

FIRST



THIRTY

STARTING YOUR JOURNEY WITH JESUS

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NAME

DATE

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THE PURPOSE OF THE FIRST THIRTY

The First Thirty is a resource to help guide you in the beginning stages of your journey with Jesus. A life of faith and a relationship with Jesus can be overwhelming and confusing, especially if the Christian faith is new to you. You might be battling thoughts like, “Am I supposed to feel different? Is all of this even real? What do I do now? How am I ever going to learn these things?” All these questions are to be expected! Following Jesus is not a small decision, and the process of understanding and practicing what you learn will be difficult, but it is rewarding!

Thirty days is a common length of time for developing new habits. Our prayer is that you will join us in developing two simple yet profound habits as a believer and follower of Jesus Christ:



PRAYING TO GOD



READING SCRIPTURE

Every relationship you have in your life takes time, communication, and intentionality to develop. The same is true with your relationship with God. The best thing you can do in these thirty days is get used to spending time with God and communicating with Him. As you read and pray, we believe that God will be present with you and help you as you continue this journey of faith.

Each day you should expect to spend **10-15 minutes** in the First Thirty. The goal is to practice your faith and get started, nothing more. Many people find the very beginning of their day or the very end of their day to be easy times to spend with God. Each day will be broken up into four parts:

1. Topic: There is a short teaching on a topic that is important for your relationship with Jesus. These teachings will just scratch the surface but are intended to get you thinking and praying about them in a deeper way.

2. Scripture: Scripture verses have been chosen to provide insight and address each topic at hand. Each verse is part of a much larger context and story, but for these thirty days we encourage you to seek out the simple nuggets of truth in each verse. Check the scripture boxes as you go.

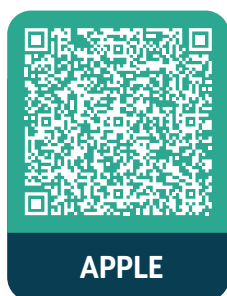
3. Prayer Practice: A sample prayer has been given to help guide your time praying and get you started. By the end of the thirty days, you should attempt to pray on your own! Prayer doesn't need to be fancy, just give it a shot and see where it takes you.

4. Reflection: Each topic is meant to answer just one question, so don't overthink it! There is a lot to learn, but spending time reflecting on the question being answered may help you solidify your understanding.

BEFORE YOU GET STARTED

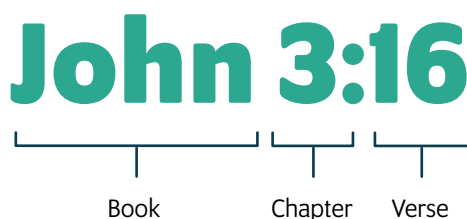
Get a Bible: Physical or Digital

Most people read a physical Bible, but you may prefer a digital version of the Bible instead. Many people do! You can have Scripture at your fingertips at any moment of the day. Scan the QR code for your appropriate app store and download the YouVersion Bible app.



Learn How to Find a Bible Verse

John 3:16 may sound familiar, but do you know how to find it? You can find the page number for each book in the table of contents in the front of your Bible. The chapter is the large number in your Bible marking a new section of the book, and the verse is the smaller number that comes before some sentences.



Find a Mentor



Don't do this alone! A life of faith is about relationships. A relationship with God, but also a relationship with other people. If you are in your first year of following Jesus, try finding a personal mentor who has been following Jesus longer than you have. If you need some help finding a mentor, scan the QR code.

Take Some Notes

You may have questions. You may want to keep track of certain definitions or concepts as you go through the First Thirty. Many people find physically journaling to be the best way to process their thoughts, and to remember new information. Whether it is physical or digital, find a way to get your thoughts out of your head, and into the world.

Got Questions?

If you have any questions throughout the next thirty days, please scan this QR code and share your questions and thoughts with a pastor.



DAYS 1-10

**THE GRAND NARRATIVE
OF THE BIBLE**



These first ten topics are meant to help you answer the question: “What is the Bible about?” These are the concepts and ideas that are on every page of the Bible. You could read the Bible a thousand times front to back and still not have a full answer to these topics. We start here because we want you to understand the story God invites us to be part of before we introduce the lifestyle, disciplines, and identity that comes with it.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD



We understand that the Bible and the ministry of Jesus can be difficult things to understand. Simply put, the Bible teaches us about the Kingdom of God. It helps us understand how Jesus established God's Kingdom on earth, and what that Kingdom looks like. God's Kingdom provides justice, freedom, life, and love to restore the brokenness in the world.

Jesus' primary message was about the good news of the Kingdom of God.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is that we are invited and freely welcomed into this newly established Kingdom. Because of Jesus, we get to experience the goodness of God's Kingdom here and now on Earth as it is in heaven.

In the days that follow, we will address different aspects of the Kingdom of God and what it means to follow Jesus as one of His disciples. As you learn how this Kingdom involves you, try committing yourself to prayer, reading scripture, and talking with others to help guide your understanding and application.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Matthew 4:23-24 | ■ Luke 4:14-21

Prayer Practice

“God, I thank you for welcoming me into your Kingdom and sending Jesus to invite me into a relationship with you. I pray that you will help me learn as I read through the Bible and the First Thirty. Help me live the new way of life that is offered by your Kingdom. Help me be an active participant in what you are accomplishing in the world. Continue to teach me what I need to know and encourage me as I continue my journey of faith. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

What is the primary message of the Bible? Why do I need to know about this?

THE LOVE OF GOD THE FATHER



Every good thing comes from God! The Bible often depicts God as a father and explains that when He created humanity, He made us in His own image. We are the pride and joy of His good creation, and He trusts us to be the caretakers of that creation. This means our uniquely human responsibility is to display the attributes of God for all creation to see.

People have inherent value because we are made in God's image, and He loves us as His children!

