GOD'S WORLD

Week 8 | Study 1

<sup>19</sup>On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." <sup>20</sup>When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." <sup>22</sup>And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

-John 20:19-23 (ESV)

<sup>18</sup>And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

<sup>19</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

--Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV)

**Memory Verse**

Imagine that you are sitting, huddled in a room, with Jesus' disciples—it's three days after He was crucified, and tension still fills the city as those who killed Jesus were also looking to arrest His followers. Everyone is jumpy, on edge. And suddenly, "Boom! Jesus appears, right in your midst. It's like someone just popped a balloon behind everyone's head at the same time—instant shock, fear, panic. That's why two times Jesus had to calm everyone down and say, "Peace be with you"—"chill out!". In this amazing appearance of Jesus with ten of His disciples, Jesus gave these marching orders: "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." What an amazing calling! What an amazing invitation! And what an amazing cause to live for—a purpose and reason to live! Jesus invites his followers to invest their lives in the things He was sent from heaven to do!

## A call to all believers

As followers of Jesus, we can embrace this invitation as well! We live in a city, on a street, we work at a job, we go to a school, with a mission and purpose. **We are called to live for the same things that Jesus was sent to live for.**

Here are a few of the things Jesus was sent to do:

- *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. **Luke 19:10***
- *For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. **Mark 10:45***
- *The thief comes to kill, steal, and destroy, but I came that you might have life, and life to the full. **John 10:10***

What if we embraced this invitation, and as we lived life among our fellow students, colleagues, and neighbors, if we saw ourselves as “sent ones” to these people, sent to them to do the things that Jesus was sent to do for them?

## Waking up to God’s mission

I wonder how many opportunities we miss because we just routinely go through the grind each day, head down, thinking about our own stuff, totally oblivious to the opportunities around us. **What if we woke up each morning, asked Jesus to fill us with His life, and to send us for His purposes for that day**--and then interacted with the people in our lives? How would that change your attitude about going to work or school tomorrow? How would that change your view of the neighbor who doesn’t rake his leaves before the wind blows them onto your lawn?

What if we were a church that saw ourselves as being “sent” to our city for the same reason that Jesus was sent to the earth?

Let’s break this down. Jesus was sent...

1. **As a servant** (*Mark 10:45*). He gave His life for others. Likewise, we are sent to serve the people around us.

What are some practical ways you can serve neighbors, classmates, office mates this week?

2. **As a life giver** (*John 10:10*). Wherever Jesus went, He brought life to the hopeless. He brought hope to the discouraged. He brought encouragement to the stressed. He brought peace to the fearful. Jesus came to give life.

What are some practical ways you can bring life to people around you?

3. **To seek and save lost people** (*Luke 19:10*). Jesus showed intentionality and purpose with His life. He intentionally pursued people who were far from God. Ultimately, Jesus came to save sinners like us! And He sends us on a similar mission—to share the Gospel with the people in our lives who do not know Him.

Here are some practical ways to begin this significant mission:

1. Be known in your circles of relationships as a **servant and a life giver**—ask Jesus for the power to live the way He lived, to live as a servant and a life giver!

Examples of serving:

**Among your neighbors**- mow a lawn, help with yard projects, shovel snow in the winter, take them a meal when you know they've been busy, invite them over for dinner or dessert.

**Among your coworkers**- take them a meal when you know they've been busy, offer to help with a project when they are overloaded, compliment their work.

**Among fellow students**- offer to help a classmate with homework or share class notes with them, ask good questions, invite them to eat with you in your home or in the dining hall together.

Examples of giving life:

**Intentionally encouraging others**--complimenting their work

Asking questions/showing interest in their lives--being a good listener

Drop notes to encourage them



2. Pray for the people in your life who do not know Jesus. Commit to praying for these people 3-5 times each week, asking God to use you to help them see who Jesus is. (See the *Praying for 3 Friends* document in the appendix.)
  
3. Be ready to share your story—with Jesus as the hero—and to share the gospel (see study 3 from *Live God's Story*)

Let's do a practical exercise for our study today. Think about three people you see regularly in your path of life—people that you are not sure if they know Jesus as their Savior, or people that you are certain don't know Jesus as Savior. Write down their initials below in the chart along the left column. Then in each block write down a few ideas of how you can live as Jesus lived in each of their lives—look for ways you can serve them, give life to them, and share the Gospel with them.

