





When we are under pressure, we often look to coping mechanisms to ease our pain, gain control over our circumstances, or find temporary relief in our anxiety. But unfortunately the ways we try to relieve the pressure often just make things worse. They cannot bring us the relief, comfort and peace that only God can give. When we trust God and do what He asks us to do, the Holy Spirit gives us what we need to not only cope, but overcome in the midst of what we are going through.

This is a series about how God meets us and leads us toward abundant life wherever we find ourselves **under pressure**.



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How to use this curriculum

This book was created as a companion to the *Under Pressure* Sunday teaching series. In it, you will find passages of scripture that pertain to the week's Sunday message, as well as spiritual practices that promote relationship building between you and God, and between you and your circle, whether it's home, men's, or women's community circles.

Coping mechanisms, both good and bad, are used to help manage difficult or painful situations. Sometimes overcoming bad coping mechanisms can require changes that we can manage ourselves with the help of our friends and family, but sometimes it requires the additional help of a trained professional. We pray that as God's spirit reveals any areas of damaging coping mechanisms, and as you assess the hold they have over you, you would seek professional help if needed.

This book isn't intended to replace professional help, nor will these practices alone provide all of the tools required to find workable solutions to damaging coping mechanisms. What this book provides is a guide to reading God's word, as well as opportunities to connect with God in ways that builds positive coping strategies such as these:

- meditation/mindfulness (meditating on his word, silence, imagery)
- gratitude
- voicing our needs/assertiveness (petition/requests, identifying and naming)
- giving voice to our grief to begin healing (lament)
- rest/play (sabbath)
- self-examination

What you'll experience

Day

- 1-2** Study that week's key scripture passages, using provided prompts for reflection
- 3** Read scripture that reflects on God's faithfulness
- 4** Read the provided psalm and complete accompanying worksheet
- 5** Write your own psalm as a prayer of gratitude, petition/request, or lament. Use the psalm structure described in the *What Are the Psalms?* feature, as well as the other resources provided on pages 6-9 to craft your psalm.
- 6** A time of reflection, self-examination, and requesting that the Holy Spirit reveal our sin.
- 7** Practice resting in the presence of God



What Are the Psalms?

The Book of Psalms consists of many hymns and prayers created by individuals and used by the community. Within this collection, made up of one hundred and fifty psalms, we see a broad spectrum of human emotions. These responses from multiple authors are centered around worship and prayer, and they teach us how to relate to God in different circumstances. Psalms also reveal God’s sovereignty and goodness, in order to inspire trust in those who follow him. Below are examples of different types of psalms.

Thanksgiving

Psalms of thanksgiving recognize God’s goodness. They express present gratitude, display a spirit of praise, and affirm God’s goodness. Psalm 7, 100, 107, 118, 136

Lament

Psalms of lament approach God with the realities of sorrow, frustration, and angst that consume and distract.

Community laments:
Psalm 12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 89, 123, 129

Individual laments:
Psalm 3, 5, 7, 13, 14, 22, 26, 27

Petition

Psalms of petition call on God for assistance and help.

Psalms 4, 22, 28, 39, 42, 71, 82, 85

Praise

Psalms of praise
Psalm 30, 56, 100, 117, 147

What Are Prayers of Intercession?

Intercessory prayer is the act of praying on behalf of others. It invites us to join God in caring for the concerns of our family and friends, our community, and the entire world. No concern is too trivial for God to receive with loving attention. However, intercession is not a means of manipulating heaven into doing our will. Rather it is a way we become aware of God’s prayer for a person and join in that intercession.

Elements of Prayers in the Psalms

Prayer, as found in scripture, comes in many forms, but the following elements are present to varying degrees in each type of psalm. Use this as a reference for writing your own prayers.