A common misconception is that God is like a cosmic police officer who is waiting for us to do something bad to punish us. This couldn't be more incorrect! As a loving father, God wants a relationship with us! He wants us to enjoy the time we have on Earth, and He wants to bless His children.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Genesis 1:26-31 | ■ 1 John 3:1

Prayer Practice

“Thank you, God, for being my Creator and heavenly Father. Help me see you as the loving father that you are. Repair any misunderstandings I have of you and open my eyes to your love and goodness. Help me experience your love in a way that changes me. Thank you for creating me in your image. Thank you that I have inherent value because I am your child. Help me display your image to the world around me. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

Why does God love me? What are some of my attributes that might be a reflection of God’s image?

THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST



We follow Jesus because He is the Son of God in the flesh. He demonstrates what it looks like to perfectly display the image of God to the world, and He teaches His disciples the truth about God's Kingdom. Being a disciple of Christ involves placing yourself under the teaching, example, and lifestyle of Jesus the best you can. Why do we want to follow Jesus? Because He looks like God the Father!

"Love" is the one word to summarize the example Jesus sets for us, and being loving is a clear expectation He has for His disciples.

As you become more familiar with Jesus, you will discover that the love He demonstrates is a compassionate, sacrificial, radical, and selfless type of love. Our privilege as His disciples is to love others as He loved us. This will help us display the image of God to the world like Jesus did.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Colossians 1:15-23 | ■ Hebrews 12:1-3 | ■ John 13:34-35

Prayer Practice

“Thank you, Jesus, for the love you displayed to the world. Thank you for inviting me to become your disciple to learn from you. Continue to show me how I can live a life that honors God and brings hope to a world that needs it. Thank you, Jesus, for the example you set, and help me follow you by showing love to everyone in my life. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

What does it mean to follow Jesus and be His disciple? How can I show more love to others in my life?

BIBLICAL JUSTICE



What comes to mind when you think about the word “justice?” Justice is a loaded word that actually finds its roots and meaning in the Bible! To make things easier to understand, Biblical justice can be summarized in three points:

1. God created a perfect and beautiful world.
2. Evil and sin is the force that wants to destroy God’s good creation, especially humans made in His image.
3. God must completely remove evil so it cannot harm His creation.

In the Bible, justice is something God does to bring healing and restoration to His creation. Like a surgeon making a cut to remove a tumor, God judges evil to remove the problem. Even though the end result is healing, it may still involve struggle or pain. God’s justice requires action to restore things to their proper place and remove the power of evil from the situation. Jesus came to demonstrate how God’s Kingdom is a Kingdom of justice by the way He lived, died, and was resurrected.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Psalms 37:27-29 | ■ Isaiah 1:16-20 | ■ Matthew 23:23

Prayer Practice

“Thank you, God, that your justice restores humanity and protects us from evil. Forgive me for the ways I have added to the harm caused by evil in this world. Help me understand your justice as love and care for me and your creation. I pray that your justice and love for your creation will help me change the way I act and feel about other people. Open my eyes to see opportunities to help others and demonstrate the love and justice of God’s kingdom. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

What comes to mind when I think about the word “justice?”

WHAT HAPPENED ON THE CROSS?



The cross is God's definitive response to the evil and brokenness in the world. Normally we ask the "Why," questions: If God is good, *why* is there evil? *Why* do bad things happen to good people? Scripture doesn't attempt to fully answer those questions, but the cross is the ultimate answer to the question, "*What* is God doing about evil?" The cross is how God demonstrated justice!

One of the most important stories in the Bible is God freeing the Israelite people from their horrible injustice and slavery in Egypt. God promised to spare the Israelite people from the judgment designated for the Egyptians and their false gods. The Israelites sacrificed a spotless lamb to demonstrate their trust in God's salvation and freedom. The sacrifice proved they trusted God more than the gods of the Egyptians. To put it simply, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross represents that spotless lamb. God Himself has become the sacrificial lamb that grants us freedom, hope, and salvation.

Everyone who trusts in Jesus' sacrifice for their salvation and freedom will be spared from the judgment designated for the evil in the world and in their lives. By suffering the worst form of execution in human history, Jesus is demonstrating His willingness to take the ultimate punishment on our behalf.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Exodus 12:21-27 | ■ Mark 15:16-39 | ■ 1 Peter 2:21-25

Prayer Practice

If you feel like you are ready to follow Jesus and want some guidance on how to get started, go to **pages 73 - 74** where you can learn about the Salvation Prayer and accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

Reflection

What did sacrificing the spotless lamb represent to the Israelites? How does this relate to me and the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross?

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE TOMB?



The cross was the turning point in human history because the penalty for all sin was paid. The resurrection is the other side of the coin where the promise of new life is fulfilled.

Jesus was raised from the tomb because new life is the finished product of God's justice. If the natural result of sin is death, then the natural result of freedom from sin is new life. God's justice is incomplete if judgment doesn't lead to new life and redemption.

Even if the story stopped at the cross, Jesus would have set an incredible example of what it looks like to display God's image and live sacrificially for others. But without the resurrection, Jesus was just another victim of persecution and evil. Without the resurrection, Satan and his forces of evil succeed in destroying the perfect image of God in the world. His resurrection proves that humanity is no longer under the authority or power of evil, and that eternal life is the promise of God's Kingdom.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Luke 24:1-8 | ■ 1 Corinthians 15:12-22

Prayer Practice

“Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross and demonstrating the possibility of new life through your resurrection. Thank you, God, for your justice that brings wholeness. Help me understand how you want me to experience this new life. Please protect me from evil and give me hope for a bright future. Help me live out your kingdom of justice and new life, in Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

Why is Jesus’ resurrection a crucial part of our story?

THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT



The Holy Trinity describes the three distinct persons of God. We have talked about God the Father, God the Son, and now we introduce the third member of The Trinity, the Holy Spirit. A lot of cultural misunderstandings about the word ‘spirit’ can make it hard to understand the Holy Spirit we read about in Scripture.

One way to understand Him is that the Holy Spirit is God’s presence on earth that is available to His children. Just like a person, the Holy Spirit speaks to us, guides us, encourages us, and warns us through a relationship with Him.

The Holy Spirit was sent by Jesus to help us expand the Kingdom of God, make disciples, share the Gospel, and bring healing to the brokenness in creation. Today, we are responsible for continuing the ministry Jesus started and the Holy Spirit equips and leads us to accomplish this.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ John 14:15-17 | ■ Romans 8:1-17

Prayer Practice

“Holy Spirit, help me build a relationship with you and teach me how to understand God’s love. Help me experience your presence as I spend time in prayer and help me listen when you speak. Holy Spirit, thank you for being with me wherever I go and teaching me how to live like Jesus. Please guide me as you guided Jesus and give me the power to live like Him. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

How can I have a relationship with the Holy Spirit? What can I do to start noticing His presence more?

FREEDOM FROM GUILT & SHAME



Guilt is feeling bad about what you have done. Shame is feeling bad about who you are. Guilt and shame are not from God, they are a result of sin. God wants His children to live free from the turmoil produced by guilt and shame.

The cross proves that God no longer holds our sin against us when we put our trust in Him. We have been forgiven! We are no longer guilty! We no longer need to feel shame!

God gives us Scripture, and the Holy Spirit to guide us toward what is right and teach us how to listen. Don't allow guilt and shame to point out that you did something wrong, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you and to gently direct you back to God.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Psalm 32:1-5 | ■ Isaiah 61:7 | ■ Hebrews 10:22-24

Prayer Practice

“God, thank you for declaring me free from the feelings of guilt and shame. Thank you for no longer holding my sins against me and for forgiving me. Please, Holy Spirit, show me the path that leads to life. Help me listen to your voice as you guide me toward things that produce life and joy. Please warn me away from things that produce guilt and shame in my life. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

How has guilt and shame impacted my life? What does the Bible say about my guilt and shame?

A BLESSING TO ALL NATIONS



God's blessing is not for just one nation, one race, one people group, or one region. God's blessing is intended for all of God's creation: humanity, animals, and the Earth alike.

God chose the people of Israel to be His representatives, giving them the divine responsibility of bringing God's justice, mercy, and peace to the world. God made a promise that all nations will be blessed because of Israel. The story in the Bible tells us how Jesus, an Israelite, fulfilled God's promise through His life, death, and resurrection.

He brought love into the darkness, healing where there was brokenness, and life where there was once death. With the example of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, we have the tools to be the blessing and bring the message of God's Kingdom. On your journey with Jesus, you will discover the unique way God has wired and equipped you to bless your small corner of His creation.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Genesis 9:12-15 | ■ Genesis 12:1-3 | ■ Galatians 3:7-14

Prayer Practice

“God, thank you that your goodness and blessing is not for just a few select people. Thank you that I fit into your plan for grace and redemption. Help me follow Jesus, obey His commands, and be a true representative of your Kingdom. Please equip me for the work of restoration in the world and teach me how to walk with the Holy Spirit to bless those around me. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

Is there a time or a moment when I really felt God’s blessing in my life? Write about it!

PEACE & SHALOM



The English word “peace” paints a true, but incomplete picture of what the Kingdom of God is about. The Hebrew word for peace in the Bible is, “*shalom*.” (Pronounced: shaw-lome)

Shalom can be summarized as, “Nothing is missing, and nothing is broken.” It describes complete wholeness between God, man, and creation.

Jesus is our “Prince of *Shalom*,” and He rules God’s Kingdom out of complete wholeness. The curse of death and sin is replaced with life and peace. The broken relationship between God and His children has been restored. All of God’s creation, even our personal lives, should be lived in a way that brings *shalom* to the world.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Isaiah 9:6-7 | ■ Philippians 4:6-9 | ■ Romans 5:1-2

Prayer Practice

“Jesus, thank you for being the Prince of Peace and restoring my relationship with God the Father. I pray that your *shalom* and peace would transform my life. Please help me restore any broken relationships in my life. I pray for peace in my heart, peace in my mind, and peace in my home. Help me actively spread this peace to the people around me so the Kingdom of God can be experienced by everyone I meet. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

Do I feel at peace in my life? Are there any sins or habits that are distracting me from the peace and *shalom* Jesus has for me?

DAYS 11-16

THE STORIES &

TEACHINGS OF JESUS



This section should help answer the questions: “What did Jesus teach about? What values and characteristics are important to Jesus and the Kingdom of God?” We look at just a handful of stories from Jesus to see what God’s Kingdom really looks like. These stories prepare us to take action, and they help us understand the meaning and importance of the actions we take.

PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM



Jesus invites His disciples to wrestle with their doubts and beliefs to get them thinking about the practical applications of His Kingdom. Jesus used parables, which are short stories used like a puzzle or riddle to teach a truth or lesson. Jesus often told parables to people who asked Him a question or who had doubts about His teaching.

Many people assume that having doubts about God or about the Christian faith is unacceptable. Here is the great news – doubts are a natural and inevitable part of the process. Jesus teaches in parables because He wants His listeners to think, pray, and talk about His words. The process of wrestling with our doubts and the truth in Scripture will produce genuine faith.

The following parables have been chosen to get you thinking about how the Kingdom of God can apply to you. Think, pray, and talk about what they mean and how they can produce genuine faith in your life.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Matthew 13:31-35 | ■ Proverbs 1:1-7

Prayer Practice

“God, I pray that you would help me have genuine faith. When doubts come into my mind, please give me the ability to wrestle with them in a way that brings me closer to you. Help me understand who you are and how you love me. Give me wisdom to understand your words and your truth. Please encourage me and let me know that I am on the right track as I learn more about you. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

Have I ever taken time to think, pray, and talk about my faith and doubts? Do I feel like I have been given permission to wrestle with my doubts? What are my doubts?