	Serve	Bring Life	Share the Gospel
Friend #1			
Friend #2			
Friend #3			



# SERVE GOD'S WORLD

Week 8 | Study 2

*"...and all peoples on earth will be blessed by you."*

-Genesis 12:3

## Reflect

From the beginning of the Bible to the end, God's heart to love and shepherd all people is clear. What are some ways your life has been blessed by the love of Jesus?

## A long journey

Have you ever considered how the Good News of God's justice and mercy through Jesus Christ traveled from the 33 A.D. city of Jerusalem in an age where there was no T.V. or internet, across 2000 years, to arrive at your heart the day you gladly received this gift? What languages had to be translated? What geographic barriers were navigated? How many cultures were crossed before the message got to you? What personal fears of those sharing were endured and overcome? What motivated these faithful saints to carry the message to you?

The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, His resurrection, and faith in Jesus' words at the end of Matthew's Gospel certainly must have played a central role!

*"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

-Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV)

## **Prayer**

Take a moment to thank God for all who exercised faith to enact this commission so that the Good News of Jesus reached your heart and life! (especially the person/people who shared directly with you!)

## **Consider**

Did you know that roughly half of the world's roughly 7 billion people have still, in 2018, not heard the message of Jesus' love and forgiveness? This defines them as 'unreached' ([joshuaproject.net](http://joshuaproject.net)). In America most families with at least 3 generations' history here know that there is a book called the Bible, have a Christian friend, or know where they can find a Christian radio station, or church to visit if they want to learn. In contrast, due to governments that restrict practice or access, people in unreached areas literally either have no way to encounter Jesus by their own initiative or have dismissed Jesus due to a lack of reliable teaching.

Did you know that roughly 90% of these 3 billion unreached people live in a geographical area of the world nicknamed the 10/40 window? The 10/40 window refers to the 65 or so countries roughly located 10 degrees south latitude to 40 degrees north latitude stretching from Western Africa to Eastern Asia.



## **10/40 Window**

What do you think God's plan is for reaching these unreached people with the Good News of Jesus? Is He calling you to play a part?

## **Gospel Barriers in the Bible:**

a) *"But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish..."* Jonah 1:3

Jonah received God's call to go preach a message of impending judgment to the people of Nineveh. Why didn't he go? (read Jonah 1-4 if you need more context to answer)

b) *"...You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him..."* Acts 10:28

Up until approximately 50AD, the vast majority of people following Jesus were Jews who shared the message of Jesus with other Jewish people! What was the reason for this? (read Acts 10-11 if you need more context to answer)

## **Act/Obey**

When Jesus said, "go and make disciples of every nation", the word "go" can mean relocating in a physical way, but it can also be translated in the manner of 'as you are going'... Take some time to consider which of the following ways you can obey Jesus' Great Commission from Matthew 28:18-20:

## **Pray**

*"...Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore to send out workers into this harvest field."*  
-Luke 10:2

1. Use the Global Outreach Partnership booklet to pray regularly for Parkview Global Workers and our partner organizations. These are available at each campus location or you can contact Paul at [parkviewgw@gmail.com](mailto:parkviewgw@gmail.com) to receive a copy.
2. Choose an unreached country, learn some things about that country, ask God to open the doors to His blessing, gather others to pray with you, (sample countries: Sudan, Saudi Arabia, North Korea, or visit [www.joshuaproject.net](http://www.joshuaproject.net) for more information about any people-group's exposure to Jesus).

## Welcome

*"...the foreigner living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt..." Leviticus 19:34*

1. God is bringing many people from unreached countries to the U.S.! Has He put any recent immigrants or international students/scholars in your life that you can faithfully befriend and invite to read the Bible?
2. Three times/year God brings 400+ Sudanese immigrants to Parkview Church where we can befriend them and care for their children! Send an email to [parkviewgw@gmail.com](mailto:parkviewgw@gmail.com) for information about the next party.
3. Two times/year you can apply to be matched with an international student at the university of Iowa! [bit.ly/FISfriend](http://bit.ly/FISfriend) is an online application link. Invite them to share life with you, pray for them, and bless them in Jesus' name!

