



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	
Week 1: New Hope: The Gospel	1
Week 2: New Identity: Being A Disciple of Jesus	13
Week 3: New Guide: Guides for Life	25
Week 4: New Family: Church	37
Week 5: New Family: Community	49
Week 6: New Priorities: Generosity	61
Week 7: New Priorities: Serving	73
Week 8: New Mission: Making Disciples	85
Week 9: New Mission: Flourishing	97

## INTRODUCTION

A disciple of Jesus is someone who follows Jesus and His teachings. But what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? What does it look like to live as a Christian? If you have ever asked yourself those questions, then Core is written to help you begin to discover the answers. Core is a ten-week discipleship experience that guides you to discover how to live as a disciple of Jesus.

When we become followers of Jesus, He re-creates us as completely new. He gives us a new hope and a new identity. He gives us a new family with new priorities. Jesus changes our lives by changing our relationships and our behavior. He changes our heart. Or if you don't feel like He's done that—it's what He wants to do in your life. Jesus wants to change you to your very core. But even though He wants to change each one of us, He does not leave us to figure it out alone. He gives us new guides to help along the way.

Core is intended to help you discover more about this new life. That means there will be a learning element to Core. Hopefully, you will learn something new over the next few weeks. Yet, even though there is a learning component, Core is not meant to be a class. It is meant to be done alongside others as an interactive experience to help you not only learn, but also to be challenged to actually follow Jesus.

Core is meant to be done as a part of New City Church. We will explore some of the concepts that we believe are foundational to the Christian life. We hope it will give you insight into the DNA of New City. Core is one of the major ways that New City Church wants to help you feel equipped to live as a disciple of Jesus in the places where you live, work, study, and play.

Core is a commitment. We understand that your time is valuable, but we also believe that it takes time to develop healthy habits. There are nine weeks of content, which are consisting of five daily devotionals for each week. We ask that you complete all five days before coming the weekly gathering. Doing so, will help you discuss with your table that week what you discovered yourself, if you feel comfortable. We believe the daily devotionals are important, but please do not miss out on the weekly gathering if you haven't completed all five days for that week.

Core is not meant to be done alone. We would like you to go through the complete experience of Core with your Core group. It is not mandatory, but for those who start Core, without previously being in a New City Community Group, we unashamedly hope that you will want to continue meeting with your Core group as a New City Community Group once Core is completed.

We will be praying for you as you enter into this journey.

- New City Staff

# **CORE**

A DISCIPLESHIP EXPERIENCE  
AT NEW CITY CHURCH

## **WEEK 1: NEW HOPE**

DAILY DEVOTIONALS

WEEK 1: NEW HOPE // DAY 1: CREATION

When we read a book, we usually start at page 1. When we start binge-watching a TV show, we usually start at season one, episode one. For many of us, our first exposure to the Bible is somewhere in the middle of this historical story. While that's okay, and God can speak to us from there, it can be helpful to know how the greatest story of all time began. After all, it is in this story in which we are living. So let's start from the beginning. We can call this "Act 1: Creation".

SCRIPTURE: READ GENESIS 1:1-25

Our story begins with God. He is the central character to everything that comes next. Genesis 1 portrays God as an artist starting with a blank canvas. Through every swipe of the brush, the canvas becomes more and more beautiful. God took moments to pause, step back, and admire the work that he had done. What was his response? He said that each new element "was good". It was all good.

**The beauty in nature around us proclaims the power and goodness of God.**

REFLECTION: Pick a day of creation from days 1-5 to reflect on what those elements of creation tell you about God.

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SCRIPTURE: READ GENESIS 1:26-31

Day 6 starts off differently than any other day. The change in God's language should signal to us that something important is coming. This is where we enter the story! Maybe not physically, but our representatives enter the story—Adam and Eve. God introduces them differently than he introduces the rest of creation. He says that they both are made after his "likeness" and in his "image". Every human thereafter has this same likeness and image passed along to them. This means that we all represent God on the earth.

**Every human being that you come across is created in the image of God and represents God on this earth.**

REFLECTION: What does it mean to you to know that, no matter of your background, your very existence represents God on this earth?

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REFLECTION: How should you view and treat other people differently than you currently do knowing that they were also created in the image of God?

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REFLECTION: How should you view and treat yourself differently than you currently do knowing that you were also created in the image of God?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Ask God to show you the image of God in others and in yourself.

WEEK 1: NEW HOPE // DAY 2: FALL

SCRIPTURE: READ GENESIS 2:1-9; 15-25

When God stepped back from creation, after he created Adam and Eve, he said that it was all “very good”. Everything was in perfect harmony in this garden paradise, named Eden. What was Eden like? Imagine living in your perfect setting with no natural disasters and with friendly scorpions. Imagine living with the love of your life in perfect commitment to each other. This was the type of world that God created for Adam and Eve, meaning that this was the type for world that God intended for us as well.

REFLECTION: What does the perfection of Eden teach us about God’s desire for humanity?

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There was one caveat that we haven’t mentioned. Before creating Eve, God gave Adam one command. He told Adam not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Doing so would give humanity both the knowledge of sin and the consequences of sin. You’d think that avoiding a piece of fruit would be easy enough for the original couple to do! Let’s see what happens.

SCRIPTURE: READ GENESIS 3:1-13

What a tragedy! Satan deceived Eve into eating the fruit from the forbidden tree. She then took the fruit to Adam who couldn’t resist either. The perfect harmony was fractured. When Adam and Eve took that bite, their view of the world completely changed. Now, they knew the difference between good and evil—which meant that they could also experience the difference between good and evil. They knew that they stepped outside of God’s plan for humanity and they felt shame for it. Everything changed. We have now entered “Act 2: The Fall”.

**Evil entered the world. Sin entered the world.**

REFLECTION: How does your life show that you would have chosen to eat the fruit just like Adam and Eve did?

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SCRIPTURE: READ GENESIS 3:14-24

Everything changed. Humanity’s perfect relationship with creation was now fractured; humanity’s perfect relationship with each other was now fractured; but most tragic, is that humanity’s perfect relationship with God was now fractured. Man and woman disobeyed God in spite of the fact that God told them there would be consequences to disobeying. Part of the consequences were that these fractures in relationship would be passed down to all of us. We experience the consequences of this original sin everyday.

**The biggest consequence of sin is the ultimate consequence—death.**

At this point in the story, it doesn’t look like there is much hope for humanity. Take some time to sit in the reality of that with anger and sadness. If that makes you feel uncomfortable, you’ll like tomorrow’s devotional, but for now sit in how uncomfortable that is.

REFLECTION: Write out some of the emotions that you feel from the events in this act of the biblical and historical story.

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PRAYER PROMPT: Tell God how frustrating it is that sin entered into the world.

WEEK 1: NEW HOPE // DAY 3: REDEMPTION

Yesterday probably felt a little uncomfortable. Everything had changed. God created a paradise for his beloved humanity, but they decided to step outside of his plan and take matters into their own hands. Sin entered into a perfect world and the consequence was that humanity couldn't live in perfect relationship with God anymore. Ultimately, without a relationship with God, people would die. Just imagine how uncomfortable sin entering into the world made God feel. We get insight into his mind not long after Adam and Eve.

SCRIPTURE: READ GENESIS 6:5-8

REFLECTION: What does it do to your heart to see how much sin hurts God?

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God wanted to be in relationship with his creation, but sin fractured that possibility. At this point it seems like God wants to just start all over. The consequence for sin is physical and spiritual death. But God hadn't lost hope! Thus far we haven't talked about hope much, so where is this hope? If we go back into Genesis 3, where God is listing the consequences to sin, there is some hope buried in there that can easily be missed. Theologians call this hope the "protoevangelium" (that just means the "first good news"). It is here where we enter "Act 3: Redemption". These "acts" just help us break down where we are in the overall story. Act three will go through the Old Testament to Jesus. It is a long act. In the Old Testament, God uses different forms of redemption that all have their ultimate culmination in a perfect redemption that we will look at tomorrow.

SCRIPTURE: READ GENESIS 3:15

When God described the consequences of the serpent's sin to the serpent, God said that an offspring from Eve would crush the serpent's head in a battle. This "first good news" was foreshadowing to the day when Jesus would ultimately defeat Satan, sin, and death. God promises that humanity would be able to enter back into relationship with him because of the faithfulness of Jesus. That's good news!

**In spite of humanity's sin, God promises that he will redeem humanity.**

REFLECTION: How is God's mercy evident in Genesis 3:15?

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If we were to read the rest of the Old Testament, we would see that God was extremely gracious to humanity. He used people who messed up. People, who Christians view as heroes of the faith, constantly let God down. They lived the human life just like we do. They weren't perfect. Noah got drunk, Abraham lied, Sarah doubted, Moses murdered, Rahab was a prostitute, and David had an affair. Yet, in spite of the unfaithfulness of humanity, God continued to be merciful. Over and over again, the Old Testament shows us that God is patient and kind to his people.

**God would do anything good and right to restore the relationship that he intended for humanity.**

REFLECTION: What does it mean to you to know that the heroes of the faith were not perfect?

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REFLECTION: How has God shown you that he is patient and merciful to you based on your past?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Thank God for the ways that he has been faithful to you.

WEEK 1: NEW HOPE // DAY 4: FAITH IN JESUS

Yesterday we learned that God promised to redeem humanity. But how would He do that? Throughout the Old Testament, we get glimpses of how He would. God continued to renew his promise, even though humanity remained unfaithful. An example of the renewal of God promise is found in the words of the prophet Jeremiah.

SCRIPTURE: JEREMIAH 31:31-34

REFLECTION: Write out as many promises as you can find in these verses.

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All of these promises should make us think of Jesus. Jesus gets His own act in our Biblical and historical story because He is the ultimate redemption. One of Jesus's closest followers introduces him to us in the Gospel of John. John calls Jesus "the Word" because Jesus was the ultimate personification of God's communication to us.

**Everything that God intended humanity to be is found in the person of Jesus.**

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 1:9-14

REFLECTION: Why is it so surprising that God would come down from Heaven and put on "flesh"? What does that do to how you view God?

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Up until this point in the biblical and historical story, we have longed for a truly faithful human to carry out God's intention. A human that would be like Adam, but unlike Adam, one who would be faithful. We finally have the tension relieved when Jesus lived His life. The apostle Paul connects this for us in his letter to the Romans.

SCRIPTURE: ROMANS 5:6-21

Sin entered the world through the sin of Adam and it was passed down to all of us. The consequences of sin also were passed down. The only way to break the cycle was for Jesus to live a perfectly faithful life and then take the punishment for sin in our place. But not only did he take the punishment for sin through death, He defeated death by rising from the dead to new life. What good news for humanity! In fact, we have a word that we use to describe it—gospel—which means "good news".

**Only Jesus could be the completely faithful one, and in Him only will we find redemption.**

In the passage that we just read, the apostle Paul called this good news a "free gift" for anyone. But how do we receive this free gift? Jesus himself tells us in John 3:16 that God loved the world so much, that he gave his only Son (Jesus), and "whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." To receive this free gift all we have to do is believe in Jesus, or to say it a different way, all we have to do is place our faith in Him. No matter what our background is, when we place our faith in Jesus, God looks at us as if we were perfect like Jesus. Theologians call this justification, meaning that our fractured relationship with God has been made right because of our faith in Jesus.

REFLECTION: Tell God what it means to you to know that He Himself stepped in your place to take the punishment for your sin.

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REFLECTION: Seeing all that God did in order to be in a relationship with you, what does it say about how He views you?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Thank Jesus for providing salvation as a free gift.



WEEK 1: NEW HOPE // DAY 5: BEING A DISCIPLE OF JESUS

When Jesus walked on the earth, He had a group of people who followed Him called disciples. A disciple is someone who follows the teachings of a leader. This was a common way to learn at this time. At the beginning of Jesus’s earthy ministry, He picked twelve people and asked them to follow Him. Some left their jobs. Some left their parents. They were regular people like us, but they committed their lives to Jesus—and most of them didn’t even fully know who He was yet!

SCRIPTURE: READ LUKE 5:1-11

REFLECTION: Reflect on when you felt like Jesus started calling you to follow Him.

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These disciples walked with, talked with, and watched Jesus for approximately three years. During this time they learned from His words and His actions, and their commitment to Him grew stronger. It’s true that some of them scattered during Jesus’s trial and execution, but the closest ones stayed committed and were rewarded with seeing the resurrected Jesus.

SCRIPTURE: READ MATTHEW 28:16-20

When these eleven saw Jesus, who had just been killed, what He told them previously started to make sense to them. When Jesus told them to go and make more disciple, they did just that. They told everyone. Most of Jesus’s disciples believed in Him so strongly that they went on to be executed for not renouncing Him.

REFLECTION: How do the disciples making more disciples after Jesus left earth show the truth about Jesus?

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Today, when we place our faith in Jesus, we become a disciple of Jesus—a follower of Him. We don’t become disciples of another person or leader. Christians are disciples of Jesus, and Jesus alone. Even the word “Christian” means “little Christ”.