Address

**How God
is addressed**

God, who has ruled forever...Psalm 55:19
You are my place of refuge. You are all I really want in life.
Psalm 142:5
The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need. Psalm 23:1
The Lord is my light and my salvation. Psalm 27:1

Describe

**Details describing
the situation**

As for my companion, he betrayed his friends; he broke his promises. Psalm 55:20
I am worn out from sobbing. All night I flood my bed with weeping, drenching it with my tears. Psalm 6:6
All night long I prayed, with hands lifted toward heaven, but my soul was not comforted. Psalm 77:2

Confess

**Confession of sin
and need**

Have compassion on me, Lord, for I am weak. Heal me, Lord, for my bones are in agony. I am sick at heart. How long, O Lord, until you restore me?. Psalm 6:2-3
Against you, and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight. Psalm 51:4
Bend down, O Lord, and hear my prayer; answer me for I need your help. Psalm 86:1

Request

Appeals for help

Show me where to walk, for I give myself to you. Psalm 143:8
Give me happiness, O Lord, for I give myself to you. Ps 86:4
Hear me as I pray, O Lord. Psalm 27:7

Praise

**Words of thanks and
adoration to God**

I will praise the Lord as long as I live. I will sing praises to my God with my dying breath. Psalm 146:2
Your laws please me; they give me wise advice. Psalm 119:24
O Lord, what a variety of things you have made! In wisdom you have made them all. Psalm 104:24

Emotion in the Psalms

In a world fractured by sin, we experience a range of emotions that are difficult or seem inappropriate to bring forward in prayer, but in the Psalms we have examples of their presence and rightful place in prayer. The Psalms teach us how to express a range of human emotions in ways that are healthy and directed to God.

Sadness ***(Psalm 30:5)***

Depression (102:1-11); Disappointment (88:1-8); Dismay (61:2); Hurt (69:29); Grief (6:7); Guilt (51:2); Loneliness (25:16); Neglect (13:1); Regret (38:18); Remorse (51:1-17); Shame (44:15); Sorrow (31:10); Sympathy (10:17)

Joy ***(Psalm 4:7)***

Contentment (62:5-8); Delight (25:9); Gladness (9:2); Hope (33:22); Optimism (27:3); Peace (4:8); Relief (46:1); Triumph (112:1-9); Zeal (69:9)

Love ***(Psalm 18:1)***

Adoration (26:8); Compassion (103:13-14); Desire (37:4); Gratitude (136:1-3); Longing (42:1); Praise (150); Sexual desire (119:9); Tenderness (147:3)

Anger ***(Psalm 74:11)***

Contempt (139:19-22); Disgust (119:158); Envy (73:2-3); Frustration (109:1-5); Irritability (37:1-9); Outrage (137:7-8); Torment (42:10)

Fear ***(Psalm 55:4-8)***

Anxiety (13:2); Confusion (143:8); Distress (42:5); Dread (64:1); Terror (88:15-17); Uneasiness (56:1-3); Worry (55:22)

Surprise ***(Psalm 55:15-16)***

Amazement (118:22-23); Astonishment (48:4-7); Awe (33:8); Wonder (90:14-16)



Week One: The Demands of Life

Sometimes the difficulty we experience isn't tragic or drastic - it's just the everyday ebb and flow of managing a crazy life! Maybe you have a demanding job, or manage multiple jobs; have lots of kids, a chronic health issue, an endless to-do list, unfinished house projects, unpaid bills, or too many deadlines; or are in a season where you are just expected to do it all! Deborah shows us how to manage a demanding and chaotic life. She trusted that God was with her in every detail of her life, allowing her to continue caring for people around her.

Week 1 Message Teacher:

Teacher:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Day 1: Deborah becomes Israel's judge

Judges 4:1-24

After Ehud's death, the Israelites again did evil in the Lord's sight. So the Lord turned them over to King Jabin of Hazor, a Canaanite king. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-haggoyim. Sisera, who had 900 iron chariots, ruthlessly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years. Then the people of Israel cried out to the Lord for help.

Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth, was a prophet who was judging Israel at that time. She would sit under the Palm of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites would go to her for judgment. One day she sent for Barak son of Abinoam, who lived in Kedesh in the land of Naphtali. She said to him, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: Call out 10,000 warriors from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun at Mount Tabor. And I will call out Sisera, commander of Jabin's army, along with his chariots and warriors, to the Kishon River. There I will give you victory over him."

Barak told her, "I will go, but only if you go with me."

"Very well," she replied, "I will go with you. But you will receive no honor in this venture, for the Lord's victory over Sisera will be at the hands of a woman." So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh. At Kedesh, Barak called together the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, and 10,000 warriors went up with him. Deborah also went with him.

