

## ON GOD, LIFE AND LOVE: The Disciplines of Life-Change

January 3, 2021

### Week 1 Reading Plan

#### Day 1-

READ: [Genesis 1:26](#) ; [2 Corinthians 3:15-18](#); and [John 12:26](#)

REFLECT: What does being made in God's image mean to you? In what ways do you see God working in you to bring about transformation into that image? How do your decisions to serve and follow Jesus cooperate with that goal? What patterns or practices do you currently have in your daily life to help you grow in this?

PRAY/ PRACTICE: Make a list of three things about you that reflect the image of God and one area that still requires transformation. Spend some time praising God for His character revealed through you and seeking His guidance on how you can better cooperate with His transformation process.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

WATCH: [Jen Wilkin, In His Image: Answering the Call to Reflect God's Character](#)

REFLECT: What does it mean to be holy as God is holy?

#### Day 2-

READ: [Luke 2:41-52](#) and [Matthew 4:1-11](#)

REFLECT: Based on the passage in Luke 2, what can we learn about Jesus' exploration of the scriptures? What methods did he use to learn and grow in wisdom? How important was knowing the word of God to him? Reading Matthew 4, how did Jesus' deep understanding of the scriptures help him when temptation came?

PRAY/ PRACTICE: Read through [Psalm 119: 9-16](#) and let it become your prayer. Ask God for specific guidance on how He wants you to explore His word in this season of your life and seek His leading toward areas of scriptures to study or even memorize. Check out the [Study/Prayer Resources tab](#) on the whoisgrace.com READ page for ideas and help getting started.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

WATCH: "[Develop a Love for God's Word](#)" a conversation from RightNow Media. [Need a *free* RNM account? Register [here](#).]

PRACTICE: Spend some time developing a plan for incorporating regular Bible reading/study into your schedule. Commit to a place, time and frequency- Find your chair and share your plan with someone close to you.

### Day 3-

READ: [Luke 5:15-16](#) and [Matthew 6:5-13](#)

REFLECT: Jesus regularly took time away from the demands of daily life to engage in conversation with the Father through prayer. It was such an important part of their relationship that he gave instruction to his disciples on how to pray to help get them started. How regularly do you make time for prayer? Do you find it easy to talk to God? What sorts of things distract or discourage you from making prayer a regular practice in your day?

PRAY/ PRACTICE: Watch the Video, "[What is the Lord's Prayer?](#)" by Juan Sanchez on RightNow Media. Take some time right now to pray and try using the Lord's Prayer as an outline for your own prayers. For example; ask for His will to be done in a specific situation in your life, or for forgiveness of a specific debt (sin)...

#### TAKE IT FURTHER!

PRACTICE: There are many resources available to help us go deeper in our prayer lives. Consider reading "Could You Not Tarry One Hour?" by Larry Lea for insights on using the Lord's prayer as a model or join "[The 28-Day Prayer Journey Online Bible Study](#)" with Chrystal Evans Hurst from Faith Gateway (starting Jan 18<sup>th</sup>) for a guided daily study to help you get started in developing your prayer practice.

### Day 4-

READ: [Matthew 4:18-22](#); [John 17:20-23](#) and [John 13:34-35](#)

REFLECT: Why do you think it is important that Jesus invited others alongside Him as He shared the word of God? How did Jesus' relationships with His disciples reflect His relationships with the Father and the Holy Spirit? What role does living in community with other believers play in spreading the gospel of Jesus to unbelievers?

PRAY/ PRACTICE: Spend a few minutes thinking about the relationships in your life that are beyond your immediate family. Is there one that God is challenging you to take deeper? Ask for guidance and opportunity this week to show His love in a new way toward that person.

#### TAKE IT FURTHER!

WATCH: "[Community is a Biblical Mandate with Ed Stetzer](#)" on RightNow Media. [Need a *free* RNM account? Register [here](#).]

CONNECT: If you're ready for a LifeGroup or just want more information, take a step [here](#).