**A disciple of Jesus is someone who believes that Jesus is the risen Savior and follows His teachings and commandments.**

REFLECTION: Why do you think believing and being in a relationship with Jesus would lead to following His teachings and commandments?

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Why would anyone want to follow someone else’s teachings and commandments? Remember, Jesus came to earth and lived His life as an example of what humanity should look like—becoming more like Jesus is becoming more fully human. Being like Jesus is for our own good. He also came so that we could be in a relationship with Him. So as we experience our relationship with Jesus—the One who gave His life for us—we will fall more in love Him. Because of these reasons, we aren’t just followers of Jesus on Sunday. We should follow Him everyday and in everything that we do.

**Being a disciple of Jesus impacts every aspect of life.**

SCRIPTURE: READ LUKE 6:46-49

PRAYER PROMPT: Ask Jesus what specific area of your life does He want to impact. Sit in silence for 5 minutes. Write out what you think He is telling you.

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# **WEEK 2: NEW IDENTITY**

DAILY DEVOTIONALS

WEEK 2: NEW IDENTITY // DAY 1: NEW IDENTITY

One of the most unfair things that we do to ourselves is to tell ourselves that we have to find our identity. Most people turn to work, money, sex, or power. While those things may be fulfilling for a short time. People are usually left feeling tired and empty because those things don't fulfill what we are created to be. The apostle Paul says that when we live like this, we are living in our old self—our flesh.

**Our identity was never meant to be about the things that we do.**

REFLECTION: What has been your experience with trying to find something that will fulfill you completely?

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SCRIPTURE: READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-21

When you place our faith in Jesus, He gives us a new identity with Him. You no longer have to search for our identity. You don't have to try to find who you are in things that won't last. You are given a new identity with Jesus. The apostle Paul described those who place their faith in Jesus as a "new creation".

**From the beginning, it was God's intention for our identity to be found in our relationship with Him.**

Jesus gave us a way to physically and symbolically identify with being a new creation. Christians call this "baptism." It means "to submerge" in water. Baptism is when someone, who professes their faith in Jesus, is placed under the water to identify with Jesus's death, and is raised out of the water to identify with Jesus's resurrection to new life. Jesus himself was baptized (Matt 3:13-17), and He commands us to be baptized as well (Matt 28:18-20). Baptism doesn't save someone, but every Christian should be baptized in order to proclaim to others that they have identified with Jesus.

REFLECTION: What are some specific ways that receiving a new identity is refreshing to you?

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SCRIPTURE: READ EPHESIANS 2:1-10

This new identity was given to us, in God's grace, as a free gift. We didn't deserve reconciliation, but God loved us and wanted us to experience a relationship with Him.

REFLECTION: Why wouldn't salvation work if you had to earn it?

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At the end of the passage in which we just read, the apostle Paul said that, as Christians, we are created in Jesus for good works. What does that mean? He further explains himself in one of his other letters.

SCRIPTURE: READ COLOSSIANS 3:1-16

Sometimes people think that God is up in heaven giving out rules because He doesn't want us to have fun. God isn't taking our fun from us. But what He is doing is helping us live in our new identity. When we are given our new identity, it doesn't make sense for us to keep turning back to the old way of living. The old way isn't what's best for us, because the old way is still walking in our sin. God asks us to walk in the new way of living because that is the way in which we are designed to function. This new way is called holiness.

**Holiness is the greatest form of flourishing.**

REFLECTION: Imagine living in a world where everyone lived out the qualities found in verses 12-15. How does that help you see that holiness is what is best for us?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Thank God for the gift of a new identity.

WEEK 2: NEW IDENTITY // DAY 2: NEW KINGDOM

When Jesus came to earth, He came preaching about a kingdom. He called this kingdom the “kingdom of God” or the “kingdom of heaven”. Jesus came at a time when people were looking for someone to establish a kingdom that revolved around them personally. Today, we act much the same way. While we may not want to establish a physical monarchy that revolves around us personally, we live focused on us alone, ruling as the authority in our own lives.

**Living in the kingdom of self is living in a way that places you at the center of life.**

REFLECTION: How are you living in a way that places you at the center of life?

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SCRIPTURE: READ MATTHEW 4:17-5:11

Jesus came to establish a new kingdom. He regularly tells people to “repent” when He tells them about His kingdom. The word “repent” means “to turn from something to something”. Jesus is telling people that they need to turn from their kingdoms of self to His kingdom. As a part of our new identity, we become citizens in the kingdom of God. No longer does our allegiance primarily lie in earthly people, places, or things. First and foremost, as citizens of the kingdom of God, we submit ourselves to King Jesus's rule in our lives.

**Living in the kingdom of God is living in a way that places Jesus at the center of your life.**

REFLECTION: Based on these things that Jesus said in this passage, what differences do you see in the kingdom of God in comparison to the kingdoms of people?

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REFLECTION: In what ways do you need to regularly repent—to turn from living in the kingdom of self to living as a citizen of Jesus’s kingdom?

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SCRIPTURE: READ MATTHEW 13:36-43

Throughout all of the Scripture, God makes promises about the kingdom of God. Many of the promises that we experience as citizens of the kingdom are already fulfilled through the work of Jesus, but some of the promises won't be complete until Jesus comes back again to rule on the earth. (Yes, He's coming back to make all things fully right!). As you read about the kingdom of God, if there are promises that don't feel fulfilled yet, you can look forward to a day when we live in a new city where these promises will be totally complete. Theologians call this reality the “already, but not yet” of the kingdom of God. His kingdom is already here, but it's not yet fully established.

**We look forward to a future day when sin no longer has any impact on our new city.**

REFLECTION: What are you looking forward to specifically when sin has no power in the new city that Jesus will build?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Ask God for strength to turn from the kingdom of self to the kingdom of God.

WEEK 2: NEW IDENTITY // DAY 3: RETURNING TO OUR OLD WAY

With all this talk about living in a new identity and a new kingdom, it may seem like once someone turns to Jesus that they have to be perfect in obedience to Him. That's a lot of pressure—and impossible. If we could perfectly obey Jesus, then our salvation would be based on our own works, not on His work. If we were perfect, then our identity would be based on our own perfection—but we aren't perfect! Thankfully, the apostle Paul writes about his own struggle with wanting to do what's right. As you read the following passage, remember that the person writing is the person who wrote a majority of the books in the New Testament.

SCRIPTURE: READ ROMANS 7:15-25

REFLECTION: What do you find encouraging about what Paul says in this passage?

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Until Jesus comes back and makes everything new, we will live in a tension. Our flesh wants to turn back to our old identity—our old way of doing things. On the flip side, our new identity, which Jesus gave to us, incites us pursue holiness. Many times, we find ourselves desiring to do what's right, but we still choose the wrong thing anyway. So what do we do with this tension? Out of frustration Paul said, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Paul quickly answers, "Thanks be to God through Jesus!"

**Wherever we go, we have the strength of Jesus, who defeated sin and death, living inside of us to help us do what is right.**

REFLECTION: What do you keep turning back to despite knowing that you shouldn't?

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This deliverance that Paul talked about can be summed up with the words of Jesus. Jesus says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30) Jesus's burden is light because we don't have to earn anything—even after we place our faith in Him. Remember, He already earned it for us.

**When we sin, Jesus stands in front of us putting His righteousness in the place of our sin.**

REFLECTION: What do you learn about Jesus's character knowing that He stood—and currently stands—in your place having taken the punishment for your sin?

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If Jesus is so gracious to us, then someone might think, "Then why don't I just keep on sinning? Jesus has forgiven me anyway." It's true that Jesus has forgiven you if you have placed your faith in Him. However, the very fact that Jesus graciously and lovingly saved you from being stuck in your old way should make you fall more in love with Him, which should motivate you to be like Him. Paul describes this very way of thinking below.

**Loving Jesus should be the motivation for living like Jesus.**

SCRIPTURE: READ ROMANS 6:1-14

REFLECTION: Why is the love of Jesus a good motivator to be like Him?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Thank God for His graciousness.

## WEEK 2: NEW IDENTITY // DAY 4: OPPONENTS

From the very beginning, there have been opponents to God and His plan. When everything was perfect in the garden of Eden, the serpent—later called Satan or the devil—deceived Eve into stepping outside of God’s plan for humanity. How did Satan get into this story? The prophet Ezekiel describes the scene when Satan entered the story before he went on to tempt Eve. (In this passage, Ezekiel uses “the King of Tyre” as a mysterious name for Satan.)

SCRIPTURE: READ EZEKIEL 28:11-19

REFLECTION: What was the sin that caused Satan to fall from his perfect position? How does he continue to tempt humanity with that sin today?

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SCRIPTURE: READ MATTHEW 4:1-11

While Jesus walked on this earth, He himself was tempted by Satan. Unlike Adam and Eve, Jesus withstood the test. In His moment of temptation, Jesus overtly attacked evil and the evil forces that were at work. Not only did he claim a victory over evil, but He set an example for us. The writer of Hebrews says this: “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:14-16)

REFLECTION: What did Jesus specifically do in the Matthew account that you can learn from Him as an example?

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Much like Adam, Eve, and Jesus, we will face Satan and his forces as an opponent. He wants to see us enslaved to our old way of doing things—our flesh. The apostle Peter says that Satan is like a lion seeking to destroy people. The apostle Paul says that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. How terrifying! He can be covert or overt. It leaves us asking the question: “So what do we do?”

SCRIPTURE: READ EPHESIANS 6:10-20

The bad news is that you can’t defeat Satan. That might sound scary to you, and you might feel helpless by reading that; However, the good news is that you serve One who already defeated Satan (and will fully defeat him in the future). Jesus already showed His power over sin, death, and Satan. We don’t battle against Satan by ourselves, but we follow Jesus, our commander, into the battle. In the passage that we just read, Paul never asks us to defeat these evil forces, but he does tell us that we can stand against the attacks that we face from them. Jesus gives us a metaphorical armor to protect us from attacks. He fights the battle for us, we just need to turn to Him and His strength.

**Jesus gives us armor to stand firm against attacks from evil opponents**

REFLECTION: Write out each piece of armor and what it can look like for you to put on that armor and live with it.

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PRAYER PROMPT: Pray for help to put on the armor of God.

WEEK 2: NEW IDENTITY // DAY 5: WEAKNESS ISN'T WRONG

When we come to faith in Jesus, we are given a new identity and we become citizens of His kingdom. However, the effects of Adam and Eve's sin are still at work in the entire world around us. People hurt people. Hurricanes destroy. Friends and family members get diseases. We can look forward to a day when all things will be made right, but in the meantime, how do we respond? How do we live as people who have been given the righteousness of Christ in a world with pain in it? Another way one might ask this is "Why do bad things happen to good people?"

REFLECTION: What are some answers that you've heard people say to the question "Why do bad things happen to good people?"

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Many times Christians want to answer the above questions too quickly. They use verses like Romans 8:28—"And we know that, for those who love God, all things work together for good". This verse is true. God will use anything with which the enemy intends to harm people. However, that doesn't mean that the bad experience feels good. It doesn't mean that we will like what happens. It doesn't mean that we will ever realize why something happened. Sometimes we see the reason why. Sometimes we don't.

REFLECTION: How has God used a bad situation for good in your life?

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Characters in the Bible are great examples of what it can look like to walk through pain as a child of God. Throughout the book of Psalms, there are many examples a how to handle suffering with something called a lament. A lament is an act of prayer and worship, where you cry out to God by expressing yourself to Him, in the middle of either suffering or sin. God already knows your heart anyway. He wants you to open up to him and share those feelings with Him. As God of the universe, He can handle your thoughts and feelings—even if they seem uncomfortable to you.

**Prayer and worship are times to be honest with God.**

SCRIPTURE: READ PSALM 77: 1-9

REFLECTION: What are some elements in this prayer that are new to you? Why do you think praying like this in difficult times is important?

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The writer of this Psalm—Asaph—expressed his pain to God. He didn't stop there though. He continued to meditate on the character of God. Asaph didn't try to answer the reasons why he was suffering. That's God's work. Asaph just meditated on the character of God. When he consistently did this, Asaph found that God is great, good, holy, and faithful. When we do this today, we find the same things Asaph did. AND not only that, but we also see that Jesus has already proven His faithfulness to us when He went through His own darkness on the cross.

**God will be faithful to you through your moments, or seasons, of darkness.**

SCRIPTURE: READ PSALM 77: 10-20

REFLECTION: What do you learn about God's faithfulness in these verses?

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SCRIPTURE: READ 2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10

PRAYER PROMPT: Thank God for His faithfulness to you.

# **WEEK 3: NEW GUIDES**

DAILY DEVOTIONALS



WEEK 3: NEW GUIDES // DAY 1: INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Many Christians would admit, at some point, to thinking, "I wish Jesus was right here physically, so I could ask Him what to do." You aren't alone. Even Jesus's disciples wanted Him to physically stay on earth with them. When Jesus told them that He was physically going to leave the earth, they were filled with sadness. They thought that they would be lost without the guidance of Jesus Himself. Jesus had a different plan.

