**Close to God: week 1, January 7, Derek, Getting Close to God Is Possible**

Reading Plan

Day 1-

READ: Jeremiah 24:17

REFLECT: It is one thing for us to talk about how much we want to experience God, but how much do you think God wants to be with us? In what ways do you know God desires a close relationship with you?

PRACTICE: After making of list of how you know God desires a close relationship with you, pray a prayer of praise to God acknowledging each one and thanking him for his presence.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

READ: Psalms 139:1-10

REFLECT: When we accept that God desires to be with us rather than our desire to be with God what difference might this new perspective make on your life?

PRACTICE: Read Psalms 139:1-10 prayerfully, slowly and out loud with your palms up in front of you.

Day 2-

READ: Revelation 21:3

REFLECT: When we think of God as being far away, how does that view impact our relationship with him?

PRACTICE: Prepare for today by thinking about situations you will be in and remind yourself that God will be there with you. If you are reading this in the evening think about tomorrow and what situations you will in.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

READ: 1 Samuel 3:1-10

REFLECT: What if God is really all around us—and we don’t realize it? What might we be missing if God is really closer than we think?

PRACTICE: Ask the Holy Spirit to help you not miss out on any opportunities to meet with God today?

Day 3-

READ: Isaiah 41:10

REFLECT: Identify things in your life that you are fearful of or overwhelmed in right now.

PRACTICE: Commit some of those areas to the Lord in prayer and give them over to Him so you can have peace.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

READ: Genesis 28:10-17

REFLECT: When was the first time you really sensed God’s presence in your life? What was your particular situation in life like at that moment? How did you feel as you sensed that He was with you? Did his presence at that moment change your life in any way? How has your sense of God’s presence grown?

PRACTICE: Jacob, after seeing and hearing from God, took the stone he had laid his head on and set it up as a memorial to that moment. Consider putting a small stone in your pocket or near where you pray to remember that God came to Jacob and he has, is and will continue to come near to you.

Day 4-

READ: Matthew 6:9

REFLECT: God looks at us through the eyes of a father. Describe the eyes of our heavenly father.

PRACTICE: Praise God that He is also you Father who is near to you.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

READ: Psalms 145:17-19

REFLECT: What word is repeated in this passage and why is that significant.

PRACTICE: At the end of today take some time to acknowledge to your heavenly Father how he has been with you. Thank Him for His presence. Determine right now what time tonight you will follow through with this challenge.

Day 5-

READ: James 4:8

REFLECT: Pastor Derek started the sermon on Sunday talking about Michelangelo’s portrayal of God and Adam. What may be keeping you from “lifting a finger” in response to God?

PRACTICE: Confess to your Heavenly Father what has been keeping you from growing closer to him and commit through the next few weeks to open your whole life to Him.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

READ: Luke 24:13-35

REFLECT: Peter felt his lack of faith would mean that he wasn’t worthy of being in Jesus presence anymore. What is there from your past or maybe in your life right now that you need to turn from and recognize that Jesus still wants you and still has plans for your life.

PRACTICE: Write on a piece of paper what has been holding you back from experiencing God’s presence. Now rip that paper up, through it in the garbage and tell Jesus though a prayer that you are ready to walk in presence.

**Close to God: week 2, Jan 14, Derek, CHAIR CHALLENGE FOR A NEW YEAR**

Reading Plan

Day 1-

READ: Psalm 1:1-6

REFLECT: In these verses what are some characteristics of a person who is ‘blessed’ or fulfilled?

PRACTICE: Spend a minute honestly asking yourself if you are willing to invest a small portion of time each day to become that person.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

READ: Mark 1:35; Luke 4:42

REFLECT: Why do you think Jesus, who was fully God and totally without sin, chose to spend time with His Father early in the morning?

PRACTICE: Decide on the best time daily to “find your chair”—a time when you are least likely to be interrupted and most likely to be mentally focused.

