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A GUIDE FOR YOUR TIMES WITH THE LORD

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In Matthew 7, Jesus contrasts two types of houses. One type of house is built upon a rock. Another type of house is built on sand. Of course, the foundation of these two homes makes all the difference for them. When the rains, wind, and floods come, the house built upon the rock is safe while the house built on sand is washed away.

Spiritually, then, how does someone have a house built on rock? Jesus tells us: "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock." (Matthew 7:24). The difference between a rock foundation and a sand foundation is simply this. Are you hearing and applying Jesus' words in the Bible?

In Christianity, there is meant to be a **SOLID** foundation, a solid core from which everything else flows. In the same way that foundations are crucial to a house, your spiritual foundation is crucial to your relationship with God.

Many Christians are a mile wide and an inch deep. They are doing many things but there is no solid foundation. Many who wouldn't call themselves Christians wonder to themselves why Christianity would be appealing at all. And, for both groups, the answer is found in spending time hearing and applying the Word of God.

This guide is meant to point you, in the context of an optional weekly discipleship meeting and a daily "quiet time," to the foundation blocks of the Christian life found in God's Word. Stages of life change. Where we live changes. How much money we earn changes. But, for the rest of your life, these foundation blocks will remain.

These will be your SOLID foundation for following Jesus for a lifetime.

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

STEP 1: **Read.** Begin your "Quiet Time" by reading a passage of Scripture.

Some days it will be a few verses or a whole chapter. We suggest using an inexpensive Bible for your quiet time. As you read passages, mark words and ideas that stand out to you. You might also consider reading your passage several times.

The goal is to be consistent at least 4 out of 7 days. Please note that this guide is not designed to be a comprehensive Bible study. Rather, it is designed to help you connect with Christ on a regular, personal basis in His Word.

STEP 2: **Record.** Once you have read the passage a few times, write down the verse or phrase that God seems to emphasize. Write this out, word for word in the book. Writing it out will help you focus your thoughts and listen to God.

STEP 3: **Reflect.** Stop and think about what God is saying to you from the verse or verses that you just recorded. You can ask "what, why, how, or when" type questions. As you reflect, write down your ideas and thoughts on the journal page. Shoot for 3 to 5 observations per day.

STEP 4: **Respond.** Once you have reflected on God's Word, write out a short 1-2 sentence that captures how you are going to apply what you have read during your Quiet Time. Be practical, make it measurable, and apply it today. Then, ask for God's help!

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EXAMPLE

READ: John 15:1-8

RECORD: "I am the vine and you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5)

REFLECT:

- Jesus is like a vine and the source of nutrients. I am like a branch that needs to be connected continually to that divine source of spiritual life.
- Fruit, spiritual fruit, can only come if I remain in Christ. What does "remain" mean in practical terms?
- Jesus is leaving no options ... it seems it is either fruit or nothing. I can't bear fruit on my own. My will power or good intentions will not produce the fruit that Jesus is talking about. Remaining in the vine is something that I am to do. It must involve keeping my heart and mind listening to and aware of God's presence throughout my day.

RESPOND: Father, I want to remain in you today not just at the beginning of the day but all-day long. Help me to see You in the routine events of my day. Today, I will pray at every meal and ask for you to make me aware of your presence throughout my day.

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GOSPEL

Tim Keller, *The Centrality of the Gospel*

The gospel is not the first "step" in a "stairway" of truths, rather, it is more like the "hub" in a "wheel" of truth. The gospel is not just the A-B-C's but the A to Z of Christianity. The gospel is not just the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the kingdom, but the way we make all progress in the kingdom.

We are not justified by the gospel and then sanctified by obedience, but the gospel is the way we grow (Gal.3:1-3) and are renewed (Col.1:6). It is the solution to each problem, the key to each closed door, the power through every barrier (Rom.1:16-17). It is very common in the church to think as follows. "The gospel is for non-Christians. One needs it to be saved. But once saved, you grow through hard work and obedience." But Col.1:6 shows that this is a mistake. Both confession and "hard work" that is not arising from and "in line" with the gospel will not sanctify you--it will strangle you. All our problems come from a failure to apply the gospel. Thus, when Paul left the Ephesians he committed them "to the word of his grace, which can build you up" (Acts 20:32).