SCRIPTURE: READ JOHN 16:4-15

REFLECTION: List all of the promises that Jesus gives regarding the Holy Spirit in this passage.

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If Jesus was still physically walking on this earth, He would be limited in where He could be at one time. Instead, Jesus said that He would ascend into Heaven and send the Holy Spirit as a Helper, Comforter, Teacher, and Guide to anyone who would receive Him. Jesus promised that this Spirit of God would come and live inside everyone who placed their faith in Jesus.

**In Jesus's own words, it's better that He left, because now everyone who believes can have God living inside of them.**

SCRIPTURE: READ JOHN 14:16-20

REFLECTION: What do you think Jesus meant by saying that He would not leave us as orphans?

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It wasn't long after Jesus ascended into Heaven that He fulfilled His promise to us by sending His Spirit. The Holy Spirit made a grand entrance making His presence known. His entrance had to be obvious, because the Spirit doesn't have a body like Jesus does. The scene that unfolded was unprecedented.

SCRIPTURE: READ ACTS 2:1-6; 38-41

All those who were committed to following Jesus received the Holy Spirit at once. The Spirit led them to start preaching in the native language of every person in Jerusalem at the time. As you could imagine, it shocked everyone who observed it.

**Jesus sent the Holy Spirit, who made His presence known, and made it clear that anyone, from any background, could receive Him.**

REFLECTION: What does the way that the Holy Spirit arrived tell us about God?

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Just think about the reality of this. If you have placed your faith in Jesus, then the God of the universe has taken up residency inside of you. He isn't just next to you. He isn't next door. You don't have to wait in line to talk to Him. He is within you.

**God lives inside of you, and you can access Him at any moment.**

PRAYER PROMPT AND REFLECTION: Set a timer for 2 minutes (or more). Sit in silence with the reality that God lives inside of you. Then write down what He speaks to you.

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WEEK 3: NEW GUIDES // DAY 2: WALKING BY THE SPIRIT

One of the promises that Jesus gave regarding the Holy Spirit was that the Holy Spirit would teach us and guide us in how to live. As God living inside you, the Spirit will guide you in the ways of God. He will guide you in becoming more like Jesus. When we follow the Spirit's lead, the apostle Paul says that we are "walking by the Spirit." He usually contrasts "walking by the Spirit" with "walking in the flesh". This means that we have a choice in every moment—will we walk in the flesh or in the Spirit?

**Our flesh leads us in one direction, and the Spirit leads us in a different direction.**

SCRIPTURE: READ GALATIANS 5:16-26

REFLECTION: With which of the "works of the flesh" do you personally struggle?

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People often ask, "What does God want for my life?" Usually we ask this question when we want to know which job to take or where we should move. We absolutely should ask Him about choices like these. However, God has already told us what He wants for our life. He describes it as the "fruit of the Spirit". Walking by the Spirit means that your life will bear fruit. It means that it will flourish. Flourishing may not mean success in the ways of which we normally think, but flourishing means that your character will become more like what God intended for humanity.

REFLECTION: God cares about the specifics of your life, but why do you think He mostly addresses the character of your life?

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SCRIPTURE: READ ROMANS 8:1-11

Paul says that setting our minds on the things of the flesh leads to death, and that setting our minds on the things of the Spirit leads to life and peace. This doesn't mean that we have to live perfectly—only Jesus could do that. However, it means that **who you** are affects your emotional and spiritual health. (Important side note: You don't live in isolation. You could live fully in the fruit of the Spirit, but still be hurt by other people because they haven't acted toward you according to the fruit of the Spirit.)

**Living in the fruit of the Spirit leads to life and peace.**

REFLECTION: How do you think living in the fruit of the Spirit (from the Galatians passage) would lead to life and peace described in the Romans passage

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SCRIPTURE: READ ROMANS 8:26-28

It may feel overwhelming to expect yourself to constantly walk according to the Spirit. Honestly, we don't have the strength to do it perfectly. We are too weak. But this is the beautiful part—the Spirit wants to help you. He wants to strengthen you. Paul says that the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, dwells in you. That's a powerful force that you have living inside of you who wants to help you.

**When you don't know what to do or say, the Holy Spirit is there to pray for you and to strengthen you.**

REFLECTION: What does it do in your heart to know that the Spirit is constantly praying for you?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Pray for strength to live according to the Spirit today.

WEEK 3: NEW GUIDES // DAY 3: HEARING FROM GOD IN HIS WORD

One of the most clear ways that we can hear from God is through reading the Bible. The words throughout it come directly from God. That sounds like a pretty great guide. When we read the Bible, it is as if God is speaking directly to us. Now it's true that humans actually wrote the words that we read, but those humans were directly led by the Holy Spirit to write them. The apostle Paul clearly explains this to the person whom he mentored, Timothy.

SCRIPTURE: READ 2 TIMOTHY 3:14-17

**The words that we read in Scripture are the very words of God that He wants to speak to us.**

REFLECTION: According to Paul in this passage, for what reasons did God give us the Scripture?

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The writer of the Psalm that you are about to read (probably King David) is in love with the Word of God. Psalm 119 is the longest psalm, and it is all about how beneficial it was for David to know God's Word. He uses many different terms for it (like commandments, statutes, testimonies, law, and etc). All of them refer to the same thing—God's Word.

SCRIPTURE: READ PSALM 119:1-16

REFLECTION: What times in your life have you read the Scripture most often? Why does David describe the Scripture as something prescriptive to life, not just reactive?

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SCRIPTURE: READ PSALM 119:97-112

REFLECTION: Choose one of the ways that David talks about the Word of God. Rewrite it in your own words. Why does this description speak to you?

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There could be a few different reasons why people don't read the Scripture. One reason is that they don't feel like the Bible is relevant to life today. It's true that there are some places where you can tell that God was speaking to a specific setting; however, Scripture usually speaks to the character of the heart. The human heart hasn't changed since the time when God wrote the Scripture.

Another reason someone might not read the Bible is because they don't feel like they are able to understand it. It's true that there can be some areas of Scripture that aren't as clear as others, but people don't have to be scholars to read the Bible. One of the biggest things that can be helpful for understanding what the Bible says is to know what's going on around the passage that you are reading. We call this understanding the context of a passage—just read the few verses around a passage to gain some clarity. We have included some questions below that could help you understand what the Bible says. If you take these three questions, and ask them of any Bible passage, then you have a Bible study for that passage!

- 1) What is God communicating to the people who first read this section?
- 2) What are the timeless principles that we can learn from what He said here?
- 3) How do these principles apply to me today?

REFLECTION: It is an amazing literary feat that the Bible is still as relevant to life today as it was 2,000 years ago. What does that tell you about God?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Thank God for giving us clear communication from Him.

WEEK 3: NEW GUIDES // DAY 4: TALKING TO GOD IN PRAYER

A guide usually communicates to the people that they are guiding. For God to guide us, we need to communicate with Him and allow Him to communicate to us. That's where prayer comes into the picture. Simply put, prayer is talking to God. There is no magic formula to pray. You can talk to God in the same way that you would talk to a friend. God wants to hear your requests, your emotions, your thoughts—all of it. You just have to tell Him. Your prayers don't have to look like other people's prayers. For instance, there are different examples of different people's prayers that can be found all throughout the Scripture. Many of the Psalms are prayers to God. In them, you will find prayers of desperation, joy, anger, praise, and sadness. Your prayer life can be uniquely your own.

**God knows your heart anyway, so don't be afraid to tell Him.**

SCRIPTURE: READ JAMES 5:13-18

While prayer is *talking* to God. Prayer is also talking to *God*. You are addressing the God of the universe when you prayer. This means that prayer is a powerful force. Prayer is so powerful that people have been healed through the prayers of Christians. You can count on this—God will answer your prayer. However, keep in mind, “no” is sometimes the answer that we get. And if you get the answer “no”, you are in good company. Jesus Himself prayed the night before He was crucified and “no” was the answer to His request.

**Even if you have all the faith in the world, it doesn't mean that the answer to your prayer will be “yes”.**

REFLECTION: How have you seen God answer prayers in your life in a powerful way? How have you seen God answer your prayers with a “no”?

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While there is no special formula to pray, Jesus gives us a model prayer so that we can learn how to pray. We call this prayer the Lord's Prayer. It doesn't have any powers that are more special than any other prayer, however it can be helpful for you to focus your heart and mind on what is important.

SCRIPTURE: READ PSALM 119:1-16

REFLECTION: Write out—in order—the different elements of the Lord's Prayer you see in Jesus's model prayer (i.e., praise, types of request, confession. There is almost one per line.) Why do you think each one is important?

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REFLECTION: In your own words, write out a version of the Lord's prayer using the different elements that Jesus gives in His example prayer.

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WEEK 3: NEW GUIDES // DAY 5: LISTENING TO GOD IN PRAYER

If you've been following along everyday, we've already practiced this a couple times, but today we are going to explore listening to God. Prayer doesn't have to be a one-way conversation. Too often we treat it like one, but God also wants to speak to us! He does so in different ways. Some people have audibly heard the voice of God. If you haven't, don't get frustrated. Most people haven't. You don't have to feel the need to chase after trying to audibly hear Him. God promises to speak to you in other ways—like through His Word, other people, or the Holy Spirit guiding your heart and mind.

**God promises to speak to you through the Holy Spirit, stirring your heart and mind.**

SCRIPTURE: READ LUKE 6:46-49

Jesus invites us to come to Him, to listen to His words, and to do them. All three of those are important, but listening is at the center of that. If we don't hear Jesus's words, then how will we know what to do? Again, you can hear from God in different ways, but putting time into your rhythm to listen to God can strengthen your foundation as a Christian.

REFLECTION: How do you think putting regular listening time into your rhythm would be helpful for you? Or if you already do so, how has it changed your prayer life?

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We aren't the best at listening in general. You can look at our relationships with other people to see that. We are often distracted, or we are too busy thinking about what to say next. The same can be true of our conversations with God. Practically, we need to create space to be able to listen to God. We may need to turn off notifications, close the computer, turn off the TV, or wake up before the kids. It is hard to find solitude in the busyness of life, but it is so important to make time to hear from God. Here is an example of the prophet Elijah listening to God.

SCRIPTURE: READ 1 KINGS 19:9-13

God is a big God. The apostle Paul says that Jesus holds ALL THINGS together. Yet, in this passage that you just read, God chose to speak to the prophet Elijah with a whisper. He could have used anything else, but He chose to whisper.

REFLECTION: What is your reaction to this passage? What does this passage tell you about how you should listen to God?

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REFLECTION: What stops you/has stopped you from making time to listen to God?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Set a timer for any amount of time that you want. Ask God to speak to you and then practice listening in silence until the timer stops. Write down anything that God brings to mind.

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# **WEEK 4: NEW FAMILY**

DAILY DEVOTIONALS

WEEK 4: NEW FAMILY // DAY 1: THE GLOBAL CHURCH

Before Jesus came to earth, God used one nation—the nation of Israel—to be a light of His love to the rest of the world (people who weren't Jewish were called Gentiles). After Jesus ascended into Heaven, the Holy Spirit came and empowered Jesus' followers to go out and spread the Good News of Jesus to every nation—to the Gentiles. It was a part of God's plan from the beginning that Jesus would make a way for everyone to come to Him. Now, through faith, God uses people from every nation, who believe in Him, to be a light to others in the world. He no longer just uses one nation. Acts records that, within a day, thousands of people were added to the number of those who were saved (Acts 2:41). This new group of people was called the "church". The word "church" just means "gathering". It is a gathering of people who identify as disciples of Jesus.

**People of every race, background, and nationality make up the Church.**

SCRIPTURE: READ EPHESIANS 3:1-12

REFLECTION: In your own words, write out why you think God wants the Church to be made up of diverse people.

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SCRIPTURE: READ GALATIANS 3:25-4:7

God describes this new diverse church as one big family. When you place your faith in Jesus, another benefit that you receive is adoption into His family.

**You are adopted into God's big family as daughters or sons of God.**

No matter what your family background looks like, you have a place in God's family. You have brothers and sisters around the world that all share the same inheritance as you do with Jesus. The eternal life that Jesus earned, He shares with us.

REFLECTION: What does family mean to you? How can God's family be a better representation of family?

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SCRIPTURE: READ MATTHEW 16:13-20

In this interaction that Jesus has with Peter, we learn that only Jesus builds His church. Even Peter—one of Jesus' closet followers—shouldn't be confused with Jesus as the one building the Church. You, your pastors, or big-name pastors aren't the ones building the Church. Yes, we get to be a part of what Jesus is building, but we aren't the ones building it.

**Only Jesus could build a movement that spans both centuries and continents.**

Be cautious about falling into the trap of thinking that America is the central piece of the Church. The Church in America is only a small fraction of what Jesus is building across the globe. It would cheapen the work that God is doing if we thought that Jesus was only working in our own country. Jesus' message is strong and powerful, and His Spirit is at work in bigger ways that we could even imagine.