Day 2-

READ: 1 Peter 1:23-2:3

REFLECT: Think about the way newborn babies act when they are hungry. Do you to want to be fed with God’s Word with that same intensity?

PRACTICE: Pray and ask God to help you ‘acquire a taste’ for reading and enjoying the Bible.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

WATCH: Bill Hybels’ video “Coffee With God”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2SVmM4qbLE>

REFLECT: How could your life be different in 2018 if you take time to meet with God regularly?

Day 3-

READ: Psalm 19:7-11

REFLECT: List some of the benefits these verses say we get from God’s Word.

PRACTICE: Zero in on one of these that you particularly need in your life right now (wisdom, joy, revelation) and ask God to give that to you through His Word this year.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

READ: Psalm 90:12 and Matthew 6:33

REFLECT: What would it look like to put God first in the way you spend the resource of time? How could giving Him first priority actually give you more time?

PRACTICE: Just as all our finances come from God so all our time is a gift from Him. Choose one way today to remind yourself of this (note on the mirror, phone message, etc.)

Day 4-

READ: Psalm 116:5; 2 Peter 3:9; Hebrews 4:12; James 1:23

REFLECT: God’s Word is a window (shows us who God is) and also a mirror (shows us who we are.) Why do we need both of these elements?

PRACTICE: Find at least two more verses in your Bible that tell what God is like. You can use a concordance (index of verses) in the back of your Bible or simply Google search verses about God’s character.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

WATCH: This music video of Hebrews 4:12 on RightNow Media: <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/KidsSeries/136097#10>

PRACTICE: Find one way this week to use technology (audio version of the Bible; YouVersion on your phone; musical settings of Bible verses) to give you added time in God’s Word but not as a substitute for finding your chair.

Day 5-

READ: 1 Corinthians 10:11; Romans 15:4; Psalm 119:105-106

REFLECT: Think about ways you have learned life lessons from people who lived centuries ago through the Bible. How has the Bible been a “light” to show you the way in life?

PRACTICE: Whenever you turn on a light today take a quick moment to thank God for the light of His Word.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

READ: Psalm 119:97-104; Read again Psalm 1:2,3

REFLECT: “in whatever he does, he prospers” (vs. 3) does not mean we will be financially prosperous or have an easy life. In fact, Jesus promises us trouble (John 16:33,) but when we sink our ‘roots’ deep into the truth of His Word we can stand firm on His promises and have joy in the midst of the trouble of the world.

PRACTICE: Look for a small block of time this weekend when you would normally be watching TV or scrolling through social media and instead read straight through a small book of the Bible like Philippians or Colossians.

**Close to God: week 3, Jan 21, Brian, SILENCE**

Reading Plan

Day 1-

READ: Mark 6:31

REFLECT: What does it mean that silence is “liberation from the noise.” How could silence in God’s presence be liberating in your life?

PRACTICE: Turn off the phone, find a quiet spot, and spend five minutes in silence today.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

READ: Luke 1:80; 3:1-18

REFLECT: Like Jesus, John the Baptist spent a period of time in the wilderness before beginning his ministry. How did God use John to prepare people for Jesus?

PRACTICE: Be intentional this week to “unplug” and seek silence and solitude. Where and when will that be? Put it in your calendar.

Day 2-

READ: Ephesians 5:15-17

REFLECT: What is the best thing in your life to say YES to right now?

PRACTICE: Ask God for wisdom to choose what is best, then allow time for silence as you sit in His presence, trusting in Him to lead you.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

READ: Tyranny of the Urgent (<http://www.olemissxa.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Tyranny-of-the-Urgent.pdf>)

REFLECT: What are the urgent things and the important things in your life? How have you let the good be the enemy of the best in your life?

Day 3-

READ: Revelation 8:1

REFLECT: Heaven ceased its unending praise of God for a time of silence in anticipation of God’s mighty acts of judgment. How would silence increase anticipation (of change, of celebration) in your life?