Now Heber the Kenite, a descendant of Moses' brother-in-law[a] Hobab, had moved away from the other members of his tribe and pitched his tent by the oak of Zaanannim near Kedesh.

When Sisera was told that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, he called for all 900 of his iron chariots and all of his warriors, and they marched from Harosheth-haggoyim to the Kishon River.

Then Deborah said to Barak, "Get ready! This is the day the Lord will give you victory over Sisera, for the Lord is marching ahead of you." So Barak led his 10,000 warriors down the slopes of Mount Tabor into battle. When Barak attacked, the Lord threw Sisera and all his chariots and warriors into a panic. Sisera leaped down from his chariot and escaped on foot. Then Barak chased

the chariots and the enemy army all the way to Harosheth-haggoyim, killing all of Sisera's warriors. Not a single one was left alive.

Meanwhile, Sisera ran to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because Heber's family was on friendly terms with King Jabin of Hazor. Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Come into my tent, sir. Come in. Don't be afraid." So he went into her tent, and she covered him with a blanket.

"Please give me some water," he said. "I'm thirsty." So she gave him some milk from a leather bag and covered him again.

"Stand at the door of the tent," he told her. "If anybody comes and asks you if there is anyone here, say no."

But when Sisera fell asleep from exhaustion, Jael quietly crept up to him with a hammer and tent peg in her hand. Then she drove the tent peg through his temple and into the ground, and so he died.

When Barak came looking for Sisera, Jael went out to meet him. She said, "Come, and I will show you the man you are looking for." So he followed her into the tent and found Sisera lying there dead, with the tent peg through his temple.

So on that day Israel saw God defeat Jabin, the Canaanite king. And from that time on Israel became stronger and stronger against King Jabin until they finally destroyed him.

→ Underline text where God is with Deborah and Israel.

→ What do you learn from this passage about how to manage a demanding and chaotic life?

→ Do you have examples of when you had a hard time trusting God in your day-to-day life? Why?

Day 2: Galatians 6:9

So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up.

→ Looking back at the story of Deborah, underline the times people could have given up but pushed through instead.

→ Can you name some times in your life that you grew tired of doing what is good? How did you push through and not give up?

→ How can you grow your trust in God in this area?

Day 3: Looking to God's faithfulness

Security allows us to feel safe even when things are difficult or uncomfortable. Often, in a desire to regain control of security, we turn to things that can't really offer true security.

In scripture, we see that God has proven to be trustworthy again and again. These scriptures don't call us to deny or ignore our present needs or fears. They serve as examples of God's faithfulness, and offer us hope and encouragement.

Take time to assess where you need to be reminded of God's faithfulness, and select one of the options below. After reading through the passages, reflect and respond.

→ What do these passages teach about God's character?

→ How do today's scriptures speak to similar circumstances in your life?

God is faithful and worthy of trust. Do not fear:

For he will strengthen you - Isaiah 41:1-20; Romans 8:12-17, 31-39

For nothing is impossible with God - Luke 1:26-38, 46-55; Proverbs 3:1-7

For he controls the wind and the storm - Matthew 14:22-33; Psalm 107:23-32

For he is just - Numbers 14:1-21; Jeremiah 32:17-19

For he is present - 1 Kings 18:17-46; 1 Kings 19:1-16; Psalm 56:1-4

For he will fight for you - Nehemiah 4; Psalm 27

For he sees you and hears you - Genesis 16:1-16; Psalm 34:1-10

For the battle is his - 2 Chronicles 20:1-30; Psalm 16

For he can be trusted - Acts 27:1-25

For he will not leave you - Joshua 1:1-18; Psalm 91

For he rescues and delivers - Daniel 6; Psalm 37:1-11

For he is your peace - Judges 6:1-24; Psalm 23

For he is able to heal - Mark 5:21-43; Revelation 21:1-6

Day 4: A psalm for prayer and study

Psalm 91

Those who live in the shelter of the Most High
will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
This I declare about the Lord:
He alone is my refuge, my place of safety;
he is my God, and I trust him.
For he will rescue you from every trap
and protect you from deadly disease.
He will cover you with his feathers.
He will shelter you with his wings.
His faithful promises are your armor and protection.
Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night,
nor the arrow that flies in the day.
Do not dread the disease that stalks in darkness,
nor the disaster that strikes at midday.
Though a thousand fall at your side,
though ten thousand are dying around you,
these evils will not touch you.
Just open your eyes,
and see how the wicked are punished.