The main problem, then, in the Christian life is that we have not thought out the deep implications of the gospel, we have not "used" the gospel in and on all parts of our life. Richard Lovelace says that most people's problems are just a failure to be oriented to the gospel--a failure to grasp and believe it through and through. Luther says, "The truth of the Gospel is the principle article of all Christian doctrine... Most necessary is it that we know this article well, teach it to others, and beat it into their heads continually." (on Gal.2:14f) The gospel is not easily comprehended. Paul says that the gospel only does its renewing work in us as we understand it in all its truth. All of us, to some degree live around the truth of the gospel but do not "get" it. So, the key to continual and deeper spiritual renewal and revival is the continual re-discovery of the gospel.

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READ: Isaiah 53:2-10

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the readings for this week?

According to our passages, why is the Gospel good news?

When did the Gospel first take hold of your life? When did you surrender your life to Christ?

Where is it hardest for you to live in line with the Gospel?

What was your spiritual highlight this week?

What was your biggest struggle this week?

How can I pray for you this week?

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COMMUNITY

Larry Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth*

In real community people know each other; they relate in ways only God's Spirit makes possible. As a friend recently commented, "I worship so much better when I'm with people I know." Christians in community give and receive what God provides through no other means than through a handful of folks who intimately know Him and each other or who are at least in passionate pursuit of that goal.

Churches are rarely communities. More often they are social machines that run smoothly for a while. The invitation to greet pew mates during the early part of the worship service typically leads nowhere. It's often nothing more than a squirt of oil on the gears. You could state your name was Bob or Howard or Rita or Sue and it would make no difference. Those kinds of interactions rarely create community—they more often substitute for it.

The path of the Spirit is so very different. It's narrower, steeper, and straighter than any other. It's a path traveled only by worshipers who celebrate their dependence on God and each other by turning their chairs toward a small community of friends and sticking with them, and who find the power of God's Spirit to make that community work.

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READ: John 17

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READ: Hebrews 10:19-25

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What most stood out to you from the readings this week?

What is compelling or exciting for you about the Biblical picture of community?

What is hard or challenging for you about the Biblical picture of community?

Who is one person that you need to reach out to this week to spend time with?

What was your spiritual highlight this week?

What was your biggest spiritual struggle?

How can I pray for you this week?

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SURRENDER

Francis Chan, *Forgotten God*, p. 120-122

I think a lot of us need to forget about God's will for my life. God cares more about our response to His Spirit's leading today, in this moment, than about what we intend to do next year. In fact, the decisions we make next year will be profoundly affected by the degree to which we submit to the Spirit right now, in today's decisions.

It is easy to use the phrase "God's will for my life" as an excuse for inaction or even disobedience. It's much less demanding to think about God's will for your future than it is to ask Him what He wants you to do in the next ten minutes. It's safer to commit to following Him someday instead of this day. We do know that we are called to keep in step with the Holy Spirit. In Paul's letter to the Galatians we read, "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh... if we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (5:16,25).

The phrases keeping in step with the Spirit and walking with the Spirit are most likely familiar, but do they affect your life in a practical meaningful way? Like I said earlier, I think dwelling on God's plan for the future often excuses us from faithful and sacrificial living now. It tends to create a safe zone of sorts, where we can sit around and have "spiritual" conversations about what God "might" have planned for our lives. Thinking, questioning, and talking can take the place of letting the Spirit affect our immediate actions in radical ways. God wants to see His children stake everything on his power and presence in their lives.

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What stood out to you from the readings this week?

What part of your life is it hardest for you to surrender to God? Why?

When is it easiest for you to depend on yourself rather than God?

What is one thing you can do this week to surrender to the Holy Spirit's leading in your life?

What was your spiritual highlight this week?

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THE WORD OF GOD

J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p.176

What is a Christian? True Christians are people who acknowledge and live under the word of God. They submit without reserve to the word of God written in "the Book of Truth" (Dan 10:21), believing the teaching, trusting the promises, following the commands. Their eyes are upon the God of the Bible as their Father and the Christ of the Bible as their Savior.

Christians will tell you, if you ask them, that the Word of God has both convinced them of sin and assured them of forgiveness. Their consciences, like Luther's are captive to the Word of God, and they aspire, like the psalmist, to have their whole lives brought into line with it. "Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees!" "Do not let me stray from your commands." "Teach me your decrees. Let me understand the teaching of your precepts." "Turn my heart toward your statutes." "May my heart be blameless toward your decrees" (Ps 119:5, 10, 26-27, 36, 80). The promises are before them as they pray, and the precepts are before them as they go about their daily tasks.