REFLECTION: How does knowing that Jesus is the one building His Church free you up to serve Him with confidence?

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REFLECTION: Think about the scale of the Church. How do you react to that?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Thank God for the work that He is doing around the world.

WEEK 4: NEW FAMILY // DAY 2: NEW CITY CHURCH

The global Church is one big family. However, if you read the New Testament, you see that there are many small churches that made up the one big Church. For instance, the book of Ephesians is written to a church in the city of Ephesus. These local churches were a local gathering led by people within that church. Just like in the New Testament, New City Church is a local gathering of believers—a family—that is led by people who are a part of New City Church. Even though we are own church family, we are not in competition with other churches.

**Every true church serves the same Lord and is on the same mission.**

SCRIPTURE: READ EPHESIANS 4:1-7

REFLECTION: Why do you think that Paul has to remind a local church that they are a part of something greater? Why do churches today also need to remember that?

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SCRIPTURE: READ EPHESIANS 4:11-16

In the local church, God calls certain people to lead it. Those people are not called to do the work of ministry alone. In fact, they are called to train the rest of the church to do ministry. That means you are called to ministry. Everyone who belongs to the church is called to have a role in the church. We will talk about that in more detail tomorrow. However, if people don't engage as the church, then the local church does not work properly. No matter who you are, or how long you've been a Christian, you have a place at New City.

**You belong as a part of New City Church.**

REFLECTION: What does it usually mean to belong to something? Why is it important that you act as if you belong at New City?

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Leaders in the church are called to equip the church for the work of ministry. So what is the work of ministry that we are all called to do? Simply, we are called to make more disciples. In future weeks, we will continue to talk more about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, but for now, we can sum up our mission like this: make disciples.

SCRIPTURE: READ MATTHEW 28:18-20

The mission given to the disciples was to make more disciples wherever they went. Jesus didn't ask them to stop engaging in places in which they already were. He just asked them to represent Him in those places. You are called to represent Jesus wherever you go. You can see where we got our mission statement as a church.

**The mission of New City Church is to make disciples who take the message of Jesus to the places that they live, work, study, and play.**

REFLECTION: What does it mean for you to represent Jesus wherever you go?

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Remember where we started today. You are not alone in your mission. People have a tendency to view this call individualistically. That can feel overwhelming and isolating. You are alongside everyone else at New City Church—and alongside every other Christian in the world. **Re-read Ephesians 4:1-7.**

REFLECTION: How is it encouraging to know that you are a part of something big?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Thank God for the work that He is doing at New City Church.



WEEK 4: NEW FAMILY // DAY 3: CORPORATE GATHERING

Over the next few days, we are going to look at some of things that the local church does. First we gather together. The Book of Acts records how the early church started meeting. In Acts 1, there were about 120 people meeting together. By Acts 2, thousands of people were being added to the church. There were large churches in the early Church. Other churches in the New Testament met within people’s homes, meaning that there were small churches in the early Church. Never is one of these churches considered better than another church. What is clear, is that every church and every believer play a role in God’s Church.

SCRIPTURE: READ ACTS 2:41-47

In the passage that you just read, you can see the tangible effect that the gathering of believers can make. One of the benefits of gathering together as a large group of people is that we get to pull our resources together to help carry out the mission of God.

**Immediately, when people are added to the church, they can start to use their time, talents, and treasures for the good of other people.**

REFLECTION: Verse 7 says, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” How does receiving your gifts for the common good differ from how you usually think about why you receive gifts?

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REFLECTION: How is the Holy Spirit convicting you to use your time, talents, and/or treasure for the good of others?

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SCRIPTURE: READ HEBREWS 10:23-25

Gathering together as a group isn’t just important for the good of others, it is also important to our own emotional health. If someone doesn’t gather with other Christians, then it is likely that the person will start to feel lonely and isolated. Coming together as a large group should be an encouragement. Social science even backs this up.

*“One of the most striking scientific discoveries about religion in recent years is that going to church weekly is good for you. Religious attendance...boosts the immune system and decreases blood pressure. It may add as much as two to three years to your life.” - T.M. Luhrmann, New York Times*

We can’t promise that church is going to add years to your life, but gathering together with other Christians has many benefits for you personally. Being around others who care for you is good for your holistic health.

**Regular church involvement is good for you personally.**

REFLECTION: Why do you think gathering with other Christians is good for your health?

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REFLECTION: Some people have experienced church in a way that is uncaring or unhealthy. Why is it important to know that isn’t the heart of God?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Pray for wisdom for New City Church to use its resources for the common good.

WEEK 4: NEW FAMILY // DAY 4: WORSHIP TOGETHER

The biggest function of the local church is to glorify God. Another way that we could say that is that the local church gathers together to worship God. Many of the practices, with which the Christian Church began, came from Old Testament Judaism. The Jewish people had many different festivals and celebrations which were a part of their worship to God. These celebrations would draw the entire nation together as they remembered the works of God. In some ways, that's exactly what the Sunday Worship service is at New City.

**We gather together, as a large body, to worship God by celebrating and remembering His works.**

SCRIPTURE: READ PSALM 96

REFLECTION: What works of God make you feel most worshipful?

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There is something special about gathering with other Christians and worshipping God together. The two primary ways that we worship together at New City is through singing and reading the Scripture. We sing songs that praise God for who He is and for the works that He has done. We read Scripture that incites awe, wonder, and love of God in our hearts.

**Worship is feeling or expressing reverence to God.**

SCRIPTURE: READ COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

REFLECTION: How does being in the presence of other Christians worshipping God incite worship in you?

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Worship can happen alone, or in groups. Worship can happen in a building, or in nature. Worship can happen in silence, or in loud expressions. Anything that causes you to feel reverence to God can be used to worship.

**You can worship anywhere.**

REFLECTION: Describe a time when you have worshipped God in an unusual place.

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SCRIPTURE: READ REVELATION 22:1-5

Christians can look forward to a day when they will eternally and perfectly worship Jesus with every other Christian from all time. Jesus will establish a New Heaven and a New Earth. There will be no sin, and there will be no effects of sin in this perfect state (this should sound like God's intention for humanity in the Garden of Eden).

**When we worship Jesus today, we look forward to a day when Jesus will establish a new and perfect creation.**

REFLECTION: How does knowing that this perfect day will come cause you to feel a sense of worship today?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Thank God for the future hope of a perfect state with Him.

WEEK 4: NEW FAMILY // DAY 5: TEACHING

In today's context, there are many different ways to consume teaching from the Scripture. People can listen to podcasts from pastors across the world, they can watch live church services from the comfort of their own bed, or they can read books from influential church leaders. These mediums aren't bad ways to hear teaching from God's Word. However, nothing substitutes hearing from a local pastor with whom you've committed to doing life as a part of the same community.

SCRIPTURE: READ HEBREWS 13:1-9

REFLECTION: Why is being faithful to Scripture and understanding the local culture important?

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Part of what local pastors are called to do is to protect the church from being led away by "diverse and strange" teachings. This means a pastor not only draws from the Scripture, but also tries to understand the culture in which you both are living. Scripture speaks to every area of life, but life is experienced differently in different contexts.

**Your church leaders have a responsibility to communicate messages that are both biblically sound and practically helpful.**

SCRIPTURE: READ 1 PETER 5:1-11

The apostle Peter wrote to one of the local churches in his region. He concludes his letter by addressing the leaders in the church. The words "elder" and "shepherd" refer to the elders and pastors in the church. Peter tells them that they need to guide the church through their own example. A pastor's role to teach doesn't just happen through preaching, but also by sharing their own life as an example.

**Your church leaders are trying to live out the Christian life just like you are.**

REFLECTION: Why do you think both the writer of Hebrews and the apostle Peter talk about pastors setting an example to their flock?

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Church leaders should not be leading solely out of their own mind or strength. Peter says that they should be letting the chief Shepherd lead them. That chief Shepherd is Jesus. Remember, He is the one who is ultimately building His church. Local church pastors and leaders should lead out of allowing Jesus to lead them personally.

SCRIPTURE: READ HEBREWS 13:14-19

Picking up where we left off a couple minutes ago, the writer of Hebrews continues to write about the leaders in the church. While Jesus ultimately builds His church, Peter says that church leaders are going to give an account to God for the ways in which they keep watch over the souls of people in their church.

**Pastors will give an account to God regarding how they lead their church.**

REFLECTION: How would you understand the writer of Hebrews saying that church leaders are "to keep watch over your soul"?

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REFLECTION: How does it change your view of your pastors, knowing that they will give an account to God for how they lead the church?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Ask God to guide your church leaders.

# **WEEK 5: NEW FAMILY**

DAILY DEVOTIONALS

WEEK 5: NEW FAMILY // DAY 1: WHAT? TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER

When Christians are adopted into this new family, called the Church, the importance of relational connection within this family cannot be overstated. We need each other in this family of God. This is obvious from both our created design and from the blueprints given to us by Jesus. Let's start with the creation design.

SCRIPTURE: READ GENESIS 2:18-22

This passage is the creation account of Eve. Up until then Adam had been alone in this perfect garden. If you remember, God had called everything "good". Creation was in a perfect state of "good-ness"—except one thing, that Adam was alone. In the perfect creation, God said that it was "not good" that man was alone. It's true that God goes on to describe the marriage oneness between Adam and Eve; however, the principle extends beyond marriage. Humans are highly relational beings. We weren't created to be alone.

**People were created to be in relationship with other people.**

REFLECTION: What benefits of living in communal relationship with others can you list?

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SCRIPTURE: READ 1 JOHN 4:7-21

Part of being a disciple of Jesus is to love other disciples of Jesus. Jesus doesn't give it to us as an option. He commands us to love one another because of the love that He has already shown to us personally. This means, in order to show love to one another, we have to be around each other! That might seem obvious, but how often can it be easy to talk about caring for others, but then we don't have to really love others because we don't spend time with them. One of the primary ways that we live in relationship with others at New City is through our community groups.

**Christians are commanded to love other Christians.**

REFLECTION: How have you avoided community with other Christians because it is difficult to actually live in love with people that you are around?

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REFLECTION: What is your reaction to how strongly the apostle John describes the Christian's call to love?

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Most people would describe love as a feeling. They would say that they "feel loved" or that they "just fell out of love" with someone. This is not how the Bible describes love. The Bible describes love as an action. Love is something that we do. Jesus ultimately showed us love in the form of action by giving up His life for us. By asking us to love one another, Jesus isn't asking us to do something that He wouldn't do Himself. But again, we have to be around each other in order to love one another.

SCRIPTURE: READ 1 JOHN 3:16-18

**Love requires action in order to truly be love.**

REFLECTION: How does your perspective on love need to shift?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Ask God for strength to love others.

WEEK 5: NEW FAMILY // DAY 2: WHY? TO SHOW THE WORLD JESUS

Yesterday, we explored how God calls His followers to love one another. Love is not a feeling, but an action—an action that Jesus himself set as an example for us. It's true that, as a Christian, we are supposed to care for people who don't follow Jesus; however, most of the "love one another" passages are directed at Christians loving other Christians. That can be shocking for most people to realize. Why would God primarily ask us to love others within the Church? Does He not care for those outside the Church? Let's look at what Jesus says.

SCRIPTURE: READ JOHN 13:31-35

God does care for those outside the church. In fact, caring for those outside the Church is the primary reason that God commands Christians to love others within the Church. People should see that we are disciples of Jesus by the manner in which we love each other. The ways that we interact with each other, the ways that we take care of each other, and the ways that we forgive each other should all point to Jesus. Imagine a world where Christians treated each other the same way Jesus treated them first. That's a world that would be attractive. People would want to be a part of what we are doing. People would want a piece of the love that we share with each other. Like we said yesterday, community groups at New City are a direct place where we can live with people in this manner of love.

**Christians loving each other should be attractive to non-Christians.**

REFLECTION: How would you describe the current attractiveness of Christianity when you look at the global Church?

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The passage that you are about to read is set during the dinner that Jesus shared with His closest disciples on the night before He is executed. The entire chapter of John 17 is a prayer that Jesus prays over His disciples. (If you have time, you should read the whole prayer.)

SCRIPTURE: READ 1 JOHN 4:7-21

One of the main themes in this prayer is unity. Jesus wants His disciples to be united with each other. Unity doesn't mean uniformity, but unity does mean that we need to work through our differences in love. The love of Jesus is the binding force in our unity.

In order to be united, we must love one another. Imagine the questions that we would get from non-Christians if we truly lived in this type of unity. We would always be able to direct our answers back to the love and example of Jesus. This is what Jesus envisions when He prays the prayer you just read. In the prayer, He also gives us the reason why we should be united. He prays that we would be one, **so that** the world may know that the Father sent Jesus and loved us, even as the Father loved Jesus.

**Christian love should be a witness to non-Christians.**

REFLECTION: Could you describe how you love other Christians as a witness to Jesus's love?

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REFLECTION: As a point of reminder, write out how Jesus showed you love.