## Go

*"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"  
Romans 10:15/Isaiah 52:7*

Thank goodness God also calls many people from all professions – medical, educational, engineering, business, etc. to bless unreached nations by going to those people in-person on a short or long-term basis! Email [parkviewgw@gmail.com](mailto:parkviewgw@gmail.com) to find out more about specific opportunities/needs (e.g. 4-person team of Oral English teachers in China, accounting internship in Iraq, aqua-culture engineering in Egypt, medical teams or individuals in Sierra Leone or Central African Republic, etc.)

## Give

*"Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account." Philippians 4:17*

1. Jesus had financial supporters (*Luke 8:3*) as did Paul (*Philippians 4:16*) and most global workers today. Are you giving a regular tithe to the Parkview General Ministry Fund? If so, almost 10% of every dollar goes to support our Global Outreach!

2. Ask God to guide you each year in setting aside an amount of money above your regular tithe for giving to short-term global outreach teams and/or a long-term global worker.

*"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb." Revelation 7:9*

Praise our Heavenly Father, who saved us, and has made us His ambassadors for inviting people/families/generations from every nation to the eternal throne of the Lamb!





# SERVE GOD'S WORLD

Week 9 | Study 1

"What if the solution to our society's biggest issues has been right under our noses for the past two thousand years? When Jesus was asked to reduce everything in the Bible into one command he said: Love God with everything you have and love your neighbor as yourself. What if he meant that we should love our actual neighbors? You know, the people who live right next door."

-Jay Pathak & Dave Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring*

<sup>16</sup>Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;  
remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes;  
cease to do evil,  
<sup>17</sup> learn to do good;  
seek justice,  
correct oppression;  
bring justice to the fatherless,  
plead the widow's cause. *Isaiah 1:16-17 (ESV)*

## Memory Verse

### Not an accident

In the book of Acts, the Apostle Paul travels to the great city of Athens. He heads for the market area to discuss Jesus with the cultural elites of his day, and he begins his address with what seems like an offhand comment, in Acts 17:

<sup>26</sup>And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, *having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,* <sup>27</sup>that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us... (ESV, italics mine)

What Paul is saying is that in the process of God bringing His plan of salvation to completion, a crucial component of His plan was in the seemingly mundane dimensions of time and space. We tend to assume that the deep plans of God are primarily about battling demons in the spiritual realm and bringing light to individual believers. But this passage tells us that in fact, **your street address, as well as those of those around you, is an integral part of God's plan to display his glory on Earth.**



What does this mean? **Your “dwelling place” is not an accident.** Those neighbors who live next to you who don’t mow *their* part of your adjoining lawn are not a coincidence. Those fellow believers who got a great deal on the house down the street are no mistake. This is God’s plan working together in the plain elements of space and time, as if He painted the end-zone around our block and lobbed us the ball- but will we catch it?

## **Neighboring throughout history**

For centuries in the early church, practicing hospitality was the primary way that unbelievers became aware of the ground-shaking movement that began when Jesus rose from His grave. If we want to join in what he is doing in Iowa City, North Liberty and to the ends of Johnson County, we need to recover the practices that were crucial to the church in its infancy. **So, what does it look like to be a Christian neighbor, showing hospitality on our block?** We need a definition, we need to make two shifts in our thought, and then we’ll think about how this looks in day-to-day life.

### **What is Hospitality?**

Hospitality is a heart-orientation.

Hospitality is an open-door policy to our homes but also our lives.

Hospitality makes people feel at home, no matter where they are.

Hospitality doesn’t stay inside waiting- it goes out and pursues.

Hospitality is about the stranger as well as the friend.

Hospitality is generous.

Hospitality requires courage.

Hospitality requires Jesus, because hospitality is an imitation of Jesus.