Christian know that in addition to the word of God spoken directly to them in the Scriptures, God's Word has also gone forth to create, and control, and order things around them; but since the Scriptures tell them that all things work together for their good, the thought of God's ordering their circumstances brings them only joy. Christians are independent folks, for they use the Word of God as a touchstone by which to test the various views that are put to them, and they will not touch anything which they are not sure that Scripture sanctions. Why does this description fit so few of us who profess to be Christians in these days?

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What is the hardest or most confusing part of the Bible for you?

What is one lesson that you learned this week that you could teach someone else?

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PRAYER

Tim Keller, *Prayer*, p.22-23

If we give priority to the outer life, our inner life will be dark and scary. We will not know what to do with solitude. We will be deeply uncomfortable with self-examination, and we will have an increasingly short attention span for any kind of reflection. Even more seriously, our lives will lack integrity.

Outwardly, we will need to project confidence, spiritual and emotional health and wholeness, while inwardly we may be filled with self-doubts, anxieties, self-pity, and old grudges.

Yet we won't know how to go into the inner rooms of the heart, see clearly what is there, and deal with it. In short, unless we put a priority on the inner life, we turn ourselves into hypocrites. The seventeenth century theologian John Owen wrote a warning to popular and successful ministers:

"A minister may fill his pews, his communion roll, the mouths of the public, but what that minister is on his knees in secret before God Almighty, that he is and no more."

To discover the real you, look at what you spend time thinking about when no one is looking, when nothing is forcing you to think about anything in particular. At such moments, do your thoughts go toward God? You may want to be seen as a humble, unassuming person, but do you take the initiative to confess your sins before God? You wish to be perceived as a positive, cheerful person but do you habitually thank God for everything you have and praise him for who he is? You may speak a great deal about what a "blessing" your faith is and how you "just really love the Lord," but if you are prayerless—is that really true? If you aren't joyful, humble, and faithful in private before God, then what you want to appear to be on the outside won't match what you truly are.

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What stood out to you from the readings this week?

What does your prayer life look like? What do you think that says about your heart?

What do you most often pray for?

What has it been like to pray for the people in this group?

What was your spiritual highlight this week?

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EVANGELISM

Keith Davy, *CoJourners*

The most powerful tool is the gospel. It is "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.." (Romans 1:16). Being able to communicate it clearly and simply is essential. I've often used the three phrases of Romans 6:23 to conversationally communicate the gospel's essence: 1. "For the wages of sin is death"; 2. "but the gift of God is eternal life"; 3. "in Christ Jesus our Lord." I've also found a simple outline, like the one in the booklet *Would You Like to Know God Personally?* can be very helpful. It has everything you need to help many come to Christ. It guides the conversation, exposes our need, includes a clear explanation of why Jesus died for us, and provides an invitation to receive him as Savior and Lord through faith.

But how do you get started talking about the gospel? Easy—you ask permission. Once you've explored and discovered some spiritual openness and have shared a bit of your own experience, simply ask, "Can I show you something that has really helped me understand this?" (Of course, you will modify that according to the situation.) If you are not in a setting where it's appropriate to talk right then, add the key word "sometime." It takes all the pressure off the moment. "Sometime I would love to show you something that has really helped me understand this. Would you be up for that?" Then you can get together for lunch, coffee, or some other preferred beverage and have a great conversation!

A fellow on a beach once asked me "how I got into all this Christianity stuff?" After telling him a little of my story and exploring more of his, I asked if I could show him a simple outline that explains how we can have a personal relationship with Christ. He was interested, so I did. When I explained the prayer in the booklet, I asked, "What do you think would happen if you sincerely prayed this today?" He replied, "Well, let's find out." And so we did. What a privilege to be a guide, showing the way to Jesus!

EVANGELISM

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READ: John 4:1-42

RECORD:

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RECORD:

REFLECT:

REFLECT:

RESPOND:

RESPOND:

READ: Acts 8:26-40

RECORD:

READ: Acts 8:26-40

RECORD:

REFLECT:

REFLECT:

RESPOND:

RESPOND:

READ: Acts 26:12-29

RECORD:

READ: Acts 26:12-29

RECORD:

REFLECT:

REFLECT:

RESPOND:

RESPOND:

READ: 1 Corinthians 9:15-27

RECORD:

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RECORD:

REFLECT:

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RESPOND:

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the readings this week?