If you make the Lord your refuge,
if you make the Most High your shelter,
no evil will conquer you;
no plague will come near your home.
For he will order his angels
to protect you wherever you go.
They will hold you up with their hands
so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.
You will trample upon lions and cobras;
you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet!

The Lord says, "I will rescue those who love me.
I will protect those who trust in my name.
When they call on me, I will answer;
I will be with them in trouble.
I will rescue and honor them.
I will reward them with a long life
and give them my salvation."



Psalm Worksheet

Author of this psalm:

☐ named _____ ☐ unnamed

What emotions are present in the psalm? Check all that apply:

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ☐ anger | ☐ anxiety | ☐ delight | ☐ fear |
| ☐ gratitude | ☐ grief | ☐ hope | ☐ joy |
| ☐ longing | ☐ love | ☐ optimism | ☐ peace |
| ☐ remorse | ☐ sorrow | ☐ sympathy | |
| ☐ other _____ | | | |

What does this psalm say about the psalmist's circumstances?

How does the psalmist describe himself?

What requests are made to God? What instructions are given to the reader?

How is God addressed and/or described?

What situation in my life does this psalm call to mind?

Day 5: Write a psalm for prayer

Write your own psalm below as a prayer of gratitude, petition/request, or lament. Use the psalm structure described in the *What Are the Psalms?* feature, as well as the other resources provided on pages 6-9 to craft your psalm.

Day 6: Reflection

- Take time to reflect on how you deal with the demands of life.
- Based on what we've learned and studied, what is the Holy Spirit teaching you about how to manage the demands of life? Are there any next steps the Holy Spirit is prompting you to take?

Pray

Bring what you know to be true about what God is calling you toward in prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to do a transforming work in your life. This can look like: prayer to surrender our ways of thinking and living to God, confessing our need for him, and asking him to transform us. As you pray, ask God to give you the strength to partner with him as we take steps towards transformation. Take time to listen, and ask the Holy Spirit for courage to do what he is asking you to do.



Day 7: Practice resting in the presence of God

Today, quiet your heart and rest in God alone.

- Set 15 minutes aside for a centering prayer. Use a timer if it helps you relax.
- Find a comfortable position.
- Intentionally place yourself in the presence of God, in the center of his love.
- Choose a simple word, phrase or verse from scripture that expresses your desire for God (e.g., love, peace, grace, Jesus, Great Shepherd). Let this word guard your attention.
- Take time to become quiet. Be with Jesus. Listen. Be still. When distractions persist, acknowledge the distractions, but continually return to Jesus through your prayer word.
- Rest in the center of God's love. Trust the Holy Spirit to connect you with God.
- Take several minutes to come out of prayer. Don't hurry. Breathe in the presence of Christ. Offer yourself to God for the tasks awaiting you (e.g., "I am yours," or "Remain with me").

**Adapted from Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun*



Week 2: Out of Control

When circumstances are out of our control God is asking us to listen and do what he says. When we trust in Jesus the foundation of our life isn't dependent on things going our way.

Week 2 Message

Teacher:

[illegible]

Day 1: Luke 6:46-49

“So why do you keep calling me ‘Lord, Lord!’ when you don’t do what I say? I will show you what it’s like when someone comes to me, listens to my teaching, and then follows it. It is like a person building a house who digs deep and lays the foundation on solid rock. When the floodwaters rise and break against that house, it stands firm because it is well built. But anyone who hears and doesn’t obey is like a person who builds a house right on the ground, without a foundation. When the floods sweep down against that house, it will collapse into a heap of ruins.”

→ What are some of the ways that you deal with pressure and stress when life’s challenges are outside of your control?

→ What does the text about building a house on a solid foundation communicate about facing life’s challenges, whether inside or outside of our control? Does this give you hope or comfort?

→ God’s word gives us many examples of how He is trustworthy, faithful, and loving. How can you lean further into God and His faithfulness during seasons of your life that are out of your control?