### **Shifting our Thoughts about Hospitality**

*Hospitality is an ethic, not an activity*

When we think about what it means to be neighbors, we shouldn’t think primarily about the activities that we do, but **the way that we relate to others.** Have you ever had a conversation with someone who instantly made you feel important, valuable, even loved? This was a person who was practicing hospitality, even if they weren’t inviting you into their home. The practices of hospitality are important, but they must be set in the groundwork of a heart transformed to love others. **A luxurious meal with cold conversation isn’t hospitality. A cold sandwich with a warm friend is.**

*Hospitality is about strangers, not dinner parties*

Perhaps our biggest obstacle when thinking about hospitality is the vision we have in our heads. Someone being gifted in hospitality means that they are a generous, good cook, keep a clean house, and love to have their friends over often. Don't get me wrong- there's nothing like a great meal with friends. **But when the Bible talks about hospitality, it's not talking about dinner parties.**

It wasn't until the late middle ages that hotels and restaurants began to emerge as the primary means of being sheltered and nourished when traveling. Until then, travelers relied on the kindness of everyday people to keep them from going hungry and cold. Even in the story of Jesus' birth, the word we commonly translate "inn" really means "guest room." **Christians in the Roman empire became known for their hospitality,** inviting the stranger into their midst, sometimes at personal risk. They followed the example of Jesus, who at great expense treated them like family even though they were strangers (Eph. 2:19).

### **Shifting our Practices of Hospitality**

Now that we have discussed a couple of shifts in our thinking, let's talk about what Hospitality *looks like*. Hospitality is more art than science, so it's hard to say that in every case, being a good neighbor will look like *this* or like *that*. That's because each of us have unique gifts. To think about how to express hospitality toward our neighbors, then, we'll need to take into account the unique gifts God has given us. Finally, we'll present a structure for approaching your neighborhood for the sake of Jesus.

We often think about God's gifts to us primarily in the realm of the Spiritual gifts described in 1 Corinthians 12 and elsewhere (see study #1 for *Share God's Gifts* on this). But James 1:17 tells us that every good gift is from God. That means that **being a good cook is a gift from God. Being mechanically minded is part of God's plan for your neighborhood. A special concern for widows and the lonely is an expression of God's love to your particular pocket of His world.** Work through the table below to consider how God has designed you in order to bless your neighborhood.

- In the first column, think about the things you naturally love..., naturally know how to..., naturally have skills in...

- In the second column, think of how you could use this aspect of who God has created you to bless your neighborhood.

I/my family naturally love/know/do...	...so I can serve my neighbors by...
Car maintenance and repair	Sharing tools and know-how
Food	Supplying a meal for those in crisis or just because

### A Strategy for Hospitality

As we said in the “what is hospitality” section, hospitality doesn’t just wait for needs to appear in order to meet them. Hospitality actively seeks out ways to *invite others in*, making *anywhere* feel like home. Here is a good strategy to be proactive about hospitality in your neighborhood.

Home is a place where you *know* and *are known*. In a neighborhood, getting involved in the lives of others means not just knowing what color their house is, but the things about them that make them, *them*. Complete the exercise below to get strategic in your practice of hospitality.

### My Neighborhood

In the center box, put your name. This is your neighborhood, and the people in the houses around you are those God has divinely chosen to place near you. In each of the surrounding boxes, you’ll fill in the following information:

**1. Names**

- This includes anyone in the house- make notes of age and gender if it's not obvious. Pets count too! Remembering someone's name is one of the easiest ways to make them feel known.

**2. Basic Information**

- This is the level of detail you would find out on a first date- what's their favorite family restaurant, what sports their kids do, where they're from. Not too personal, but very helpful when showing hospitality!

**3. Beliefs & Background**

- This is the stuff that usually takes time to get to. It might include their spiritual beliefs, tough stuff in their past or present, or their dreams for the future.


Don't feel like you've failed if your grid isn't completely or even partially filled. Me too! This is a *goal* to reach, a strategy to think about. But what it should do is push us to get acquainted with our neighbors beyond just the cursory information that does little to demonstrate the incredible hospitality that God has shown us through Jesus.

There's one thing I didn't mention in the "what is hospitality" section:

Hospitality is an adventure. Life on mission for Jesus is the most invigorating thing we can do. When the neighborhood becomes your

mission field, walking the dog isn't just a daily chore- it's an opportunity to walk by the Spirit and courageously seek a conversation with that family that just moved in. **Don't be surprised when they happen to walk out to the mailbox just as you turn the corner!** God loves to move through these simple acts of obedience and bless our plans to bless others, seeking to make God's family a little bit bigger each day.