Day 5-

READ: [Genesis 2:1-3](#); [Exodus 20: 8-11](#); [Mark 2:23-28](#) and [Matthew 11:28-30](#)

REFLECT: Since God never gets tired, what do you think it means that God rested from all his creation work? Why do you think God made the Sabbath for us? How did Jesus model Sabbath rest in His time on earth? What do you think about the idea that we can find rest in Jesus?

PRAY/ PRACTICE: Challenge yourself to sit still and quiet (without any noise if possible) and reflect on the goodness of God, **for 5 minutes**. Set a timer if you need to. Afterwards, reflect on how that felt. Was it difficult to set aside plans, worries, distractions? Consider what it would be like to incorporate periods of silence and solitude into your day.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

WATCH: "[How to Practice Biblical Rest](#)" on RightNow Media. [Need a *free* RNM account? Register [here](#).]

READ: If you find it difficult to connect to the rest offered by Jesus in the midst of a busy life, consider reading "Sacred Rest" by Sandra Dalton-Smith, MD for some creative perspectives on different types of rest.

## ON GOD, LIFE, and LOVE: Finding and Living Your Mission

January 10, 2021

### Week 2 Reading Plan

Day 1 -

READ: [Esther 4](#)

REFLECT: What was paralyzing Esther from fulfilling her mission? Mordecai was a Truth-Teller in Esther's life and he had a perspective that was different than hers. In your own words, what was it that Esther needed to hear? Reflect on your own life- who are your truth-tellers? What do you need to hear?

PRAY: Use [Psalm 139:23-24](#) to lead you to prayer. Ask the Lord to show you what may be paralyzing you and keeping you back from fulfilling your mission. Ask Him to speak truth to you through His word and through the Truth-Tellers in your life.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

WATCH: "[How to Read Esther](#)" for an overview of this Old Testament book from The Bible Project on RightNow Media. [Need a *free* RNM account? Register [here](#).]

Day 2 -

READ: [Esther 5](#)

REFLECT: In this chapter, Esther faced a pivotal moment- would the king extend her favor or would he be angered and order her death. Review [4:15-16](#). How did Esther prepare for this moment? Put yourself in Esther's shoes- what would you have felt? What do you think changed in Esther from that moment forward?

PRAY/PRACTICE: Ask your truth-teller (mentor, accountability partner, close friend with wisdom) what they believe your mission is how well they feel you are accomplishing it. If you do not know who to ask, make this a point of prayer. Consider joining a life group as a starting point.

TAKE IT FURTHER –

REFLECT: The second part of [Esther 5](#) tells a portion of Haman's story. In this section Haman follows some very bad advice from his "lie-tellers." How can you identify truth/wisdom versus lies/foolishness when you are receiving advice and counsel?

Day 3 -

READ: [Esther 6](#)

REFLECT: This chapter has everything to do with the story and yet does not mention Esther or any of her plans and efforts. What do you think is God's message in this chapter?

PRAY: Read [Psalm 25:4-5](#). Ask the Lord to give you more awareness of what He has been doing and how he has been working behind the scene. You may pray this prayer concerning the mission you are burdened for, or concerning a specific person, or specific situation. Pray this prayer at various times of the day. Take time at the end of the day to think about and/or journal on what God revealed.

Day 4 -

READ: [Esther 7](#)

REFLECT: Do you think Esther approached this with boldness and confidence or with fear and trembling? Why? Take a moment to compare and contrast Esther and Haman- who did they listen to? How did they prepare for decisions? What did they risk their lives for?

Now consider your life- what world/community need or injustice has God placed on your heart? What do you think He is asking you to do?

PRAY/PRACTICE: Write [Isaiah 6:8](#) on the top of a journal page and spend time praying for the mission/purpose God has placed on your heart. What commitment is He calling you to make? Be it large or small- surrender to His good work in your life!

TAKE IT FURTHER!