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REFLECTION: Who is someone that you have a hard time loving? Write out a prayer for them here.

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PRAYER PROMPT: Ask God for unity and love to permeate New City Church.

WEEK 5: NEW FAMILY // DAY 3: WHY? FOR ENCOURAGEMENT

As we already explored on day one of this week, we are created to be in relational community with each other. No one is meant to live life alone or to be isolated. Toward the end of the apostle Paul's life, he shared a personal experience regarding why it is important to be in relationship with others.

SCRIPTURE: READ PHILIPPIANS 1:19-28

Paul was writing this passage from prison. He thought for sure that his fate was that of martyrdom. However he was encouraged. Even with such a bleak outlook ahead, just knowing that the Philippian church was praying for him, helped strengthen him. Their prayers were so encouraging to Paul that he hoped to get out of prison just to return the encouragement to their church.

**To both provide and receive encouragement, you have to be around other people.**

REFLECTION: Reflect on a time when someone genuinely encouraged you through their prayers for you. How did that experience feel?

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Followers of Jesus can look forward to a day when all the hurts and effects of sin will no longer be present in our lives. Until then, we will all experience pain. We will all face moments of discouragement. Christians are not immune to pain just because they believe in Jesus. In fact, Christians may face more discomfort than non-Christians, because Christians will face scorn and persecution from people who are against the way of Christ. Thankfully, Christians have hope. We have the Holy Spirit to comfort us, and we have the example of Jesus, who was faithful in the ultimate persecution. But we have even more than that! We have each other. Christians should never be isolated. If you feel isolated, then ask yourself—and ask God—how you can start building true community.

**Disciples of Jesus are called to encourage each other as a regular habit.**

REFLECTION: List some ways that your community could encourage each other. If you are not in community, then what can you do to find that community?

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SCRIPTURE: READ ROMANS 15:1-7

Once again, the example of Christ is what motivates us to encourage one another. Jesus welcomed us when we were enemies of Him. We, too, should welcome one another. Even if we disagree, we should seek to work through our differences and live in harmony with each other. Being in a regular community with other Christians won't always be easy, but we are called to work through our differences and build each other up.

**It is such a beautiful picture of Jesus's message to see people with differences work through their differences and build each other up in love.**

REFLECTION: How do words from someone who's different from you encourage you even more than words from someone who is just like you?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Ask God to bring someone specific to mind whom you can encourage. What can you do to encourage them?

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WEEK 5: NEW FAMILY // DAY 4: WHY? FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Today, we are going to explore another reason why Christians should be in a loving community with other Christians. The reasons that we've looked at so far are: 1) to be a witness and 2) for encouragement. Most people can get excited about those reasons, but today's reason might feel a little less popular for some. Christians need a loving community of other Christians for accountability. You need accountability to help remind you what it looks like to imitate Jesus. You also need to help keep others accountable to their own discipleship process. Let's look at how Jesus describes it.

SCRIPTURE: READ MATTHEW 7:1-5

REFLECTION: What is your initial gut reaction to the concept of accountability?

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Most people would read this and say that they have no business looking into someone else's life. To prove that, flip it around. If someone told you that you've stepped outside of what is appropriate for a disciple of Jesus, then you'd probably be quick to say, "Don't judge me!" The message that Jesus is telling us in the above passage is that we should not judge someone else **out of a place of hypocrisy**. But then, once we've examined our own life, Jesus says that we **should** "take the speck out" of our brother or sister's eye. Paul picks up the same theme in his letter to the Corinthian church.

SCRIPTURE: READ 1 CORINTHIANS 5:9-13

Paul tells the church, to actually judge each other (again, without hypocrisy). Where the church has no business judging people are those who are outside the church. Those outside the church have no standard of discipleship, so there is nothing to which we can hold them. But the church does have a standard of discipleship—Jesus Himself.

**Your Christian community is called to keep those in it accountable to the way of Jesus.**

REFLECTION: How have you seen Christians judge those outside the church more than those inside the church?

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If we are called to keep each other accountable, then how should we go about approaching a brother or sister whom needs accountability? Jesus gives us a model that is best for everyone involved.

SCRIPTURE: READ MATTHEW 18:15-20

REFLECTION: In what ways does Jesus's model of approaching someone have so much wisdom in it?

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The temptation for people when practicing accountability is to view, or treat, others like they are better—this is hypocrisy. This mindset has no place in the family of God because we are all equally "in Christ".

**We must approach others with a spirit of humility, love, and gentleness.**

SCRIPTURE: READ GALATIANS 6:1-5

REFLECTION: What steps do you need to take to start practicing accountability?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Ask God for humility.



WEEK 5: NEW FAMILY // DAY 5: HOW? COMMITMENT

All of us should be in loving Christian community. But community is hard. Sure it's fun to make new friends, but living in community gets hard once we start to act like this new family that God describes. The new family, that we've been adopted into, should be built on the perfect love of Christ. Much like in families of origin, the people who make up this family are broken and naturally don't want to live with Christ's love toward each other. We hurt each other, we abandon each other, and we close off in protection of ourselves. Some of this behavior will happen. Even in what we talked about yesterday—Jesus's model of approaching someone who has sinned against you—this happens. When an unrepentant offender abandons the way of the family, then they are treated as if they are outside the family. When God's family operates in its design, everyone should be committed to loving others even when relationships get difficult.

**Being adopted into God's family requires commitment to your brothers and sisters.**

SCRIPTURE: READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-31

REFLECTION: Where do you see commitment to one another in the passage that you just read?

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Everyone has a voice in God's family. No matter gender, class, education, or race, we should be committed to hearing each other's voice. Rather than doing the hard work of working through our differences, we have the tendency to want to abandon the family of God with which we've been doing life (we could also say our "community"). If the community calls out our sin, we usually would rather get defensive, angry, and go find a new community. Let's face it, running away from accountability is easier than facing our sin. But sin always comes to light. Unhealthy behavior always resurfaces. Either the new community will find out at some point, or the new community won't care about you enough to bring the sin to light.

**Running from community to keep your sin in darkness only hurts you for longer.**

REFLECTION: How have you tried to hide from community to keep sin hidden?

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Paul uses the metaphor of our personal body to refer to the church family. Every person is a part of the body and is important to the wholeness of the body. In our physical bodies, if a particular body part is cancerous or broken beyond repair, then it is removed. However, that is a last resort. The medical goal is to repair the body back to its state of wholeness. This same goal, but spiritually, should be the approach to our church body.

**If relationships are broken, they should seek repair before amputation.**

REFLECTION: When do you think it is appropriate for relationships to be cut off?

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Paul goes on to describe how the church should love each other. As we've talked about, love is an action. The way that Paul describes love is the way that we need to live with one another—especially as the church family to whom we are committed.

SCRIPTURE: READ 1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-7

REFLECTION: When do you think relationships should "bear all things"?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Ask God to help your commitment to your church family.

# **WEEK 6: NEW PRIORITIES**

DAILY DEVOTIONALS

WEEK 6: NEW PRIORITIES // DAY 1: GOD OWNS EVERYTHING

Everyone has priorities. Maybe for you, they are work, family, sports, or achieving a certain lifestyle. Whatever they might be, you have priorities. Or maybe you have things that you want to prioritize, but practically you are unable to do so because other things take their place. (As we'll look at this week, to figure out your own priorities, a helpful gauge is to look at where your money and your time go.)

REFLECTION: Try to honestly list your top five priorities in life. Do your practical priorities match the priorities that you want in your life?

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Tomorrow, we will talk about what God says about your money. But first, we need to answer the question of why we should even let God into the conversation about how to handle our money.

SCRIPTURE: READ COLOSSIANS 1:15-23

In week one we talked about how God created the world and everything in it. In the above passage, Paul reminds us about Jesus's role in creation. Paul not only says that Jesus created all things, but Paul also takes it a step further. He says that Jesus currently sustains all things. This means that God didn't just create the world and walk away. He is currently active within it.

**God created everything, and God owns everything.**

REFLECTION: Why is necessary to be reminded about how Jesus is still active in creation?

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SCRIPTURE: READ HEBREWS 1:1-12

The writer of Hebrews also highlights the fact that Jesus created and currently sustains the world. Most Christians are comfortable with the fact that Jesus created the world, but people get tripped up when they learn that Jesus continues to uphold it. They start to look at injustice and wonder why Jesus doesn't stop it. The writer of Hebrews foresees this question and highlights how Jesus is righteous and just.

**Jesus desires righteousness and justice in His creation.**

REFLECTION: When you look at the world around you, why do you need to remind yourself that God is good and that He desires righteousness and justice in creation?

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SCRIPTURE: READ PSALM 24:1-2

So what does all this have to do with our money? God—who is a good God—gave you everything that you have. He gave you your time. He gave you the talents to work. He led you to your job. It's easy to think that you orchestrated all of that yourself, but in reality, God did. God gave you the mind to be educated. God gave you the connections to the person that hired you. God gives you everything that you have.

**Every good thing that you've been given comes from God.**

REFLECTION: With one word answers, write out anything that you believe is a gift.

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PRAYER PROMPT: Thank God for the things that He has given you.

WEEK 6: NEW PRIORITIES // DAY 2: HEART FOLLOWS TREASURE

As a Christian, God calls you to have new priorities. He knows that you will put your money toward the things that you prioritize, so He has much to say about your money. Money is one of the things that Jesus talks about most.

SCRIPTURE: READ MATTHEW 6:19-24

Your heart is the center of who you are. The way Jesus describes the heart is like a mixture of your heart and your brain. It is the essence of life in terms of thinking, willing, and feeling. The heart forms the center of one's affections and commitments. Thoughts, feelings, passions, desires all originate in the heart. From this baseline, Jesus makes the jump to money. He says that where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. In essence, if you want Jesus to tell you where your priorities are found, then look at your bank account.

**Your heart always follows your treasure.**

REFLECTION: Take an honest look at your bank account. Write down the top three places where your money goes.

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REFLECTION: Through what your bank account says, where are your priorities, according to Jesus? Are you encouraged or discouraged with yourself?

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Jesus seemingly says this out of the nowhere: "You cannot serve God and money." Jesus is trying to point us to the only true source of hope—Him. He doesn't want to

compete for our allegiance. He doesn't want to compete for our trust. If we put our priority into our money, then how sad will it be when one day all the things that we stored up on this earth will be gone? Jesus tells us to do something radical. He tells us to store up our treasure in heaven, rather than on the earth. But what does that mean, and how do we do that?

**We store up treasure in heaven through selfless living.**

Here are just some examples of selfless living:

- Doing good works - Ephesians 6:8; Romans 2:6
- Persevering under persecution - Luke 6:22-23
- Showing compassion to the needy - Luke 14
- Supporting widows and orphans - James 1:27
- Giving to your local church (tithing) - Malachi 3; Matt. 23:23

REFLECTION: How does living selflessly with your time and money show that you trust in Jesus more than you trust in yourself?

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We don't earn our salvation, but Jesus asks us to live selflessly. He set the example for us by being selfless for us. 2 Corinthians 8:9 says this about Jesus, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."

REFLECTION: Putting everything from today together, how do think Jesus redefines what it means to be rich—both in what He calls us to do and in what He did for us?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Ask God for courage to live selflessly with your time and money.

WEEK 6: NEW PRIORITIES // DAY 3: STEWARDING OUR RESOURCES

Many people think that the Bible says, “Money is the root of all evil.” The Bible never says that. God isn’t anti-money. The rich are not condemned for having money. He doesn’t want His children to owe anyone anything (Romans 13:8)—meaning that we should seek to live debt-free. However, with all that being said, those who are rich are often challenged in the Bible more strongly than anyone else. Read Jesus’s interaction with the “rich, young ruler” here.

SCRIPTURE: READ LUKE 18:18-30

REFLECTION: What are your initial reactions to this story?

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This rich ruler had everything that one could want—except escaping death. He knew that he was missing something, so he came to Jesus seeking eternal life. He believed Jesus to be God, but there was a fatal flaw in his question. He asked, “What must I **do**?”. Doing good doesn’t necessarily mean that someone loves Jesus. Jesus went directly to the rich ruler’s true need and addressed that.

**Jesus always gets to the root of the problem—the sin beneath the sin.**

The root cause of the rich ruler’s issues was not **what** he did, but **why** he did what he did. Nowhere in Scripture are we commanded to sell all that we have and give it to the poor. The “one thing” that he lacked wasn’t doing something more. The thing he lacked was a trust in God that would allow him to abandon all of his old identity and follow Jesus. Jesus said it is difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom. Why? The poor often have the myth of control removed from them in this life. They usually understand the concept of letting go of their identity much “easier.” Jesus is saying that it is “impossible” for anyone who can’t give up control of their identity to enter the kingdom.

**Anyone, rich or poor, who can’t give up control in this life, can’t enter the kingdom.**

REFLECTION: Based on your experience, in what ways have you seen how quickly money makes you feel like you are in—or not in—control?