PRACTICE: Make a list of the events and changes coming in your life. Add space in your calendar for silence as a way to prepare yourself.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

READ: Psalm 37:7 and Psalm 46

REFLECT: What are you waiting for in your life? How can the practice of silence bring you closer to God in the waiting?

PRACTICE: Silence does not have to be motionless. Spend some time in silence while walking, driving, or doing something with your hands (sewing, kneading, coloring, whittling, etc).

Day 4-

READ: Exodus 34:21

REFLECT: God’s law commanded regular rest, even in the busiest seasons. How would this affect

PRACTICE: How can you create space for rest in your busy schedule? Delete something from your schedule next week!

TAKE IT FURTHER!

WATCH: Learn more about how to Sabbath from this Right Now Media study, 24/6: <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/Series/358>

PRACTICE: Start the conversation in your home about what it will take to establish a regular Sabbath for your family.

Day 5-

READ: Psalm 23:1-4

REFLECT: A shepherd cares for his sheep and wants what is best for them. If the Lord is your Shepherd, how will you let Him lead you to what is best?

PRACTICE: Preparing for this weekend, what might be the best use of your hours? Remember, sometimes good things crowd out time for what is best!

TAKE IT FURTHER!

READ: Psalm 16

REFLECT: Psalm 16 and 23 are professions of trust in the Lord. Underline the words and phrases that declare trust and meditate on them.

PRACTICE: Trust God that He is best for you! Make a plan for an hour of solitude and quiet this weekend.

**Close to God: Reading Plan Week 4, January 28, 2018**

**Pastor Derek, “CELEBRATION”**

Day 1-

READ: Nehemiah 8:9

REFLECT: Why did the people of Israel weep as Ezra read God’s Laws

PRACTICE: Take a moment to remember a time when you realized that you had drifted from God. Write a line or two that express your feelings as you worked to reconnect with God.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

Google: Nehemiah and read about the historical Governor Nehemiah (Wikipedia perhaps)

REFLECT: Does it bolster your faith to know that much of the Christian Bible is corroborated in historical accounts?

Day 2-

READ: Nehemiah 8:9-10

REFLECT: Our word, “holiday” comes from Holy Day. How do we typically commemorate our holidays? How does Nehemiah direct the Israelites to recognize the holy day?

PRACTICE: Jot down a list of the common themes and practices we engage in as we celebrate our holidays. What new traditions could be added that keep the days holy?

TAKE IT FURTHER!

READ: Psalm 4:7

REFLECT: How does David contrast happiness and joy in this verse?

Day 3-

READ: Nehemiah 8:10

REFLECT: How does hedonism differ from appropriate celebration?

PRACTICE: List three forms of hedonism or pleasure seeking that separate us from God. Next, list three forms of God-honoring celebration.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

LISTEN: Find a favorite worship song (use the Grace Church app to find the songs we sang on Sunday) that inspires joy and celebration. Listen to it and allow it to lift your head and rejoice in the God who saves!

Day 4-

READ: 2 Kings 23:21-23

REFLECT: King Josiah gave an order to all the people to, “…celebrate the Passover to the Lord your God, as it is written in the Book of the Covenant.” Is this not further evidence of God’s desire for us to celebrate and experience joy?

PRACTICE: Consider ways that you might be a living source of joy to others. How can you practice the discipline of finding and expressing joy?

TAKE IT FURTHER!

READ: Genesis Chapters 1 and 2

REFLECT: What direct evidence do we see of God’s joy as he created the universe?

PRACTICE: Be intentional today to find joy in God’s creation.

Day 5-

READ: Nehemiah 8:1-12

REFLECT: How does God, through Nehemiah, tie joy with giving?

PRACTICE: Summarize your giving and charitable works through the year. Do these acts of generosity, sacrifice and kindness connect you to the joy of the Father?

TAKE IT FURTHER!

PRAY: that you would discover joy in sharing with those in need.

PRACTICE: Take a step toward serving today. Find ways to do that through <http://serverie.com/>