REPENTANCE: THE PRODIGAL SON



Repentance is the act of turning your heart away from things that separate and distract you from God. Repentance involves the intentional decision to let go of the baggage from your past and focus on what God wants to give you instead.

When you repent, you will begin to experience new victories and new challenges because of your new direction in life. It can be easy to get distracted or go back in the wrong direction which is why you may need to do this often.

When we truly repent and turn to God, He will always be ready to welcome us home with open arms. Repentance is part of the journey of faith, and it is something we must do continually so that our steps are always moving toward Jesus.

Read the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32 then think and pray about how this shows repentance and how it applies to your life.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Luke 15:11-32 | ■ 2 Corinthians 5: 17-19

Prayer Practice

“God, thank you for welcoming me home with open arms. Forgive me for the ways I have turned my heart away from you and help me repent and turn back to you. Help me listen to the Holy Spirit as He encourages me to repent when I get distracted and turn away from you. Help me have a heart that is willing to receive direction from you. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

In the past, have I had a negative or positive view of the word repentance? Has my understanding of repentance changed? How?

FORGIVENESS: THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT



One defining characteristic of a follower of Jesus is the willingness to forgive others and ask for forgiveness. Forgiveness is central to the good news of God's Kingdom that Jesus teaches.

"I'm sorry," and, "I forgive you," can sometimes feel impossible to say. Thankfully, Jesus can empathize with us when it feels difficult and painful. He is the perfect example of how painful and freeing it is to forgive others. The old saying is hard but true: "Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die."

Read the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant in Matthew 18:21-35 and notice how much God is willing to forgive! Think and pray about forgiveness in your life and take any action steps you feel the Holy Spirit is prompting you to take.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Matthew 18:21-35 | ■ Colossians 3:13

Prayer Practice

You may need to physically write down the names of individuals in your life you are trying to forgive. It may be helpful to say this prayer specifically for each person on your list.

“Jesus, help me become a forgiving person and help me be quick to ask for forgiveness. Show me any people in my life I have hurt or need to ask forgiveness from. Thank you for forgiving me for every sin I have committed against you. I need your help to forgive [their name] for [reason]. Help me humble myself and forgive them. If you can forgive me, then I can forgive them. Help heal my heart and help me see them the way you see them. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

How did it feel after praying for and forgiving people who have hurt me? How can I make this a regular practice in my life?

MERCY: THE GOOD SAMARITAN



The world will know that we are part of God's Kingdom by the love and mercy we show one another. Mercy is kindness towards others joined with actions that help them regardless of whether they deserve it or not.

God's mercy turns His enemies into His friends.

Jesus was compelled by mercy when He was crucified on the cross. He was compelled by mercy when He healed the sick, restored sight to the blind, and delivered people from the forces of evil. He was compelled by mercy when He sat at the table with tax collectors, protected the adulterous woman, and touched the lepers. He was compelled by mercy to show love to the most hated and ostracized people in society.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan paints a dramatic picture of God's mercy for us, and Jesus gives the command to have that same kind of mercy for others.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Luke 10:25-37 | ■ Proverbs 14:20-21

Prayer Practice

“God, thank you for your love and mercy. Forgive me if I have not acknowledged the mercy and love you have given to me and help me feel your love for me. Forgive me for any ways that I have withheld mercy from other people and teach me to have a heart filled with mercy like Jesus. Give me opportunities to demonstrate the mercy and love of God’s Kingdom. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

What are some ways I can show mercy to the people in my life? How will my attitudes and actions need to change?

STEWARDSHIP: THE BAGS OF GOLD



Stewardship is the faithful management of resources that have been given to us by God. Part of God's original command to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden was to steward His creation. God designed humanity to be the caretakers of the Earth and everything we have in life comes from God. Our ability to work, think, feel, and create are all results of being made in His image.

Food, water, and the air we breathe are all gifts from God's creation. As a follower of Christ, even our time on earth has a purpose and needs to be used wisely. God has entrusted us with His creation, and our privilege is to spread the peace and shalom of His Kingdom to the ends of the Earth.

Our time, talents, and treasures are three important aspects of life God teaches us to steward. See if you can identify these three areas in the Parable of the Bags of Gold in Matthew 25:14-30. Think about some ways you can learn to steward these things well in your life.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Matthew 25:14-30 | ■ Genesis 1:26-30

Prayer Practice

“God, thank you for your good creation and thank you for inviting me to take care of the world you created. Help me use my time, talents, and treasures to spread the good news of your Kingdom. Teach me how to steward the resources in my life to express my gratitude to you. Help me see the things in my life as gifts from you and help me use them well. I pray that you will multiply my time, talents, and treasures to be a blessing to all the people in my life. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

What are a few ways I can be a better steward of my time, talents, and treasures?

PREPARATION: THE SOWER



The Parable of the Sower is about God spreading the truth of His Kingdom to the world. Jesus is asking His disciples the question, “How are you going to respond to my words and the Kingdom of God?” Each soil represents the condition and response of our heart: unprepared, impatient, distracted, or receptive.

As disciples of Christ, our responsibility is to prepare the soil of our heart to receive the good news of the Kingdom of God with gladness, patience, and confidence.