Close by spending some time praying for your neighborhood and the ways that God can show them His love through you and your family.



# SERVE GOD'S WORLD

Week 9 | Study 2

"The unbeliever is not necessarily moved by seeing Christians serving the theological and psychological needs of others. They cannot understand the action because they do not feel the need themselves. But unbelievers do feel physical needs. When they see Christians feeding the hungry, comforting the suffering, supporting the financially and physically weak, unbelievers see our service. Through this, hearts can be softened to Christ."

-Timothy Keller, *Ministries of Mercy*

In the early hours of June 6, 1944, the first artillery shells impacted near the beaches of Normandy, France. Within 6 days, the Allies would establish an entryway into northern France, and then on into the rest of Western Europe. Any military historian will tell you that when this battle was over, World War II ended. And yet, it wasn't until May 8, 1945 that victory was finally secured over the Axis powers and Hitler's Nazi regime was defeated and finally dismantled. In between these dates, there was still much fighting to do, but the enemy was a foe with no hope- it was just a matter of time until terms of defeat were settled. The war was over, the final victory all but achieved, but there were still battles to be won.

As members of Christ's Kingdom, we face a similar scenario. On the cross, our King went to war with his enemies- Satan, sin and death- and though He appeared to have been defeated, He rose from the grave, dealing the decisive blow against our enemies. Colossians 2:15 tells us, "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him." But though Satan and his army are a defeated foe, he is not a fully vanquished foe. **There is still a war, and we fight eagerly for victory, knowing that our King is returning to set things right once and for all.**

## **Joining our King, displaying His kingdom**

While waiting for this final victory, our King has called us to join Him through the work of His Spirit in spreading the news of His victory, the Gospel, all over the earth. **He has also called us to seek to make the earth look more like His Kingdom in the meantime.** Jesus is the King who looks

nothing like earthly kings, whose natural mode is to use power to elevate themselves and their kingdom. Instead, Jesus subjected Himself to pain and dethronement in order to elevate others. Today, we'll consider the task of defending the weak and powerless in light of Jesus' commands to his followers.

When Jesus announces his public ministry in Luke 4, he does so in this way:

*<sup>16</sup>And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read.*

*<sup>17</sup>And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,*

*<sup>18</sup>"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,*

*<sup>19</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

*<sup>20</sup>And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup>And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (ESV)*

What is Jesus saying about the nature of His mission on earth? What does it involve?

Here's another key insight on Jesus' ministry from Matthew 25

*<sup>31</sup>"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup>Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup>And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. <sup>34</sup>Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. <sup>35</sup>For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup>I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you*

visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’<sup>37</sup>Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?’<sup>38</sup>And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?’<sup>39</sup>And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’<sup>40</sup>And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

<sup>41</sup>“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. <sup>42</sup>For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, <sup>43</sup>I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’<sup>44</sup>Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’<sup>45</sup>Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’<sup>46</sup>And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (ESV)

There are certainly many things to learn from this passage, but what does this passage teach us about how we should relate to those who are in need?

Jesus gives the example in this passage of the “hungry”, “thirsty”, “strangers”, “naked”, “sick” and “imprisoned” as those who are unable to help themselves and have profound needs. Many of these categories still fit for us today. There may also be others in our own day. Are there any that you observe in your area?

## **Why do we serve God’s world?**

One thing that we learn from the whole of the Bible is that the Christian ethic of mercy is embodied by Jesus is not based on our ability but on God Himself. God tells us that every person is made in his image and therefore is deserving of respect and compassion from fellow humans. Christians should lead the way in this. **We don’t show mercy and compassion because it’s trendy, or because it makes us relevant or because it is a tenet of our political party.** God’s mercy isn’t partisan. He calls us to compassion and mercy so that *He* will be glorified, and His image won’t be dishonored in the Earth.