READ: Additional truth from God's Word for living on mission- [Isaiah 58:10](#); [Mark 10:45](#); [Acts 20:35](#); [1 Corinthians 7:17](#); [Ephesians 2:10](#); [2 Timothy 1:5-18](#); [Hebrews 12:1-2](#); [1 Peter 4:9-11](#)

Day 5 -

READ: [Esther 8](#)

REFLECT: What was the outcome of Esther's obedience? Look at [verse 17](#) again- how did God use Esther to make His Name great? How is God speaking to you through this week's readings?

PRAY: Spend time offering prayers of praise. Reflect on the mission that God has placed on your heart and offer specific praise for what God has already done or what He is doing.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

REFLECT: Esther is a signpost that points us to Jesus. In other words, Jesus is the better Esther. What are the similarities of Esther's story to what Jesus accomplished?

## ON GOD, LIFE, and LOVE: Bridging the Racial Divide

January 17

### Week 3 Reading Plan

Day 1-

READ: [Luke 10:25-37](#)

REFLECT: Today, go ahead and set aside your opinions about how to fix racial inequality and just focus on the sin of racism. The root of this sin is simply not *loving our neighbors as ourselves*.

When someone asked Jesus "Who is my neighbor?" He responds with a story about a Samaritan who ignores the racial tensions of his day to go above and beyond to help a Jew. In verse 33, what drove the Samaritan to help the Jew, and what did he do in response? What is your response when you see the distress of an individual or community of people who are different than you?

PRACTICE: A really challenging but helpful exercise is not to ask yourself "Am I racist?" but "How am I racist?" Take a few minutes and write down some ways that you have not loved people of another race as you would love yourself.

PRAY: Confess these things to God and ask him to fill you with compassion. Pray for a humble heart that is open to correction.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

LEARN: [Sign up for "Be the Bridge"](#), a class offered by Grace church to learn more about how you can extend love to people of color.

Day 2-

READ: [Romans 12:15-18](#)

REFLECT: What does it look like for you to put this passage into action in your life? How can you rejoice and weep with people who look different than you? Who have grown up with a different "normal" than you?

PRACTICE: The first step toward building a bridge of racial unity is to empathize with people who have been marginalized. Empathy doesn't see someone's pain and say, "I empathize with you, *but...*" or "I acknowledge systemic racism in our country, *but...*" Empathy says, "I empathize with you, *so...*" and "I acknowledge systemic racism in our country, *so...*" Write down 3-5 things you have thought or said about our current state of racial unrest, but this time follow each statement with "so" and then move into prayer below...

PRAY: Before you finish those sentences, read Romans 12:15-18 again and ask God to help you feel what He feels for each man, woman and child that He has made. When your heart feels surrendered to Him and you feel His Spirit move you, complete those sentences.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

REFLECT: Empathy is putting yourself in someone else's shoes. If you are white, have you ever actually imagined what it would be like to be a person of color? Close your eyes and take 5 minutes to imagine what it might feel like.

Day 3-

READ: [Colossians 3:11-17](#)

REFLECT: Paul says here that Jesus is the glue that holds us together. Jesus put people on equal standing regardless of who they were or how society ranked them, and in light of that (verse 12: "put on *then*") He called us to live differently than society, too. How well does verse 12 describe you as you live in community with people both like you and unlike you?

PRACTICE: A Next Step from the sermon ([January 17, 2021](#)) was to lean in to a diversity of relationships. Where are there opportunities for you to pursue diverse relationships in your life? What's the first step you can take in making that happen?

TAKE IT FURTHER!

LEARN: Pastor Derek said, "Those who are part of the white majority don't understand the alienation that people of color have experienced in our culture. We must do the work to understand." What will you do to educate yourself? Consider reading a book like [Be the Bridge](#), [The Color of Compromise](#), or [Divided by Faith](#) or watching a documentary like [True Justice](#) or [13<sup>th</sup>](#).

Day 4-

READ: [1 John 3:16-18](#)

REFLECT: Verse 18 challenges us to not love in word but in deed. The NLT translation puts it this way: "*Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.*" What actions are you taking to pursue racial reconciliation within your circles of influence?