Day 2: Joseph sold into slavery

Genesis 37:18-36

When Joseph's brothers saw him coming, they recognized him in the distance. As he approached, they made plans to kill him. "Here comes the dreamer!" they said. "Come on, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns. We can tell our father, 'A wild animal has eaten him.' Then we'll see what becomes of his dreams!"

But when Reuben heard of their scheme, he came to Joseph's rescue. "Let's not kill him," he said. "Why should we shed any blood? Let's just throw him into this empty cistern here in the wilderness. Then he'll die without our laying a hand on him." Reuben was secretly planning to rescue Joseph and return him to his father.

So when Joseph arrived, his brothers ripped off the beautiful robe he was wearing. Then they grabbed him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it. Then, just as they were sitting down to eat, they looked up and saw a caravan of camels in the distance coming toward them. It was a group of Ishmaelite traders taking a load of gum, balm, and aromatic resin from Gilead down to Egypt.

Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain by killing our brother? We'd have to cover up the crime. Instead of hurting him, let's sell him to those Ishmaelite traders. After all, he is our brother—our own flesh and blood!" And his brothers agreed. So when the Ishmaelites, who were Midianite traders, came by, Joseph's brothers pulled him out of the cistern and sold him to them for twenty pieces of silver. And the traders took him to Egypt.

Some time later, Reuben returned to get Joseph out of the cistern. When he discovered that Joseph was missing, he tore his clothes in grief. Then he went back to his brothers and lamented, "The boy is gone! What will I do now?"

Then the brothers killed a young goat and dipped Joseph's robe in its blood. They sent the beautiful robe to their father with this message: "Look at what we found. Doesn't this robe belong to your son?"

Their father recognized it immediately. "Yes," he said, "it is my son's robe. A wild animal must have eaten him. Joseph has clearly been torn to pieces!" Then Jacob tore his clothes and dressed himself in burlap. He mourned deeply for his son for a long time. His family all tried to comfort him, but he refused to be

comforted. "I will go to my grave mourning for my son," he would say, and then he would weep.

Meanwhile, the Midianite traders arrived in Egypt, where they sold Joseph to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Potiphar was captain of the palace guard.

→ Underline the text where you see God intervening on Joseph's behalf.

→ What are some areas in your life that you are trying to control and should relinquish to God's control instead?

→ Do you trust God enough to give him control? Why or why not?

→ How can you grow your trust in God?

Day 3: Looking to God's faithfulness

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For he will strengthen you - Isaiah 41:1-20; Romans 8:12-17, 31-39

For nothing is impossible with God - Luke 1:26-38, 46-55; Proverbs 3:1-7

For he controls the wind and the storm - Matthew 14:22-33; Psalm 107:23-32

For he is just - Numbers 14:1-21; Jeremiah 32:17-19

For he is present - 1 Kings 18:17-46; 1 Kings 19:1-16; Psalm 56:1-4

For he will fight for you - Nehemiah 4; Psalm 27

For he sees you and hears you - Genesis 16:1-16; Psalm 34:1-10

For the battle is his - 2 Chronicles 20:1-30; Psalm 16

For he can be trusted - Acts 27:1-25

For he will not leave you - Joshua 1:1-18; Psalm 91

For he rescues and delivers - Daniel 6; Psalm 37:1-11

For he is your peace - Judges 6:1-24; Psalm 23

For he is able to heal - Mark 5:21-43; Revelation 21:1-6

Day 4: A psalm for prayer and study

Psalm 22:1-31 – For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be sung to the tune “Doe of the Dawn.”

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?
Why are you so far away when I groan for help?
Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer.
Every night I lift my voice, but I find no relief.

Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
Our ancestors trusted in you,
and you rescued them.
They cried out to you and were saved.
They trusted in you and were never disgraced.

But I am a worm and not a man.
I am scorned and despised by all!
Everyone who sees me mocks me.
They sneer and shake their heads, saying,
“Is this the one who relies on the Lord?
Then let the Lord save him!
If the Lord loves him so much,
let the Lord rescue him!”

Yet you brought me safely from my mother's womb
and led me to trust you at my mother's breast.
I was thrust into your arms at my birth.
You have been my God from the moment I was born.