What is scariest about sharing the Gospel?

If someone were to ask you to share with them what you believe, what would you say?

Who is one person that you think God wants you to try to share the Gospel with this week?

What was your spiritual highlight this week?

What was your biggest struggle this week?

How can I pray for you this week?

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DISCIPLESHIP AND MULTIPLICATION

Roger Hershney, *Finishers*, p.219-221

In college I became infected with the life-changing power of discipleship. At the end of the last chapter I mentioned Larry and David. These two men took me, a spiritual baby upon my arrival at Penn State, under their wings and literally carried me closer to God. I grew spiritually and developed ministry skills because they did what Jesus modeled. They made themselves available, intentionally pursued me, modeled Christ-like living, showed me how to read the Word, and taught me how to minister to others. God used them as significant instruments in my transformation.

I have been privileged to do the same for other men throughout my life. I have a framed map hanging on my basement wall that I've covered with several dozen pictures of men and their families—men I've spent time discipling and investing my life into, men who are now serving Christ around the world.

No amount of significance or status the world offers can stand up to the rich, eternal significance of playing a part in the salvation and transformation of others. Discipleship even allows us to be used by God to affect those we'll never meet. Two years after my graduation, when I was visiting Penn State, I met a student who I discovered was a sort of spiritual great-great grandson of mine, a link in a multigenerational chain of discipleship that could very well stretch to the present day. What joy to be a part of such a legacy! What cause for worship!

God wants us to have this sort of eternal impact, and discipleship is a primary means of Him bringing it about. In fact, discipleship is the primary method Jesus chose to reach the nations. What I mean by the word discipleship is this: the intentional investment of my life into another to guide him or her toward maturity in Christ.

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READ: Matthew 28:16-20

RECORD:

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RECORD:

REFLECT:

REFLECT:

RESPOND:

RESPOND:

READ: Acts 11:19-30

RECORD:

READ: Acts 11:19-30

RECORD:

REFLECT:

REFLECT:

RESPOND:

RESPOND:

READ: 2 Timothy 1:1-14

RECORD:

READ: 2 Timothy 1:1-14

RECORD:

REFLECT:

REFLECT:

RESPOND:

RESPOND:

READ: 2 Timothy 2:1-10

RECORD:

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RECORD:

REFLECT:

REFLECT:

RESPOND:

RESPOND:

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What stood out to you from the readings this week?

How has discipleship impacted your life?

What is your biggest fear about discipling someone?

Who could you meet with this week to share your story of faith and hear their story of faith?

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GOD'S HEART FOR THE WORLD

Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, p.231

The ultimate goal of God in all of history is to uphold and display his glory for the enjoyment of the redeemed from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. His goal is the gladness of his people, because God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. Delight is a higher tribute than duty. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy his glory forever. Since his glory is magnified most in the God-centered passions of his joyful people, God's self-exaltation and our jubilation are one. The greatest news in all the world is that God's ultimate aim to be glorified and man's aim to be satisfied are not at odds.

The goal of missions, therefore, is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God: "The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad!" (Psalm 97:1). "Let the nations be glad and sing for joy!" (Psalm 67:4)... Therefore, worship is the fuel and goal of missions. Worship is the goal of missions because in missions we aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God's glory. It is the fuel of missions because we can't commend what we don't cherish. We can't call out, "Let the nations be glad!" until we say, "I rejoice in the Lord." Missions begins and ends in worship. This means that God is absolutely supreme in missions. He is the beginning and end. He is also the one who sustains and empowers the entire process.

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READ: Psalm 46

RECORD:

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RECORD:

REFLECT:

REFLECT:

RESPOND:

RESPOND:

READ: Acts 1:1-11

RECORD:

READ: Acts 1:1-11

RECORD:

REFLECT:

REFLECT:

RESPOND:

RESPOND:

READ: Acts 16:1-10

RECORD:

READ: Acts 16:1-10

RECORD:

REFLECT:

REFLECT:

RESPOND:

RESPOND:

READ: Revelation 7:9-17

RECORD:

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RECORD:

REFLECT:

REFLECT:

RESPOND:

RESPOND:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the readings this week?

Why is it so easy to ignore missions?

Go to www.joshuaproject.net. Pray for one unreached people group.

What is one way that you can give or go to be a part of what God is doing in the world?

What was your spiritual highlight this week?

What was your biggest struggle this week?

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