PRAY: Ask God to show you where you can pursue racial reconciliation. Pray for a heart that is aligned with His kingdom and a heart that breaks when it sees injustice of any kind, committed by anyone.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

REFLECT: from Dr. King's *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*: "I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: 'I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action'"

Day 5-

READ: [Acts 2:42-47](#) and [Acts 4:32-35](#)

REFLECT: The early church lived in partnership in nearly every imaginable way. What does it look like for you to live in partnership with people of color? In what ways have you been equipped to care for the needs of marginalized communities?

PRAY: Reconciliation is a lifestyle. Ask God to show how you can be an ongoing ally to people of color. Commit to doing those things in 2021.

TAKE IT FURTHER!

REFLECT: "Those who've inherited the power and benefits of past wrongs should work to make it right for those who've inherited the burdens and oppression of the past." -Latasha Morrison, *Be the Bridge*



## ON GOD, LIFE, and LOVE: Don't Give Up!

January 24, 2021

### Week 4 Reading Plan

#### Day 1-

READ: [Hebrews 11](#) and [Hebrews 12:1-11](#)

REFLECT: Quickly skim through Hebrews 11 and then read Hebrews 12 more slowly. Take a moment to reflect on the “cloud of witnesses” from chapter 11. How does it feel to know they not only completed their time on earth, but are witnesses to your journey? Think of a favorite person from the Bible- how can their life and faith help you to endure?

PRAY: Praise God for His Word and for the generations of faithful Christ-followers who are examples to you. Confess an area of discouragement and ask God to lead you with His Spirit, to encourage you and fill you to endure and not give up!

TAKE IT FURTHER!

WATCH: The Bible Project's [How to Read Hebrews](#) is a great big picture look at this New Testament letter. [Need a *free* RightNow Media account? Sign up [here](#).]

#### Day 2-

READ: [Hebrews 12:1-2](#) and [Psalm 121](#)

REFLECT: According to verse 2 of Hebrews 12, where should your focus be? What do you think is the “joy” set before Jesus, set before us?

Where does our help come from According to Psalm 121? In your journal, make 2 lists: what does Psalm 121 reveal about God's character and God's promises? If God is who He says He is, and does what He says He does, what does that mean for your life and your endurance in the faith?

PRAY: Where do you feel most vulnerable in your life right now? Ask the Lord that you might feel his protection. Pray that those around you will experience his protection. Pray that God helps you to persevere during these trying times as you focus on Jesus and the Joy of His eternal presence.

#### Day 3-

READ: [Hebrew 12:1-3](#); [Galatians 6:9](#); [1 Peter 1:3-7](#); [Revelation 2:3](#)

REFLECT: Reflect on the common thread of these passages. What does it look like to imitate Jesus? How can you prepare yourself, train yourself to follow and imitate Jesus? What are the rewards of endurance? In your journal, write a description of life for you right now. Beneath that, reflect on how

God has prepared you and what additional “training” you made need in order to endure this season and prepare for the next.

PRAY/ PRACTICE: Use [Psalm 46](#) to lead you to praise God that He is an ever present help in time of trouble and to be still before His sovereign might. Invite Him to strengthen you, to guide you, to fill you with confidence in Him.

#### Day 4-

READ: [Philippians 2:5-8](#), [Hebrews 4:15](#), [Hebrews 12:1-4](#); [John 14:26-27](#)

REFLECT: What do you learn about Jesus in Philippians 2 and Hebrews 4? What is His character? What did He do? If we were to compare ourselves to Christ, what can we learn from these verses and from Hebrews 12 about our character and actions in the midst of struggles? Whom has Jesus sent so that we have a Helper?

PRAY/ PRACTICE: Praise God that we have a High Priest who knows what our struggles are because of his own experience and praise Him for sending us a Helper! Ask God to help you to have the humble attitude that Jesus did so we can be a servant to others in Christ.

#### Day 5-

READ: [Hebrews 12:1-11](#), [Philippians 3:14](#)

REFLECT: What should our attitude be toward the discipline of God? How have you experienced His discipline? How have you grown in response? How will His discipline and correction NOW help prepare you to endure and press on in this life?