Preparing your heart involves practicing ways to spend time with God. This process is sometimes referred to as “Spiritual Formation,” and the following days will guide you in this process.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Matthew 13:3-23

Prayer Practice

“Thank you, God, for revealing to me the truth and good news of your Kingdom. Thank you for letting me experience the love and forgiveness found in Jesus. Help me prepare the soil of my heart in order to receive your words with joy and help me be patient as you teach me. Help me keep my heart away from distraction and worry. Give me the strength to stay true to Jesus and not walk away from my faith. I believe that you will produce something beautiful in my life, so I give my life to you. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

How would I describe my heart as I hear the good news of the Gospel and God’s Kingdom? Unprepared, impatient, distracted, or receptive?

DAYS 17 - 25

**SPIRITUAL FORMATION
& DEVELOPMENT**



This is where a relationship with Jesus gets really practical. We aim to answer questions like, “How do you live a life of faith? How do you have a relationship with God?” This is not a list of dos and don’ts but a helpful place to start living out your faith. You will learn some of the daily disciplines and habits of someone who follows Jesus. The goal is to build a relationship with God, and these are a few suggestions that will help you grow closer to Him.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT



The Fruit of the Spirit are the qualities and characteristics that become evident in the life of someone who is spending time with Jesus. Remaining connected to Jesus is the best way to grow in your journey of faith.

He teaches us to “abide” in Him, which means to spend time in His presence. The more time we spend with Jesus, the more we will become like Him. Time with Jesus will begin to shape our heart, mind, and life to be more like His.

Similar to how a gardener grows and prunes their plants, the process of spiritual formation will also include growing and pruning. We do not produce the Fruit of the Spirit by ourselves, but as we listen to the Holy Spirit, prepare our hearts, and spend time with Jesus, we will see them develop in our lives.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Galatians 5:22-23 | ■ John 15:1-11

Prayer Practice

“Holy Spirit, thank you for the way you are working to produce good fruit in my life. I submit myself to your process and guidance. Help me learn to love others, have joy in all circumstances, and peace when I am anxious. Help me be patient when I am tempted to hurry, to respond with kindness rather than offense, to focus on what is good and true, and to remain committed and faithful to you. Help me display gentleness in my words and actions, and to exercise self-control even when my emotions or desires are hard to resist. Holy Spirit, develop this fruit in my life as I grow in my relationship with you. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

Which Fruit of the Spirit have begun to develop in my life as I’ve spent time with Jesus and His Word?

DISCIPLINE & PATIENCE



We don't grow because we did something just one time. We grow because we do something over and over again until it changes who we are from the inside out. Discipline is doing the same things consistently for a long period of time. This is how we develop habits. This is how relationships grow. Simple actions over a long period of time are the key to spiritual formation.

What do you think would be more helpful: Praying for 15 hours one day or praying 10 minutes a day for three months? Both would be 900 minutes of prayer, but it isn't about the total amount of time prayed! It's about the discipline of becoming the type of person who wants to be close with God.

God makes it clear in scripture that He is comfortable and patient with the process, and the good news is you don't have to be an expert right away. In fact, it may be better to approach your faith like a beginner who is committed to the process and eager to learn. Your journey with Jesus is something that should be enjoyed, and every part of your journey becomes part of your story and testimony. Don't wish away the time and don't forget to enjoy the ride!

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Galatians 6:9 | ■ 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 | ■ 2 Peter 3:8-9 | ■ Ecclesiastes 8:15

Prayer Practice

“Lord, thank you for your mercy and patience with me. Thank you for being willing to walk with me through my struggles and through my doubts. Thank you for encouraging me in my shortcomings. Please help me as I take new steps in my faith and be with me when I fall. Help me stay committed to the lifelong journey of being your disciple and keep me from becoming impatient with the process. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

What simple actions am I committed to taking over a long period of time to develop my faith and relationship with God?

GIVING TIME & ATTENTION TO GOD



What does your daily schedule look like? We all have the same 24 hours in a day but what you do with that time shows where your priorities are. One key to developing your faith is making God a priority in your schedule.

We live in a world that is filled with distractions. Things like social media and television have literally been designed to steal your time and attention. It is hard to have a close relationship with someone without quality time, and the same is true for our relationship with God. You will rarely stumble upon an extra 30 minutes in your day. So develop the discipline of intentionally making time for God.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Luke 10:38-42 | ■ Psalm 39:4-7 | ■ James 4:13-17

Prayer Practice

“God, thank you that you desire to spend time with me and that you are never too busy for me. Help me recognize when my attention is being stolen by unimportant or unproductive things. Help me set my focus on you and prioritize time with you over everything else. Give me a new desire for your presence and give me a passion for the Word of God. Help me be consistent and devoted in my relationship with you. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

What practical steps can I take to realign my schedule to make God a priority in my life? Take 5 minutes to list them out and come up with a plan of action!

LISTENING FOR GOD'S VOICE



God is incredibly relational, and He speaks to anyone willing to listen. You will find that God speaks to each of us in different ways. Scripture and prayer are probably the most common things God uses to communicate with us, but the list is endless. Receiving an act of kindness from a stranger, being out in nature, and experiencing music or art are some other examples of how God can speak in our life.

A disciple of Christ must develop the ability to identify God's voice in a busy and noisy world. Practicing spiritual disciplines help silence the noise and focus our hearts, minds, and bodies on God.

Rarely do people hear God speak in an audible voice, but many people do hear God's voice through their thoughts or feelings. Don't be discouraged if it takes time to hear God's voice! Your job is to discover the ways God speaks to you most clearly and practice them regularly.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Psalm 23 | ■ Hebrews 1:1-3 | ■ Revelation 3:20-22

Prayer Practice

“Lord, please speak to me as I draw near to you and teach me how to listen to your voice. Help me manage the noise and busyness of life so I can prioritize your voice. I pray that you will communicate with me in a unique way that speaks directly to my heart. I pray that the problems and restlessness of life will not crowd out the encouragement and truth you want to speak to me. I am listening. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

Have I experienced hearing God’s voice yet? If yes, what was it like? What happened? If not, don’t be discouraged! Keep going.