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SCRIPTURE: READ 1 TIMOTHY 6:3-16

Paul describes the “love of money” as the root of all kinds of evil. Money can be used for good, but the love of money is often used to wield evil. Ecclesiastes 5:8 tells us,

**“Those who love money will never be satisfied with enough money.”**

REFLECTION: Why do you think people can never get enough money? How could the love of money separate people relationally?

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Some of you who have money may be feeling like God doesn’t want you to have money after the last two days. A good practice for you should be to regularly ask God what He wants you to do with your money. Be willing to listen. He may ask you to do something radical. Let’s finish today by looking at how Paul asks people to act, whom he describes as “rich” (remember being rich isn’t a sin).

SCRIPTURE: READ 1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19

REFLECTION: Pointedly ask God what He wants you to do with your money. Write out what you feel like He is telling you.

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WEEK 6: NEW PRIORITIES // DAY 4: TITHING TO THE CHURCH

The wisdom writer, in the book of Proverbs, writes about the wisdom in giving. He commands the reader to “Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all you produce” (Proverbs 3:9). Later on, he continues the teaching on giving: “One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.” (Proverbs 11:24)

Jesus also shares the same teaching as the wisdom writer. He says, “Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.” (Luke 6:38)

One of the ways in which we can give is through giving to the church—called tithing. The word tithe means “a tenth”. The tithe is an Old Testament concept that goes all the way back to Genesis. Rabbis in the New Testament period understood the tithing laws to refer to three separate tithes: a tithe to provide for priests, a tithe spent on celebrating at the temple, and a charity tithe. Some people say that Jesus didn’t talk about tithing, but He actually mentions it in Luke. He says, “Woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.” - Luke 11:42

**Jesus reminds us not to neglect tithing.**

The following are some common reasons why people don’t tithe:

- 1) No one sees if I tithe or if I don’t tithe.
- 2) I can’t afford to tithe.
- 3) I earned the money, so I deserve it.
- 4) I don’t trust the church with my money.
- 5) I didn’t get blessed afterwards.
- 6) I don’t really trust that God will provide for me.

REFLECTION: Which one of these reasons resonates with you the most (the reason that keeps you from tithing or makes tithing difficult for you)?

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SCRIPTURE: READ 2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-15

In this passage, the Corinthian church directly blessed the Macedonian church when the Macedonians were in need. What an example of the good that can be done when a local church pools it’s financial resources! This is what we do when we tithe to the

church. Paul doesn’t want the Corinthians to be burdened, but he does ask for them, as a church, to help their brothers and sisters in need. Giving to the church might not feel like it provides a return on investment because we can’t measure everything that a church does. Some organizations can measure life change by how many houses they build (intervention), but the church can’t easily measure how people’s lives change by being a part of a local church (prevention).

REFLECTION: Try to imagine what would happen if the church left the neighborhood. How does that help you realize the importance of tithing to the church?

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REFLECTION: Considering only about 15-25% of church attenders regularly tithe, how much more could the church accomplish if we all took tithing seriously?

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SCRIPTURE: READ 2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-15

REFLECTION: How is it possible to balance the command to give, yet not feel under compulsion to give?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Ask God what your tithe should look like.

WEEK 6: NEW PRIORITIES // DAY 5: STEWARDING OUR TIME

It could be argued that time is the most valuable resource that you possess. Almost every other resource or possession you can get back or get more of said resource.

**Time is precious because you can neither get it back nor get more of it.**

Reading this truth might cause some of you deep pain because you feel like you have wasted the time that you've been given. (Take heart in what God says, "For I will be merciful toward your iniquities, and I will remember your sins no more." [Hebrews 8:12]. There is forgiveness for anything in your past.) For others, you haven't realized the value of time yet. Whichever feeling that you have, time isn't slowing down for you. Because of this, God has some things to say about how we use this precious commodity.

SCRIPTURE: READ JAMES 4:13-17

REFLECTION: How do you react to seeing your life in comparison to mist or vapor which disappears quickly? In what ways have you been reminded of this in your life?

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SCRIPTURE: READ MATTHEW 6:25-34

Jesus tells us to spend the time that we've been given on kingdom living, not earthly living. Most of us spend a majority of our energy seeking to make our earthly life as comfortable as possible. Meaning, we overwork so that we can spend money lavishly; or we over-worry because we fear that we won't have enough money to match the lifestyle that we want. Ultimately, what we are really doing, is trying to take control of our time. According to James, we can't control the time that we have. According to Jesus, we should invest our time in living a life that matters—kingdom living.

**Kingdom living means relinquishing control of your time to Jesus.**

REFLECTION: What does "relinquishing control of your time to Jesus" mean to you? According to your calendar, do you make time to relinquish control of your time to Jesus?

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REFLECTION: Where, in your life, can you put more time into kingdom living and pursuing righteousness?

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If we end our teaching on time here, it might feel like God is against light-hearted fun. It might seem like we are only supposed to spend our time doing serious things. The wisdom writer, in Ecclesiastes, shares wisdom regarding how we can spend our time.

SCRIPTURE: READ ECCLESIASTES 3:1-13

The wisdom writer says that there is a time for everything—an argument to keep a balanced calendar. However, he said that it is God's gift to humanity to take enjoyment in our life. If we look at the overarching story starting from creation, this make sense. God wants us to flourish.

**God wants the earth to be a place where we can all find complete joy in relationship with Him.**

REFLECTION: How can you put more fun, or rest, into your calendar?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Ask God for wisdom in stewarding the time that you have.

# **WEEK 7: NEW PRIORITIES**

DAILY DEVOTIONALS



WEEK 7: NEW PRIORITIES // DAY 1: JESUS'S CALL TO SERVE

Last week, we started talking about how our priorities change once we start following Jesus. This week, we will continue to explore how God asks us to use our time and our talents. If most people were to be honest, they would probably find that they use their time and their talents for their own benefit.

REFLECTION: Try to think about how you—indirectly or directly—use your time and talents for your own benefit. Write what you find here.

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Even Jesus's disciples were not immune to the tendency to seek their own benefit over the benefit of others. Imagine the following setting. The disciples are walking behind Jesus. They think that they can talk in private, so they begin to argue with each other about which one of them is the greatest.

SCRIPTURE: READ MARK 9:33-37

You can't hide anything from Jesus. He quickly addressed how the disciples hoped for notoriety and power over others. Like Jesus always does, He turned the natural way of doing things upside down. He told the disciples—and subsequently us—that the way to greatness in the kingdom is by serving, not by seeking to be great.

**Being a disciple of Jesus doesn't mean seeking to be first, but seeking to serve first.**

REFLECTION: What are some ways that you can remind yourself to intentionally serve others?

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Apparently, Jesus's words didn't sink in for the disciples. Only one chapter later, Mark recorded an interaction very similar to the one that you just read. Here we have another example of where some of Jesus's disciples sought greatness.

SCRIPTURE: READ MARK 10:35-45

Maybe Mark shares another interaction because he knows that we are all bent to act like the disciples did? James and John asked Jesus to give them privilege over the other disciples. They wanted the seat of honor next to Jesus. But, once again, Jesus reiterates that in order to be great in the Kingdom, one must serve.

REFLECTION: What leader have you respected most? What made her or him great in your mind? How did they model service like Jesus commands?

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Jesus's words probably came as a shock to the disciples because many of them left everything in order to follow Jesus. You could say that they were already serving! However, the motivation to serve should be out of love, not out of a false humility. Jesus shared another similar story to remind us how important it is to be humble.

**The key to serving is to view yourself as no better than other people.**

SCRIPTURE: READ LUKE 18:9-14

REFLECTION: By viewing yourself as better than others, how does that lead you to use others for your gain rather than to serve others?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Pray for opportunity to serve someone today.

## WEEK 7: NEW PRIORITIES // DAY 2: JESUS'S EXAMPLE

Jesus calls His followers to live with serving as a new priority in His kingdom. As disciples of Jesus, He is our Master. Ultimately, we serve Jesus. And just like with any master, Jesus has to inspire people to be motivated to serve. The way that Jesus inspires His followers is by setting an example of humility.

**However Jesus asks you to serve, He has already gone further through His own example of serving you.**

SCRIPTURE: READ PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

REFLECTION: In your own words, describe how Jesus modeled humility, just by leaving heaven and coming to earth as a human?

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Human masters often ask people to serve in areas where they aren't willing to go themselves. That isn't the way of the kingdom. Jesus shows us what kingdom-living looks like as the ultimate master. He doesn't ask us to serve/sacrifice without being willing to do so Himself.

**Remember that with Jesus's request to serve, Jesus sacrificed Himself first for your own good.**

REFLECTION: Why do you think the apostle Paul asks us to remember Jesus's example when telling us to keep other's interests in mind?

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Jesus gave the ultimate sacrifice for us. He gave His life through death. But that was part of the plan from the beginning. In some ways, someone might argue that it was easier for Him to give the ultimate sacrifice—death—because He believed in the cause. But Jesus didn't just serve by giving up His life! He also radically served others when He walked on the earth.

SCRIPTURE: READ JOHN 13:1-16

The scene that unfolded was shocking. Jesus—the one who created everything—got down and washed the feet of His friends before dinner. These were not clean feet either! Imagine walking around on dirt roads all day with nothing but sandals on your feet. (Those would be some dirty feet.) His disciples knew that Jesus had no business washing their feet. Yet, Jesus did it anyway. He did it to show the type of life that He wanted His disciples to live. That's true humility, and that's true love!

**Jesus used His position of power to serve those who were subject to Him.**

REFLECTION: Have you ever been served by someone who "shouldn't" have served you? How did that act of service impact you?

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REFLECTION: How can you use your position of power, status, or influence to serve someone today?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Pray for opportunity to serve someone today.

WEEK 7: NEW PRIORITIES // DAY 3: EVERYONE GIVEN A GIFT

Over the last two days, we talked about our call to serve. But how do we practically serve? What does that look like? Jesus is our ultimate Master, so ultimately we serve Him. But the primary way in which we serve God is by serving each other.

**God equips every one of His children with gifts with which to serve the body and subsequently the world.**

SCRIPTURE: READ ROMANS 12:3-8

Paul says that God's Church is made up of many people who are "individually members one of another". He goes on to say that those individual members, who make up the Church, have gifts that differ from each other.

REFLECTION: What does "individually members one of another" mean to you?

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**Gifts are special talents or a special empowering from the Holy Spirit that we should use to serve one another.**

Most of the time, when we think of a gift, we think of something that was given to us for our own personal benefit. Jesus already made it clear to us that we should be seeking the benefit of others. Paul picks up the same theme in the above passage. He says that we must use our gifts. Every one and every gift is important in God's family. As a church, we need the diversity of people and the diversity of gifts in order to be complete.

SCRIPTURE: READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-20

Think about a gift that you received from someone. You probably are thinking about a gift that stands out to you because you liked that gift more or less than other gifts that you've received. We tend to view our own spiritual gifts like this. We compare gifts and view some as better than others. This gets especially dangerous because those gifts are tied to people, and we start comparing people as better than others. That isn't the way of the kingdom. That isn't the way of love. Paul says that all gifts are important.

REFLECTION: When you look at the church, it is tempting to view gifts like preaching or evangelism as better than gifts of generosity or mercy. Why are all gifts equally as important to the health of the church?

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So how does one find what her or his gifts are? If you are asking this question, you aren't alone. Christians around the globe ask this question so often that you can even find spiritual gift tests online. Some people feel like they are helpful. Others don't find them helpful. Probably the most sure way to find your gifts is to start serving.

**You can learn how God has gifted you when you serve.**

REFLECTION: What are some talents or perspectives that you feel like God has uniquely given to you?

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REFLECTION: Think about how God has gifted someone else. How is your role just as important as his or her role?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Pray for an opportunity to serve someone today.

WEEK 7: NEW PRIORITIES // DAY 4: FOR BUILDING UP THE BODY

SCRIPTURE: READ ROMANS 12:9-13

This passage comes right after Paul talks about spiritual gifts. Yesterday, we explored how all people are important—and all gifts are important. It is no accident that Paul directly links our spiritual gifts to loving one another, serving the Lord, and serving each other. In fact, Paul encourages us to use our gifts in some healthy competition. Again, this isn't a competition of whose gifts are better; but he encourages us to “compete” with each other by outdoing one another through showing each other honor.

**All spiritual gifts are used for the same purpose—to build up the body of Christ.**

REFLECTION: What do you think Paul means when he says that we should “outdo one another in showing honor”?

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It's hard to see people's motives behind serving. Ultimately, we are not called to judge motives—that's Jesus's job. But if people do not follow Jesus's leading, many of the motives that people have to serve others are actually self-serving. (It's true that there will be kind people who seek the good of others even though they do not know Jesus.) But even in our motivations for good works, the Church is supposed to be counter-cultural.

**The Church should serve each other out of love, not out of self-promotion.**

REFLECTION: How could serving someone actually be done in a self-serving way? How does this subversively tear down the body, rather than building the body up?