PRAY: Ask God for a revival in your heart, in your family, in a loved one, in your church, as you allow the discipline of your loving Father to correct and teach and guide you so that you can press on toward His joy, come what may!

TAKE IT FURTHER!

PRAY: A prayer of praise for God’s enduring, eternal love- [“The One Heart-Freeing, Hope-Fueling Constant in Our Lives”](#) [Scotty Smith, the Gospel Coalition]

## ON GOD, LIFE, and LOVE: God's Irrational Love

January 31, 2021

### Week 5 Reading Plan

#### Day 1-

READ: [Hosea 1:2-3](#) and [3:1-2](#); [Romans 5:8](#)

REFLECT: The prophet Hosea is called by God to use his own marriage- unfaithfulness and restoration- as a parable for the Lord's relationship with His people, Israel. Why do you think our covenantal relationship with God is compared to a marriage covenant? Did Gomer deserve Hosea's love? What did Hosea's love for Gomer cost him? What did God's love for people, for you, cost Him?

PRAY: Use [Revelation 19:6-9](#) to meditate on the immense love God has for His Bride. Praise and thank Him for His love for *you*. You don't deserve it, you couldn't earn it, it is freely given!

#### TAKE IT FURTHER!

WATCH: The Bible Project's "[How to Read Hosea](#)" on RightNow Media. [Need a *free* RNM account? Sign up [here](#).]

#### Day 2-

READ: [Hosea 2:1-13](#); [Deuteronomy 4:23-24](#)

REFLECT: The picture of adultery that is presented here is a parable for the idolatry of Israel. In our day and culture, we rarely find someone worshiping a wooden or metal idol; however, we do find ourselves elevating people and things in our lives about God. Reflect on your day-to-day life. How does the way you spend your time, money, talents reveal what is number 1 in your life? How is God's *righteous* jealousy for the people He has created reveal His love?

PRAY/ PRACTICE: Confess areas of your life that have become idols. Ask God to open your eyes to the ways He loves you. Commit to spending time every day with the One who loves you most and best.

#### TAKE IT FURTHER!

READ: "[How to Expose the Idols in Your Life](#)" from The Gospel Coalition

PRAY: "[A Prayer for Relishing God's Jealous Love for Us](#)" from The Gospel Coalition.

#### Day 3-

READ: [Hosea 2:14-23](#)

REFLECT: Here is the hope of restoration, not only for Hosea's marriage, but for the people of Israel with their God. Where does God draw the people to in verse 14? Why might this place be the best place

to listen and draw near to God? Remember that God called Elijah, John the Baptist, Paul and Jesus into the wilderness in preparation for His work. What will it look like for you to “go away” with the Lord? What do you long to hear from Him?

PRAY/ PRACTICE: Schedule some extended time alone with God in the next week or two. Begin now by asking God to speak to you through His Word and His people.

Day 4-

READ: [Hosea 6:1-3](#); [John 3:16](#)

REFLECT: How do these verses in Hosea 6 spell hope for the people of Israel? Praise God for the fulfillment of that hope in Jesus! What do you learn of the love of God knowing that He promised a Savior, He was faithful to that promise, and He has called you to receive that promise?

WORSHIP: Close your eyes, open your hands, fall on your knees- whatever posture you take, worship the Lord with your whole heart. [How Deep the Father’s Love For Us](#) by Stuart Townsend; [Reckless Love](#) by Cory Asbury.

Day 5-

READ: [Hosea 14](#)

REFLECT: Out of His immense love, God pleads for His people to return to Him. How will you turn your heart toward Him? What will you walk away from in order to walk more fully with God? Read the final chapter of Hosea again and ask God to give you understanding and wisdom to live in His love.

PRAY: Use [Ephesians 3:14-21](#) to pray over your church family and as a prayer of hope for loved ones still far from God.

PRACTICE: How will the abundant and irrational love of God overflow from your heart and into someone else’s life today?