P R A Y E R



One of the most important spiritual disciplines for a follower of Christ is prayer. Prayer is not optional; it is a central part of our faith that is clearly practiced and taught by Jesus.

Prayer is an around-the-clock, two-way street between us and God where we can speak and hear from Him. Every moment of every day is an opportunity to pray and connect with God. The creator of the universe wants to talk to you!

You do not need to prove yourself or have the perfect prayers for God to pay attention to you. God is more concerned with what is happening in your heart when you pray than what is being said with your lips. He measures our prayer by authenticity, not by a set of rules. Prayer doesn't have to be complicated. Just pray to God with a humble and genuine heart, and He promises to listen.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Matthew 6:5-13 | ■ Luke 18:9-14 | ■ Philippians 4:6

Prayer Practice

In the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:5-13, Jesus teaches His disciples an easy way to frame our prayers: Start with gratitude, repent by turning your heart back to God, and end with your request. Thank you. Sorry. Please.

"Thank you, Jesus, for your example and teaching on prayer. Thank you for forgiving me for my imperfections and hearing my prayers. Lord, would you help me pray from a genuine heart and learn how to communicate with you. Holy Spirit, as I pray, please give me the words to say, and help me have closeness in my relationship with you. Help form within me the discipline and desire to pray. Transform my life and my heart as I draw closer to you. In Jesus' name, amen."

Reflection

When praying in the past, what were my prayers like? How might prayer bring me closer to God? Do I believe that God hears and answers my prayers?

READING & UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURE



The Bible has been studied by billions of people for thousands of years and somehow it still proves to be life changing for those who read it. You may or may not have some familiarity with the Bible, but please know you are not expected to have it all figured out. Is the Bible a quick and easy read? No. But, the Holy Spirit was sent to help you understand it, so just be patient and have a willingness to try.

The Bible is the written Word of God that was recorded throughout history. These are God's words to humanity, and He chose to partner with mankind in the process. It is commonly agreed that there are 40 or more authors responsible for recording the words in the Bible. God's willingness to include us in the process is evidence of His desire for relationship and partnership with His creation.

The Bible is more than human thoughts, words, and feelings. It is evidence of God's loving and personal relationship with us. In God's Word we find truth, love, correction, encouragement, direction for life, and so much more.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ 2 Timothy 3:16-17 | ■ 1 Corinthians 2:6-14 | ■ Matthew 4:4

Prayer Practice

“God, thank you for your willingness to communicate and speak to me. I pray that you will give me a desire to know and understand your Word. Would your Holy Spirit empower me to understand and apply the truth found in your Word. I choose to accept and be challenged by your truth and not rely on my own understanding. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

Why is it so important to read and understand the Bible? What can I do when I find the Bible difficult to understand?

W O R S H I P



Worship is the way we express our love for God. Worshiping God through music and song is a common occurrence in the Bible, and many chapters in the book of Psalms are songs of worship to God. Even today, corporate worship in churches typically takes the form of singing and music. There is something about music that lifts our mood, connects us with others, stirs our emotions, and focuses our hearts on God.

Worship goes beyond music and can include anything we do that expresses our gratitude, honor, and love for God. Romans 12 gives many examples of what worship can look like in the Kingdom of God, and part of having a relationship with God is learning the different ways worship can be expressed.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Psalm 57:7-11 | ■ Romans 12

Prayer Practice

“Lord, help me express my love for you through worship. Thank you for music and the ability to worship you in song and show me more ways I can express my gratitude to you. Help the things I think about, the things I do, and the way I treat people be an expression of worship that honors you. Help me discover the joy and encouragement of living a life of worship and gratitude toward you. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

What are the ways I best express my gratitude, honor, and love for God? What are some new ways of worshiping God I would like to try?

S A B B A T H



The creation story in Genesis teaches us that God rested on the seventh day of His creative work and blessed it. The word “sabbath” means to stop, cease, or rest, a very counter-cultural concept in our world of production and busyness.

In the book of Exodus, God’s people are enslaved by the Egyptians and forced to do hard labor. After freeing them, God commands the Israelites to rest on the seventh day which was revolutionary for a people group who was kept alive only to do slave labor. In God’s Kingdom, you are not forced into endless labor to prove your worth. Instead, your value is inherently given to you as God’s image bearer.

A sabbath isn’t just a day off, it is an intentional time to stop, rest, enjoy life, and worship God. Stopping and resting is a spiritual discipline and builds a habit of enjoying the life God has given us. For a Christian, the sabbath isn’t reserved for a specific day or time, it is God’s invitation to prove that your life is valuable and priceless, even when you stop producing.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Genesis 2:1-3 | ■ Exodus 5:4-9 | ■ Exodus 20:8-11 | ■ Mark 2:23-28

Prayer Practice

“Thank you, God, that my value is not found in what I produce or what I earn. Forgive me if I have placed the busyness of life above time and rest with you. Please help me align my life with the rhythms of stopping and resting that you demonstrated in creation. Help me make time to stop and enjoy the things in this life that you have given me. Refresh me and help me focus on you. In Jesus' name, amen.”

Reflection

Do I regularly take time to rest and slow down? What would I do on a sabbath day to spend time with God, enjoy life, and worship Him?

DISCERNMENT & PERSPECTIVE



Whose opinion matters the most in your life? As you grow in your relationship with Jesus, you may notice you see the world differently. You should discover that His opinion of your life, thoughts, and actions is the most important! Becoming a disciple of Jesus helps us apply a different filter to our lives and gives us a new perspective.