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SCRIPTURE: 1 PETER 4:7-11

As you know, working or serving alongside others isn't always easy. However, when we view what we are doing for the good of someone else, then the apostle Peter says that it “covers a multitude of sins”. Try it. If someone is especially annoying to you, seek their good by listening to them and praying for them. Go even as far as to serve them with your gifts. See how that changes your perspective on that person. Imagine how much glory it must bring to God to see His children loving each other with the love that He showed first.

**When the whole body of Christ works together, the Church is strengthened and God is glorified.**

REFLECTION: Who is someone with which you especially have a difficult time interacting? Write out some ways that you can serve that person.

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REFLECTION: How is serving at church a way of loving your neighbor?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Pray for an opportunity to serve someone today.

WEEK 7: NEW PRIORITIES // DAY 5: SERVING AT NEW CITY

REFLECTION: The prayer prompt all week was to ask God for an opportunity to serve someone. How was that experience?

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Since Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, humanity has been pushing their responsibilities to someone else. Adam pushed his responsibility to Eve. Eve pushed her responsibility to the serpent. We are no different. The apostle Paul knows this about us.

SCRIPTURE: GALATIANS 6:5 says, "For each will have to bear his own load."

SCRIPTURE: READ GALATIANS 5:13-15

If you aren't building others up with your gifts, then you are probably using your gifts as an opportunity for your own flesh. Paul refers to this type of selfish living in the church as "devouring" someone else. What does he mean? How we say this today is that someone who doesn't get involved in the church is being "a consumer". If you go to church without getting involved, then you are just a consumer. You are devouring someone else's gifts and talents.

**To keep from being a consumer, you must get involved and serve alongside others.**

REFLECTION: What is your experience being a consumer? Did you feel satisfied? [And/or] What is your experience with others being a consumer?

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New City Church is a local body of believers that is made up of different people with different gifts. Every one of those people and gifts are important. Every person is important to the wholeness of the church. In other words, New City Church needs you in order to be complete. There are many ways to get involved serving at New City. For example, we have a variety of ministries like the Host Team, Student Ministry, New City Kids, Community Groups, Worship and Arts, and Justice and Care Initiatives. All of those areas are vital to the whole of our church, because they all care for people in different ways.

REFLECTION: Where could you start serving at New City? [Or] How has serving in the local church grown you in your faith?

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It's true that the Church needs you, but the Church also wants something for you. It is not good for you to sit idly by watching. To use a sports analogy, a game becomes much more real to you if you become a participant rather than just a spectator. To use a geography analogy, a body of water that only has an inlet, with no outlet, becomes stagnant (for example, the Dead Sea in Israel). Serving is for your own good.

**To grow in your faith, you need an outlet. You need to become a participant, rather than just a spectator.**

REFLECTION: Have you experienced growth in your faith while serving? If so, describe what that growth looked like.

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PRAYER PROMPT: Pray for an opportunity to serve someone today.

# **WEEK 8: NEW MISSION**

DAILY DEVOTIONALS

WEEK 8: NEW MISSION // DAY 1: MAKE DISCIPLES

Back in week four, we briefly described our mission as a church. Followers of Jesus are called to a mission—that is, to make disciples. **What** we do will always be in an effort to make disciples.

SCRIPTURE: READ MATTHEW 28:18-20

Another way to describe what Matthew is saying is like this: "As you are going, **make disciples**". The mission given to the disciples was to make more disciples wherever they went. Jesus didn't ask them to stop engaging in places in which they already were. He just asked them to represent Him in those places. You are called to represent Jesus wherever you go—wherever you live, work, study, or play.

**New City Church exists to make disciples who take the message of Jesus to the places that they live, work, study, and play.**

REFLECTION: In your experience, why is it important to constantly keep the mission in focus?

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SCRIPTURE: READ ACTS 1:1-11

When Jesus commissioned the disciples, He was also commissioning us to be His witnesses throughout the world. Luke, the writer of Acts, describes the mission a little differently than Matthew, but it is the same. The mission has always been, and will always be, to make disciples by being a witness of Jesus.

**Mission is biblical and timeless.**

Think about a witness. A witness is someone who sees, hears, or experiences an event take place. A witness can be called into a court of law to truthfully testify what took place. As one of Jesus's witnesses, we testify that we have experienced that Jesus is who He said He was. We declare that He is God and that He defeated sin and death to be in relationship with us.

REFLECTION: How should your experience play in to your witness?

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But **how** do we make disciples? How do we witness for Jesus? We call the answers to these questions the "vision". Vision is how we complete the mission. The ways in which we complete the mission can change as long as the plan is biblically grounded. The Church has been doing—as it should be doing—different things to make disciples since its inception. Vision should take into account the audience or culture in which we are placed. For instance, how we make disciples in Phoenix looks different from how Christians in Tokyo make disciples of Jesus. This means that the vision looks different at different times or places, but the mission never changes.

**Vision is biblical and timely.**

REFLECTION: How have you seen churches hold on to a vision that no longer works to achieve the mission?

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REFLECTION: How have you seen churches appropriately adopt a changing vision?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Pray for an opportunity to be a witness.

WEEK 8: NEW MISSION // DAY 2: IN THE PLACES YOU GO

Yesterday, we focused on mission and vision, mostly from the Church's perspective. But if we do just that, it can be easy to think that mission and vision are things that churches do. Remember though, that individuals make up each church. That means that we can't take our own responsibility out of the equation. Mission isn't just something for a large group.

**The mission of Jesus is also for you individually.**

REFLECTION: How have you removed yourself from the responsibility of carrying out God's mission? [Or] how is it tempting to remove yourself from that responsibility?

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If mission is for you individually, you must also ask yourself what the vision is—that is, how you will carry out the mission. First and foremost, in order to make disciples, you have to be a disciple of Jesus yourself. Just think about this. You represent Jesus (remember in week one, when we talked about being made in the image of God). You represent Jesus by being a witness to what He has done in your own life. This means that your faith should be evident to other people. The apostle James describes this as faith and works.

**Your story is your best witness to who Jesus is.**

SCRIPTURE: READ JAMES 2:14-18

REFLECTION: Why is it important to view your actions, not just words, as a witness?

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SCRIPTURE: READ MATTHEW 5:13-16

Jesus describes His followers as salt. In the ancient world, salt was used as a preservative. Followers of Jesus act as a preservative of God's intention for humanity. Sin fractured God's design, but by imitating Jesus, Christians can live fully in that design. People should see something different about the ways in which Christians live. Some Christians have taken this to extremes and have isolated from the world. But there is a problem with isolation: Jesus doesn't want Christians to isolate from the world.

**Jesus calls you to live in the world without compromise to His teachings or example.**

REFLECTION: Where has been the biggest temptation for you to compromise on Jesus's teaching while living in the culture?

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Jesus also describes Christians as the light of the world. A light isn't needed in a place that is well-lit. You probably don't leave your outside lights on, during the day, in the middle of the summer. That would be a waste. A light is only needed where there is an absence of light. Again, Jesus is making it clear that He doesn't want Christians to isolate themselves. We should live in dark places as a light that illuminates people to see Jesus. That means that you don't have to remove yourself from your job, your neighborhood, your soccer league, or your school to be a witness for Jesus.

**You can—and should—be a witness for Jesus wherever you go.**

REFLECTION: Where do you find yourself withdrawing from culture, when you shouldn't? Where do you find yourself remaining in culture when you should withdraw?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Pray for courage to live and speak the Gospel.



WEEK 8: NEW MISSION // DAY 3: WHO YOU ARE AT HOME

In the later half of the 20th century, many Christians believed that, in order to serve Jesus, they had to pack up everything and move to a foreign country. In some instances, that might be what God is calling you to do. But that might not be what He is calling you to do. In fact, most often times, Jesus is calling you to live as one who represents Him in the place where He already has you. In the following passage, you will read about how God sets the boundaries for nations. He also has placed you where you live.

SCRIPTURE: READ ACTS 17:22-28

REFLECTION: How does it change the ways you view where you live, knowing that God has placed you there?

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In the book of Proverbs, the wisdom writer shares a lot of quick principles regarding how one should interact with family or with neighbors. The following passage is one of the longer ones that talks about wise interactions with your neighbors.

SCRIPTURE: READ PROVERBS 11:8-14

Where you currently live matters. Someone may have a grand story about how they got to where they live; but it doesn't mean that where they live is more important than where you live. You have people around you that need to see Jesus. You have people to whom God has called you—your neighbors. The wisdom writer goes even as far as to link neighborly interactions to the rising or falling of a city.

**The ways in which you interact with your neighbors impact your city.**

REFLECTION: How do single interactions change a city?

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Where you currently live matters because you are called to represent Jesus wherever you go. Your neighbor should know that you represent Jesus. They should see how you are different as a neighbor. It doesn't mean that you have to be weird, but being different as a neighbor can mean many things. It could mean that they don't hear you yelling at your spouse, because you are patient and kind with each other. It could mean that you take care of your house/yard well, because it is God's gift to you. It could mean that you don't blast loud music at night, because you are considerate of others. It could mean that you are generous to neighborhood Girl Scout, because you trust in God to provide for you. The list can go on and on.

**The ways in which your neighbors see you live should reflect the kingdom of God.**

REFLECTION: How can your neighbors see Jesus reflected through your home and your character?

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REFLECTION: Who are your neighbors? List some specific prayer requests for each of them. [Or] What can you do to get to know your neighbors?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Pray for your neighbors.

WEEK 8: NEW MISSION // DAY 4: WHO YOU ARE AT WORK/STUDY

SCRIPTURE: READ COLOSSIANS 3:22-4:1

The view of work in the Bible is revolutionary. Ancients believed that work was a curse given only to the underclass. Contrast that with the modern day views of work; most people view work just as a way to make a living. Both of those have biblical roots, but fall short of a complete understanding. Yes, work is a way to make a living, but it is also something wherein people are called to express their God-given creativity. Also true, the toil of work is a curse, but work itself is also a good gift given to everyone. We can see this from the creation order where God mandated work before the fall of humanity. God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to cultivated it and care for it.

“Work is the gracious expression of creative energy in the service of God and others.”  
- pastor and author, Tim Keller

REFLECTION: How do you view your work? What needs to change about how you view your work?

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SCRIPTURE: READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-14

Work in and of itself is good, but not all of us are able to work in the same way. When there are people who are unable to work, the church should care for them as you'd expect the church to care. All of us who are able should work as bondservants to our bosses, just as we would work for Christ himself. Christians should be the most honest employees. Christians should be some of the most hard-working people. Christians should be the most trustworthy people. The character of Jesus should be reflected in how we work. If your co-workers know that you are a Christian, but you lie, cheat, gossip, and slack off, then that shows poorly on yourself and on Jesus.

**God matters to your work, and how you work matters to God.**

REFLECTION: As a Christian, how does your personal quality of work reflect Jesus?

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People think that serving Jesus while working means that they need to work for a church or be a missionary overseas. While those are honorable callings, you could be called to work retail, you could be called to be a High School teacher, you could be called to be a stay-at-home mom, or you could be called to be a CEO of a bank. Your work doesn't need to be in formal ministry. You can serve Jesus in all those places. In fact, Christians need to permeate the workforce to represent Jesus in places of cultural, social, and economic influence. Whether you like it or not, you have influence.

**The job in which you have right now is a place where you can do ministry.**

REFLECTION: How does your profession need to be influenced by Jesus? What can you do to be a part of that influence?

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From the very beginning, God has asked His people to cultivate the lands where they lived. It can't be stated enough that you can seek the flourishing of your work, wherever you have been called to work.

**Christians should seek the flourishing of their work through cultivation.**

REFLECTION: Define "cultivation" for your context? What could it look like for you to cultivate today?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Pray for your workplace or school.

WEEK 8: NEW MISSION // DAY 5: WHO YOU ARE AT PLAY

New City's mission is to make disciples who take the message of Jesus into the places where they live, work, study, and play. Those four places cover most of life. We should represent Jesus in all the places that we go. From inception of the Church, Christians have understood the importance of where they live. In addition to that, recently, there has been a resurgence of the importance of forming a theology of work within the Church. Those two places—where we live and work (or study)—probably take up a majority of our time. But let's not take ourselves too seriously either. The wisdom writer, in Ecclesiastes, reminds us that we should also enjoy our life!

SCRIPTURE: READ ECCLESIASTES 5:18-6:2

REFLECTION: Why do you think the wisdom writer says that it is "an evil" to work hard, but not to enjoy the fruit of your labor?

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SCRIPTURE: READ PSALM 150

The psalmist is describing a scene that isn't stoic or boring. The people of God were singing, dancing, and playing loud music. Just think about the joy and excitement in this scene. But sadly, Christians aren't known for having fun. If you told someone that you were going to a Christian party, they might laugh at you. But after reading the Ecclesiastes and the Psalms passage, maybe we could say that Christians should be known for the fun that they have together.

**The people of God can enjoy themselves because every good gift that we receive comes from God.**

REFLECTION: What can you do to have fun with other people?