So, what does this actually look like? Let's think about an internal and external change:

## **Cultivating a Heart of Mercy**

Showing mercy and compassion for those in difficult circumstances comes from a heart that realizes its own spiritual poverty. When we see someone who is down-and-out, who has deep need for help, we should feel a deep sense of sympathy. Spiritually speaking, we are worse than beggars and thieves. We are dead and in need of spiritual CPR. Jesus brought us to life, not because we were beautiful or smart or rich. He showed mercy because He *is* mercy. We show mercy to others because mercy *dwells* in us through God's Spirit. **We can relate to the needy, the sick, the disempowered and abused, because we have been there, and we have been rescued.** In the first story we read in this study, we learned that one of the most basic signs that you have understood and believed the Gospel is if you have a heart of compassion toward those who are also poor. Ask God to soften your heart and remind you that you were poor, guilty, and sick and that He would make your heart look like His.

## **Demonstrating Deeds of Mercy**

It is not enough to show compassion with our words, though that too is important. James reminds us of this in the second chapter of His letter by saying... <sup>15</sup>*If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food,* <sup>16</sup>*and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?* (ESV)

## **Serving in community**

One of the primary ways to engage with the needs in your local area is to be a part of a Community Group. In the last study, we discussed what it looks like to be a neighbor in the image of Jesus, showing hospitality to the strangers in your neighborhood. **Being part of a network of people who are familiar with their own neighborhood will increase your exposure to the needs in your community.** It will increase the possibility of connecting with someone in your group, another group, or in another neighborhood whose needs God has blessed you with the ability to meet.

## Serving through Parkview

Throughout the history of Parkview Church, we have felt a keen responsibility to demonstrate Christ's coming Kingdom by making Iowa City look more like it will when Jesus is finally and fully victorious. One way that this has been expressed is through the ministry of *The Spot*. Located in one of the most underserved areas of the county, **this ministry offers a safe, nurturing atmosphere where youth are able to learn and grow while participating in healthy, fun, Christ-centered activities.** In coordination with this ministry, Parkview's East Campus was launched in 2016. By providing a campus location in this area, our hope is to reach the neighborhood with the Good News about Jesus through word and deed. To learn more, contact Liz at [lizcloven@gmail.com](mailto:lizcloven@gmail.com).

Another illustration of Parkview's efforts in this area is Faith Academy. Founded in 2013, Faith Academy creates a community where children love learning and grow in godliness, and partners with families in raising tomorrow's leaders with a focus on excellence. **This Christ-centered school strives to radiate with the Gospel message, transform the community, and elevate the value of education and redemption.**

Parkview is seeking the good of this area through the ministries of The Spot and Faith Academy. There are many ways to get involved, from working with children, to cleaning rooms, to helping serve lunch. Contact Doreen at [dschlabaugh@faithacademyiowa.org](mailto:dschlabaugh@faithacademyiowa.org) for more information.

Finally, there are also several families in our church who are involved with foster care and adoption. As a church family we can look for many practical ways to come alongside these families who have expressed Jesus' love and mercy to children in need. Through our S.A.F.E. families program, we have offered respite nights for foster parents or those in the pre-adoption process. Contact our office at [office@parkviewchurch.org](mailto:office@parkviewchurch.org) if you'd like to help provide food or help put on an exciting and fun night for the children while the parents have a much needed night off.

What is one way you can join in God's plan to make this world look more like it will when Jesus achieves his final victory over Satan, sin and death?





### **3 Friends**

I commit to pray for these three friends that God has given me...that they would come to know Jesus.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

#### **Pray for...**

- God to send someone to share Jesus with them (*Matt. 9:36-38*)
- An opportunity for me to serve them and share with them. (*Col. 4:2-6*)
- A chance to authentically share what Jesus has done for me. (*Eph. 6:19-20*)
- Boldness to speak without fear. (*Eph. 6:19-20*)
- God to give me the words to say to make the Gospel clear (*Col. 4:2-6*)
- My lifestyle to point my friends to Jesus (*Col. 4:2-6*)

#### **Matthew 9:36-38**

*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."*

#### **Colossians 4:2-6 (NLT)**

*Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart. Pray for us, too, that God will give us many opportunities to speak about his*

*mysterious plan concerning Christ. That is why I am here in chains. Pray that I will proclaim this message as clearly as I should. Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.*

### **Ephesians 6:19-20 (NLT)**

*And pray for me, too. Ask God to give me the right words so I can boldly explain God's mysterious plan that the Good News is for Jews and Gentiles alike. I am in chains now, still preaching this message as God's ambassador. So pray that I will keep on speaking boldly for him, as I should.*