The process of spiritual formation should be developing a new way to evaluate and understand things in your life. Practicing the spiritual disciplines of giving time to God, listening to His voice, praying, reading Scripture, worshipping God, and observing a sabbath will develop your ability to see the world in light of the love God has for you and for all His creation.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Philippians 1:9-11 | ■ Ephesians 4:17-24 | ■ Proverbs 3:1-7

Prayer Practice

“Holy Spirit, thank you for your guidance and your wisdom. Open the eyes of my heart to see what is true and right and give me discernment as I try to live my life in a way that is pleasing and honoring to you. Help give me perspective so that I can see the world using your filter and not my own. I pray that my mind will be transformed and that I will see myself and everyone around me through your eyes. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

What are some ways I have begun to see the world differently as a result of spending more time with God and learning how to live like Jesus?

DAYS 26 - 30

THE BEATITUDES: KINGDOM IDENTITY

The Beatitudes summarize Jesus' teachings about the Kingdom of God.

The Beatitudes help us understand Kingdom identity as humility and compassion.

The Beatitudes help us understand God's righteousness and justice in action.

The Beatitudes explain the identity of Jesus Christ and His disciples.

The Beatitudes describe the true path to happiness taught by Jesus.



This section answers the question: “If I follow Jesus, what type of person am I going to become?” The topic of identity is incredibly personal, and Jesus teaches us that our relationship with Him will change how we see ourselves. We use one of Jesus’ most famous teachings, The Beatitudes, to demonstrate what this identity will look like. This may be the most difficult part of following Jesus, but as you will experience, it is worth it!

THE BEATITUDES: THE IDENTITY OF A DISCIPLE



If we needed to summarize the ministry and teachings of Jesus to just one passage in the Bible, it would have to be the Beatitudes. In eight simple, yet profound statements, Jesus summarizes the Gospel, He paints a picture of the culture in God's Kingdom, and He describes the identity of His disciples.

The word Jesus uses for "blessed" means "happy." Jesus is answering the questions we always ask: "How can I be happy? What is the path that leads to happiness?" The problem is that His answer doesn't involve any of the things in our typical pursuit of happiness.

Comfort, money, pleasure, power, and status do not seem important in the Kingdom Jesus is describing.

To most of us, happiness is the opposite of mourning and persecution, but Jesus explains that His Kingdom looks very different from ours. He does not give us a list of rules or how-to's. Instead, He describes the characteristics and identity of a member of God's Kingdom. Following Jesus is learning to live in the Kingdom of God. The remaining topics will invite you to participate in this process of learning and applying this Kingdom identity to your life.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Matthew 5:1-12 | ■ Psalm 37:3-11

Prayer Practice

“Jesus, thank you for setting the perfect example and showing me what it looks like to be part of your Kingdom. I pray that my heart and my attitude will begin to look like yours and the Beatitudes you taught. Help me remember your words in every circumstance and challenge me as I learn to live like you. Empower me with your Spirit and give me the strength and patience to bring your Kingdom into the world. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

What do the Beatitudes explain about my life of faith and my identity as a disciple of Christ?

HUMBLE DISCIPLES



Through His actions and His words, Jesus demonstrates that humility is a clear character trait of His disciples. The first four Beatitudes are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. This describes someone who is humble and completely trusts God for all their needs.

A disciple of Jesus must acknowledge that no amount of effort can produce true happiness and satisfaction in their lives. Jesus makes it clear that happiness does not involve our independence or self-reliance. His words and actions prove that even in suffering, poverty, heartache, and loss, true happiness is still possible.

His disciples see poverty as an opportunity and attitude to remove greed and pride from their hearts (Poor in Spirit). His disciples mourn for the pain caused by evil in the world and long for it to be removed (Mourn). His disciples have strength and self-control through hardship, believing that God's justice will make things right (Meek). Humility and total dependence on God are the first lessons a disciple learns from the Beatitudes. If a disciple has God, then what they have is enough. This humility means a disciple will hunger and thirst for what only God can provide (Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness).

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Matthew 5:3-5 | ■ Matthew 6:25-34 | ■ Psalm 10:17-18

Prayer Practice

“God, thank you for being the provider of all my needs. Help me become humble like Jesus and completely depend on you for everything. Teach me that all I need is provided by you. Thank you for welcoming me into your Kingdom even though I have not earned it. Thank you, Jesus, for giving me access to God’s Kingdom. Teach me how to be your disciple and encourage me when things are difficult. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

How would my life look different if I trusted God to provide for all my needs? How might my attitude change toward the problems in my life?

COMPASSIONATE DISCIPLES



Can you imagine a world where everyone is compassionate and loving toward each other? The last four Beatitudes are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted because of righteousness. These four Beatitudes paint a picture of how people will treat each other in the Kingdom of God. They teach us that disciples of Jesus are characterized by compassion.

A disciple of Christ should have incredible compassion for other people because God has incredible compassion for them.

His disciples have the forgiveness, kindness, and generosity of a merciful heart (Mercy). His disciples focus their attention, trust, and hope only on Jesus (Pure in Heart). His disciples turn their enemies into neighbors through love, peace, and reconciliation (Peacemakers). They are even willing to endure rejection, pain, and loss so others can experience the compassion of God (Persecuted because of Righteousness). Compassion displays the image of God to the world. Compassion demonstrates how the Kingdom of God is bringing wholeness and peace to all of creation. Humble compassion is the identity of a disciple. This is the culture of God's Kingdom on Earth as it is in heaven.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Matthew 5:7-10 | ■ Luke 4:17-22 | ■ Isaiah 61

Prayer Practice

“Jesus, thank you for the compassion you have for me. Thank you for sacrificing yourself so I could experience the compassion and mercy of God. Help me live a life that displays the mercy of God to others. Help give me the strength to endure any difficulties that happen because of my faith. Help me stay humble and have compassion in all circumstances. Teach me to love others like you love me. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

How has God showed compassion to me? How can I learn from Him and begin to show more compassion and mercy to the people in my life?