Do not stay so far from me,
for trouble is near,
and no one else can help me.
My enemies surround me like a herd of bulls;
fierce bulls of Bashan have hemmed me in!
Like lions they open their jaws against me,
roaring and tearing into their prey.
My life is poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart is like wax,
melting within me.
My strength has dried up like sunbaked clay.
My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.

You have laid me in the dust and left me for dead.
My enemies surround me like a pack of dogs;
an evil gang closes in on me.
They have pierced my hands and feet.
I can count all my bones.
My enemies stare at me and gloat.
They divide my garments among themselves
and throw dice for my clothing.
O Lord, do not stay far away!
You are my strength; come quickly to my aid!
Save me from the sword;
spare my precious life from these dogs.
Snatch me from the lion's jaws
and from the horns of these wild oxen.

I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters.
I will praise you among your assembled people.
Praise the Lord, all you who fear him!
Honor him, all you descendants of Jacob!
Show him reverence, all you descendants of Israel!
For he has not ignored or belittled the suffering of the needy.
He has not turned his back on them,
but has listened to their cries for help.

I will praise you in the great assembly.
I will fulfill my vows in the presence of those who worship you.
The poor will eat and be satisfied.
All who seek the Lord will praise him.
Their hearts will rejoice with everlasting joy.
The whole earth will acknowledge the Lord and return to him.
All the families of the nations will bow down before him.
For royal power belongs to the Lord.
He rules all the nations.

Let the rich of the earth feast and worship.
Bow before him, all who are mortal,
all whose lives will end as dust.
Our children will also serve him.
Future generations will hear about the wonders of the Lord.
His righteous acts will be told to those not yet born.
They will hear about everything he has done.



Psalm Worksheet

Author of this psalm:

☐ named _____ ☐ unnamed

What emotions are present in the psalm? Check all that apply:

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ☐ anger | ☐ anxiety | ☐ delight | ☐ fear |
| ☐ gratitude | ☐ grief | ☐ hope | ☐ joy |
| ☐ longing | ☐ love | ☐ optimism | ☐ peace |
| ☐ remorse | ☐ sorrow | ☐ sympathy | |
| ☐ other _____ | | | |

What does this psalm say about the psalmist's circumstances?

How does the psalmist describe himself?

What requests are made to God? What instructions are given to the reader?

How is God addressed and/or described?

What situation in my life does this psalm call to mind?

Day 5: Write a psalm for prayer

Write your own psalm below as a prayer of gratitude, petition/request, or lament. Use the psalm structure described in the *What Are the Psalms?* feature, as well as the other resources provided on pages 6-9 to craft your psalm.

Day 6: Reflection

- Take time to reflect on how you respond when circumstances are outside of your control.
- Based on what we've learned and studied, what is the Holy Spirit teaching you about things that are outside of your control? Are there any next steps the Holy Spirit is prompting you to take?

Pray

Bring what you know to be true about what God is calling you toward in prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to do a transforming work in your life. This can look like: prayer to surrender our ways of thinking and living to God, confessing our need for him, and asking him to transform us. As you pray, ask God to give you the strength to partner with him as we take steps towards transformation. Take time to listen, and ask the Holy Spirit for courage to do what he is asking you to do.



Day 7: Practice resting in the presence of God

Today, quiet your heart and rest in God alone.

- Set 15 minutes aside for a centering prayer. Use a timer if it helps you relax.
- Find a comfortable position.
- Intentionally place yourself in the presence of God, in the center of his love.
- Choose a simple word, phrase or verse from scripture that expresses your desire for God (e.g., love, peace, grace, Jesus, Great Shepherd). Let this word guard your attention.
- Take time to become quiet. Be with Jesus. Listen. Be still. When distractions persist, acknowledge the distractions, but continually return to Jesus through your prayer word.
- Rest in the center of God's love. Trust the Holy Spirit to connect you with God.
- Take several minutes to come out of prayer. Don't hurry. Breathe in the presence of Christ. Offer yourself to God for the tasks awaiting you (e.g., "I am yours," or "Remain with me").

**Adapted from Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun*



Week 3: Anxious and Afraid

When we feel anxious and afraid, God invites us to pray, tell God what we are thankful for, and ask him for help. When we do, we receive his peace that surpasses all understanding to guard our heart. As we fix our mind on the good, pure, lovely, true, excellent, admirable and praiseworthy aspects of God, we find the courage to trust God and do what he is asking us to do.