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Think about the places where people most often play. Christians should be able to enjoy the park with family or friends. Why? Because they know that work isn't everything. Christians should be able to have the most fun at sports games. Why? Because they know that even if their team loses, God is still good. Christians should be able to enjoy hiking more than anyone else. Why? Because they see God's glory in His creation. Christians should have a joy-filled home. Why? Because Jesus delights in you.

REFLECTION: Think about where you play most. How can you incorporate a joyfully reflective attitude in that area?

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When you place your faith in Jesus, the apostle Paul says that you are free. You are no longer in the bondage of sin. That's something to celebrate! But we can't lose our self-control within our freedom. Paul cautions us to beware of indulging in our flesh (Galatians 5:13). The Christian must find the balance of enjoying herself or himself, without indulging in the flesh.

**You represent Jesus even in the places that you play.**

REFLECTION: How does representing Jesus motivate you to have fun, but also to live responsibly by biblical principles?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Pray for an opportunity to be a witness in the places you play.

# **WEEK 9: NEW MISSION**

DAILY DEVOTIONALS

WEEK 9: NEW MISSION // DAY 1: BE A BLESSING

You know the mission of New City Church. We talked about it all last week. New City Church exists to make disciples who take the Gospel to the places they live, work, study, and play. But we haven't really answered why we do this. Obviously, we make disciples because Jesus commands us to make disciples. But why does He ask us to do this as the mission of the church?

**Making more disciples of Jesus leads to the flourishing of our homes, neighborhoods, and city.**

REFLECTION: In your own words, summarize how making disciples leads to the flourishing of our homes, neighborhoods, and city.

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The flourishing of humanity has been God's heart from the very beginning. People don't always see it though. Some people think that God chose a family to become a single nation because He was racist. That couldn't be further from the truth. God wants His people to care for those around them. Let's look at both God's call to the chosen family—Abraham's family—and His instructions for the chosen nation—Israel. First, Abraham's call.

SCRIPTURE: READ GENESIS 12:1-3

In verse 2, when God says, "so that you will be a blessing," it is actually a command. God promises to bless Abraham, in order that Abraham would then bless others.

REFLECTION: Why do you think God had to explicitly command Abraham to bless the nations? Why do you need to be reminded of God's command to bless others?

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Not only can we see God's intention to bless the nations through Abraham's call, but we also see the same intention in God's instructions for Israel. After they were led out of slavery, God gave them laws that they were supposed to follow as a people. God told Moses why He was giving them these laws.

SCRIPTURE: READ EXODUS 19:1-6

God promises that Israel would be His treasured possession among all people. As His treasured possession they were supposed to follow God's laws, which would lead them to stand out as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. What do the terms "kingdom of priests" and "holy nation" mean? Think about a priest. A priest is supposed to be a mediator between God and people. As a kingdom of priests, Israel was called to be a mediator between God and all nations. To be a holy nation, Israel would devote themselves to God's law and show the world what living in relationship with Him looked like.

**The purpose of God's people's mission has always been to bless others.**

REFLECTION: In what ways are you called to be a priest like Israel?

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In Isaiah 49:6, the prophet Isaiah quotes God restating the mission of Israel: "I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." This language should sound familiar. We talked about being a light to the world last week. It is the exact thing that Jesus says in Matthew 5:14 when He says that His followers are the "light of the world".

REFLECTION: How do you feel about the consistency of the purpose of God's mission?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Ask God for a chance to bless those who aren't like you.

WEEK 9: NEW MISSION // DAY 2: GOD'S HEART FOR THE CITY

In order to get the full understanding of the passage today, a little background to the setting in which Israel found themselves is helpful. God's people—Israel—had gone through a lot of turmoil. They weren't obedient to God's mission that He had for them. Their country split into two different countries: the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. The northern kingdom was captured by Assyria in 722 BC. Judah held strong for about 125 more years, but in 597 BC, the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, defeated the southern kingdom of Judah. The armies of Babylon carried the people of Judah out of their homeland and into Babylon (2 Kings 24:10–25:21). God's people were in exile with no home to practice worship to God like they were used to doing. But there was hope! Babylon allowed God's people to choose between two options for where they would live. They could either live in the Babylonian capital city or they could live outside the city. The prophet Jeremiah received a word from the Lord regarding how God wanted Israel to live while in exile.

SCRIPTURE: JEREMIAH 29:4-9

Jeremiah was the only true prophet at the time. He told the people that God wanted them to move into the city, yet to keep their identity as His people. By doing this, they could seek the shalom—or peace—of the city. But this was the hardest option. They would constantly be tempted with two others ways to live.

First, they were tempted to stay outside the city and keep their own identity away from the Babylonians. It seemed like the most comfortable way to be in exile. But then they wouldn't have been able to seek the peace of the city. They would have only been using the city for their own agenda. The second temptation to living was they could have assimilated into the city. But if they did that, God's people would have lost their distinctiveness as a people. They wouldn't have been able to be a light to the nations. They would have just become one of the nations.

REFLECTION: How do we face the same two temptations today that God's people faced in Babylon (to ignore the city or to assimilate into the city)?

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REFLECTION: Why are both living in the city and keeping your distinct identity as a follower of Christ important?

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What does our own city look like? Phoenix has a population of 1.61 million people (the whole valley has a population of about 4.7 million). It is the 5th largest city in the United States. The forecast is for Phoenix proper to be at least #4 by 2025, and for the valley as a whole to have 6.3 million people by 2025. The following statistics are from the Barna Group.

- 50% of valley residents say they seldom, or never, go to a religious service.
- 18% of valley residents agree strongly that the Bible is God's Word.
- The valley ranks 9th in least Bible mindedness (that means that people don't agree that the Bible is God's word nor do they read it weekly).
- Only 61% of people in the valley who identify as Christian believe that Jesus was without sin.
- Only 59% of people in the valley who identify as Christian believe that the Bible is accurate.

REFLECTION: Do any of these statistics surprise you? If so, which one(s) and why?

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PROMPT: Ask God to help you fall more in love with the people in the city. Ask God what can you do to seek the peace of Phoenix? Write down what He reveals to you here.

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WEEK 9: NEW MISSION // DAY 3: CARE AND JUSTICE IN THE CITY

There are three things that should come out of a city. A city should be:

- 1) A place of justice
- 2) A place for cultural development
- 3) A place for spiritual seeking

REFLECTION: How do you see these three things positively happening in our city?

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If you read these three things and feel like it is a romanticized version of the city, then you'd be right. We don't usually experience them as a part of a city. Why not? The city is filled with people who let sin reign. Under the sinful reign of humanity, the city is a place of racism, classism, violence, greed, and over-working. We have to be careful not to romanticize the city.

**We must honestly see the sin in the city around us.**

REFLECTION: How do you see the three things from above perverted under sin in our city?

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Sometimes people see the sin in the city, and they want to run away from it. We have to be careful not to run from the city. It is helpful to remember that the city isn't more sinful than the areas outside the city. It just has more people who are sinful in it. The city isn't the enemy. People aren't the enemy. So how should we interact with the city? Let's look at the example of Jesus.

SCRIPTURE: READ LUKE 19:41

When Jesus came upon the city that was about to kill Him, He wept over it. He didn't see people as the enemy. Jesus loved the city. He wept because He loved the people in the city. It hurt Jesus's heart to see that they didn't accept Him and that they would thus experience the pain of destruction.

**We should love the city, because God loves the city.**

REFLECTION: What does it mean to see that Jesus knew the people of the city fully, wept over them, allowed them to beat him, and then went to the cross for them?

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Just like the instructions for Israel in yesterday's devotional, Jesus went into the city and kept His distinct identity. He experienced the city under sin, but sought the peace of the city. Jesus experienced the injustice of being innocently killed, so that we could experience life. Jesus asks us to model our lives after Him. With the lives which we've been given, God wants us to seek justice in the city.

**Under the influence of Jesus's reign, cities can fulfill their God-given purpose of justice and flourishing.**

SCRIPTURE: READ MICAH 6:6-8

REFLECTION: What can you do to seek justice and flourishing in Phoenix?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Ask God for wisdom in seeking justice in our city.

WEEK 9: NEW MISSION // DAY 4: JUSTICE AND FLOURISHING

Seeking the flourishing of others isn't optional in God's kingdom. The flourishing of humanity, and justice among humanity, cannot be separated from each other. That means, seeking justice isn't optional in God's kingdom either. By His very nature, God is just. As Christians trying to imitate Jesus, we should be seeking to imitate God's justness. The book of James describes how Christians should be seeking justice.

SCRIPTURE: READ JAMES 1:19-27

REFLECTION: James uses really strong language. What does his language teach you about how important this topic is to God?

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To be clear, there is nothing that can save you besides faith in Jesus. It doesn't matter how good you are, your good deeds can't save you. However, James tells us that someone, who has been saved by faith in Jesus, should act on what Jesus has done in her/his life. James uses the example of looking in a mirror. In his illustration, the reflection in the mirror represents the salvation given to you in Christ. Not to act on that faith is like forgetting what you look like after you saw yourself in the mirror.

**Not to act on your faith is to forget what Jesus has done for you.**

REFLECTION: How does not acting on your faith mean that you've forgotten what Jesus had done for you?

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James specifically names orphans and widows as people for which Christians should care. Specifically during the time period in which James was writing, orphans and widows were some of the most under-resourced people in society. James is telling us

that we should care for those who are under-resourced. Caring for the under-resourced is a part of "social justice". Christians should care for social justice because of what Jesus did for us. Before Jesus, we didn't have the resources to enter into God's kingdom, yet Jesus reached out and saved us anyway. That's the gospel. Yes, we pursue spreading the gospel message as the primary means of what we do; but the Christian should pursue social justice as a result of the gospel.

**We pursue social justice because of the reality of the gospel in our own life.**

REFLECTION: What happens if we pursue social justice without the gospel?

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James is going to continue his teaching along the same lines. Part of seeking the flourishing of humanity is to treat all people as equal.

SCRIPTURE: READ JAMES 2:1-13

James's teaching goes back to the teaching of the image of God. All humanity is made in God's image. No one is viewed more valuable than another. If we view someone as less valuable than another, or less valuable than ourselves, then we are committing sin. Viewing anyone—whether they are a different race, gender, orientation, or socio-economic status—as less than another is a grievous sin.

**Living for the flourishing of our city means that we act in mercy toward all.**

PRAYER PROMPT: Ask God to reveal to you a person, or a group of people, whom you need be more merciful toward. Then ask Him to show you what that mercy looks like. Write how He leads you here.

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WEEK 9: NEW MISSION // DAY 5: RESTORATION OF THE CITY

The biblical and historical story starts in "Act 1: Creation". We learned that all was good. Humanity was created in God's image and they lived in perfect harmony with God and each other. But it didn't take long for the biblical story to take a turn. By Genesis 3, we were introduced to "Act 2: Fall". The perfect harmony was disrupted. The perfect shalom was fractured. In order to enter back into relationship with God, humanity would need to be redeemed. Enter "Act 3: Redemption". We have found ourselves in this act since Genesis 3. God used a family and a nation to redeem humanity; but ultimately, God chose to redeem people through sending His own Son to take the punishment for sin. This is the part of the story where we, as God's people, were given redemption through faith in Jesus. Our relationship with God can be redeemed through faith, but not everything is restored yet. We still experience the effects of sin. The whole of creation still longs for the day when everything operates within perfect harmony. To this future, sin-free reality, we turn our attention.

SCRIPTURE: READ REVELATION 21:1-8

REFLECTION: What specific part of this promise of a perfect restoration resonates with you the most? Why?

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The apostle John wrote the book of Revelation from a vision which he received about what the end would look like. We can describe this future part of the story as "Act 4: Restoration". The biblical and historical story wouldn't be complete without returning to the perfect state in which God intended us to live. We can look forward to the day when, once again, the dwelling place of God will be with humanity. All harmony will be restored, sin will no longer have its influence over creation, death and pain won't exist, and everything will be beautiful and whole.

**Christians can look forward to the day of restoration when God establishes His new and perfect city.**

REFLECTION: We all need reminders that this day of restoration is coming. What can you look for today to remind you that restoration is coming?

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SCRIPTURE: READ REVELATION 21:22-22:5

John describes a day when Jesus will reign with His people forever and ever. His people will be made up of every nation living in perfect harmony with each other. What John described here should provide us hope for an ideal future. We need to be careful though. It can be tempting to say that it is impossible to live in harmony with others until we get to the ideal state. That would lead us to live in despair today, and it would cause us to give up hope for living peaceably with others. That's not what God wants.

**God's purpose in sharing His future plans should motivate us to live in harmony with others today.**

REFLECTION: How should knowing that it is God's intention to restore humanity lead you to live with others today?

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SCRIPTURE: READ REVELATION 22:20-21

**Jesus promises to come back for us soon!**

REFLECTION: Reflect on the biblical and historical story. What makes you most trust Jesus when He says that He is "coming soon"?

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PRAYER PROMPT: Thank God for His plan to restore creation.