HUNGER & THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS



Jesus uses the word “righteousness” twice to clarify how important it is for developing Kingdom identity. Most people have a limited understanding of righteousness and believe it only describes their personal holiness. However, the word Jesus used for righteousness in the Beatitudes is the Greek word for both righteousness and justice.

The story of the Bible shows that righteousness is not something we can accomplish for ourselves. We receive it when we let go of our own efforts and have faith that God declares us righteous because of what Jesus did on the cross. The righteousness we receive and the righteousness we live out comes from God alone. It doesn't originate in our own abilities or holiness. We receive God's righteousness because He gives it to us as a gift.

Righteousness is proven through action! When we cry out to God in need, He hears us and responds with righteousness. When a disciple of Christ hears the cries of those in need around them, they should respond with righteousness. We have hungered and thirsted for God's righteousness and justice, which means we know how to respond when others hunger and thirst for righteousness and justice. Living a righteous life will require sacrifice so others can have justice, peace, and restoration.

The Kingdom of God is a place where the poor, outcast, hurting, foreigner, orphan, and widow receive justice. It is also a place where everyone has something to contribute because their value is not determined by earthly things. The Kingdom of God is a place where nobody hordes the solution to someone else's problem. Everyone receives and gives freely because everything comes from God's righteousness. Genuine humility, compassion, righteousness, and justice are the core characteristics of a disciple of Jesus Christ and a member of God's Kingdom.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Matthew 5:6 | ■ Matthew 5:10 | ■ Isaiah 58:6-11 | ■ Matthew 25:31-46

Prayer Practice

“Lord, help me hunger and thirst for righteousness. Help me align my heart and my hands so that my actions will be a way to demonstrate the Gospel. I pray that my personal righteousness will not be about what I can do, but that I can accept the righteousness you give to me through Jesus. I pray that this righteousness will produce justice and action that reflects the image of God into the world. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflection

If righteousness and justice is a gift from God, what responsibility do I have to others who need God’s righteousness and justice?

BAPTISM & PUBLIC DEDICATION



The decision to be baptized as a disciple of Jesus Christ communicates that you understand and commit yourself to a life of following in His footsteps. Baptism is the public commitment to walk with Jesus and place yourself fully under His teaching and authority.

Jesus values baptism because it symbolizes both His death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave. Jesus calls His disciples to pick up their cross and follow Him. Jesus calls His disciples to walk in new life that brings healing and hope to others. Jesus calls His disciples to live with the identity He taught in the Beatitudes. Jesus calls His disciples to reflect God's image to the world as earthly representatives of the Kingdom of God. His disciples are committed to blessing all nations.

Baptism is not just a tradition or religious practice; it is a way of life. It is a way to publicly commit yourself to a discipleship process that will require incredible humility and new levels of compassion. If you trust in the words and wisdom of Jesus, you will discover life with Christ is indeed the way to true happiness.

SCRIPTURE READING

■ Matthew 28:18-20 | ■ Romans 6:1-14 | ■ Luke 14:27-30

Prayer Practice

The perfect way to conclude your journey through the First Thirty would be to seriously pray and consider getting baptized. If you are ready to commit to following Jesus, then baptism is clearly your next step. Do as Jesus suggests in Luke 14:28 and count the cost of this way of life. Write down your thoughts, pray to God for direction, and ask a mentor for guidance and wisdom.

Take what you have learned about prayer and try praying on your own. Personalize your prayer to your needs, current life circumstances, and your journey of faith. Pray for the next steps and direction in your faith.

Reflection

Am I ready to get baptized and commit myself to living a life that follows in Jesus' footsteps?

SALVATION PRAYER

It is common to say a prayer to God to express your desire to have a relationship with Him and to claim Jesus as your Lord and Savior. There is nothing magical about this prayer. The power comes from the genuineness of your heart. The power comes from a deep desire to follow Jesus as the Lord and Savior of your life. We say a prayer to help us express the feelings, commitment, and desperation we have for Jesus. The Bible promises that God hears our prayers when we come to Him.

If you are not ready to make this commitment yet, then come back when you are ready. Sometimes you need to have a few questions answered or have a real experience with God before you are ready. That is okay! Finish reading the First Thirty, talk with a mentor, and pray until you are ready to commit to following Jesus with your whole heart.

If you are ready, see what **Romans 10:9-13** says:

“If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.” For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

MY PERSONAL PRAYER

Before you pray this prayer to yourself or with a mentor, make sure your desire for Jesus is genuine, that you are not being pressured into this decision, and that you are truly wanting a relationship with Him. Remember, this is the starting line not the finish line. Enjoy the journey.

“Heavenly Father, I come before you today recognizing that I am a sinner in need of your forgiveness and grace. I believe in my heart that Jesus Christ is your Son, and I confess with my mouth that He is my Lord and Savior. Thank you for welcoming me into your Kingdom as one of your children. I believe in my heart that Jesus died for my sins and rose from the dead, and I accept your free gift of salvation. I acknowledge that I cannot save myself and that I need your forgiveness and guidance in my life. I repent of my sins and ask for your forgiveness. Wash me clean and make me a new creation in you. Fill me with your Holy Spirit, that I may walk in your ways and live a life that honors you. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for your love and grace. I trust in you as my Savior, and I commit my life to following you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Today's Date



FIRST THIRTY

A life following Jesus should not be lived in isolation. Your faith is personal, but it was never intended to remain private. Your relationship with Jesus should bring you closer to community, rebuild broken relationships, and develop relationships that encourage and challenge you. Jesus is willing to meet you wherever you are at in life, but He is not willing to leave you there.

Following Jesus is not a quick fix to transform your life overnight and The First Thirty is just a tool to help guide your steps in a lifelong journey with Him. Our prayer is that your time using this resource can reinforce your belief in Christ by helping you form spiritual disciplines and experiencing God in a real way.