Week 3 Message

Teacher:

[illegible]

Day 1: Numbers 13:25-33, 14:5-24

Numbers 13:25-33

After exploring the land for forty days, the men returned to Moses, Aaron, and the whole community of Israel at Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran. They reported to the whole community what they had seen and showed them the fruit they had taken from the land. This was their report to Moses: “We entered the land you sent us to explore, and it is indeed a bountiful country—a land flowing with milk and honey. Here is the kind of fruit it produces. But the people living there are powerful, and their towns are large and fortified. We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak! The Amalekites live in the Negev, and the Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites live in the hill country. The Canaanites live along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and along the Jordan Valley.”

But Caleb tried to quiet the people as they stood before Moses. “Let’s go at once to take the land,” he said. “We can certainly conquer it!”

But the other men who had explored the land with him disagreed. “We can’t go up against them! They are stronger than we are!” So they spread this bad report about the land among the Israelites: “The land we traveled through and explored will devour anyone who goes to live there. All the people we saw were huge. We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak. Next to them we felt like grasshoppers, and that’s what they thought, too!”

Numbers 14:5-24

Then Moses and Aaron fell face down on the ground before the whole community of Israel. Two of the men who had explored the land, Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, tore their clothing. They said to all the people of Israel, “The land we traveled through and explored is a wonderful land! And if the Lord is pleased with us, he will bring us safely into that land and give it to us. It is a rich land flowing with milk and honey. Do not rebel against the Lord, and don’t be afraid of the people of the land. They are only helpless prey to us! They have no protection, but the Lord is with us! Don’t be afraid of them!”

But the whole community began to talk about stoning Joshua and Caleb. Then the glorious presence of the Lord appeared to all the Israelites at the Tabernacle. And the Lord said to Moses, “How long will these people treat me with contempt? Will they never believe me, even after all the miraculous signs I have done among them? I will disown them and destroy them with a plague. Then I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they are!”

But Moses objected. “What will the Egyptians think when they hear about it?” he asked the Lord. “They know full well the power you displayed in rescuing your people from Egypt. Now if you destroy them, the Egyptians will send a report to the inhabitants of this land, who have already heard that you live among your people. They know, Lord, that you have appeared to your people face to face and that your pillar of cloud hovers over them. They know that you go before them in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. Now if you slaughter all these people with a single blow, the nations that have heard of your fame will say, ‘The Lord was not able to bring them into the land he swore to give them, so he killed them in the wilderness.’

“Please, Lord, prove that your power is as great as you have claimed. For you said, ‘The Lord is slow to anger and filled with unfailing love, forgiving every kind of sin and rebellion. But he does not excuse the guilty. He lays the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations.’ In keeping with your magnificent, unfailing love, please pardon the sins of this people, just as you have forgiven them ever since they left Egypt.”

Then the Lord said, “I will pardon them as you have requested. But as surely as I live, and as surely as the earth is filled with the Lord’s glory, not one of these people will ever enter that land. They have all seen my glorious presence and the miraculous signs I performed both in Egypt and in the wilderness, but again and again they have tested me by refusing to listen to my voice. They will never even see the land I swore to give their ancestors. None of those who have treated me with contempt will ever see it. But my servant Caleb has a different attitude than the others have. He has remained loyal to me, so I will bring him into the land he explored. His descendants will possess their full share of that land.

→ What is your first instinct when you are anxious or afraid (e.g. turn to family, friends, food...)?

→ Consider what Caleb did vs. what the other spies did. Take note of each outcome and how it will help you next time you feel anxious or afraid.

Day 2: Philippians 4:4-9

Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.

→ What actions are you called to in this passage?

→ What are the actions of God in this passage?

Day 3: Looking to God's faithfulness

Security allows us to feel safe even when things are difficult or uncomfortable. Often, in a desire to regain control of security, we turn to things that can't really offer true security.

In scripture, we see that God has proven to be trustworthy again and again. These scriptures don't call us to deny or ignore our present needs or fears. They serve as examples of God's faithfulness, and offer us hope and encouragement.

Take time to assess where you need to be reminded of God's faithfulness, and select one of the options below. After reading through the passages, reflect and respond.

→ What do these passages teach about God's character?

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God is faithful and worthy of trust. Do not fear:

For he will strengthen you - Isaiah 41:1-20; Romans 8:12-17, 31-39

For nothing is impossible with God - Luke 1:26-38, 46-55; Proverbs 3:1-7

For he controls the wind and the storm - Matthew 14:22-33; Psalm 107:23-32

For he is just - Numbers 14:1-21; Jeremiah 32:17-19

For he is present - 1 Kings 18:17-46; 1 Kings 19:1-16; Psalm 56:1-4

For he will fight for you - Nehemiah 4; Psalm 27

For he sees you and hears you - Genesis 16:1-16; Psalm 34:1-10

For the battle is his - 2 Chronicles 20:1-30; Psalm 16

For he can be trusted - Acts 27:1-25

For he will not leave you - Joshua 1:1-18; Psalm 91

For he rescues and delivers - Daniel 6; Psalm 37:1-11

For he is your peace - Judges 6:1-24; Psalm 23

For he is able to heal - Mark 5:21-43; Revelation 21:1-6

Day 4: A psalm for prayer and study

Psalm 27 - A psalm of David.

The Lord is my light and my salvation—
so why should I be afraid?
The Lord is my fortress, protecting me from danger,
so why should I tremble?
When evil people come to devour me,
when my enemies and foes attack me,
they will stumble and fall.
Though a mighty army surrounds me,
my heart will not be afraid.
Even if I am attacked,
I will remain confident.
The one thing I ask of the Lord—
the thing I seek most—
is to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
delighting in the Lord's perfections
and meditating in his Temple.
For he will conceal me there when troubles come;
he will hide me in his sanctuary.
He will place me out of reach on a high rock.
Then I will hold my head high
above my enemies who surround me.
At his sanctuary I will offer sacrifices with shouts of joy,
singing and praising the Lord with music.

Hear me as I pray, O Lord.
Be merciful and answer me!
My heart has heard you say, "Come and talk with me."
And my heart responds, "Lord, I am coming."
Do not turn your back on me.
Do not reject your servant in anger.
You have always been my helper.
Don't leave me now; don't abandon me,
O God of my salvation!
Even if my father and mother abandon me,
the Lord will hold me close.

Teach me how to live, O Lord.

Lead me along the right path,
for my enemies are waiting for me.
Do not let me fall into their hands.
For they accuse me of things I've never done;
with every breath they threaten me with violence.
Yet I am confident I will see the Lord's goodness
while I am here in the land of the living.

Wait patiently for the Lord.
Be brave and courageous.
Yes, wait patiently for the Lord.



Psalm Worksheet

Author of this psalm:

☐ named _____ ☐ unnamed

What emotions are present in the psalm? Check all that apply:

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
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Bring what you know to be true about what God is calling you toward in prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to do a transforming work in your life. This can look like: prayer to surrender our ways of thinking and living to God, confessing our need for him, and asking him to transform us. As you pray, ask God to give you the strength to partner with him as we take steps towards transformation. Take time to listen, and ask the Holy Spirit for courage to do what he is asking you to do.



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- Rest in the center of God's love. Trust the Holy Spirit to connect you with God.
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**Adapted from Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun*



Week 4: Unfulfilled Desires

When we are denied something we've longed for, it's difficult to cope with the reality of our unfulfilled desires - a child we wish would come home, a health situation we wish would go away, a relationship we want to be reconciled. When we experience this kind of adversity, it's easy to lose faith and choose self-pity. But the heroes of our faith show us how to trust God in the midst of disappointment and unfulfilled longing by continuing to serve God and live rightly. We can trust in the Lord, do good, take delight in the Lord and commit our way to the Lord, even when our desire is unfulfilled.

Week 4 Message

Teacher:

[illegible]

Day 1: Hebrews 11

Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see. Through their faith, the people in days of old earned a good reputation.

By faith we understand that the entire universe was formed at God's command, that what we now see did not come from anything that can be seen.

It was by faith that Abel brought a more acceptable offering to God than Cain did. Abel's offering gave evidence that he was a righteous man, and God showed his approval of his gifts. Although Abel is long dead, he still speaks to us by his example of faith.

It was by faith that Enoch was taken up to heaven without dying—"he disappeared, because God took him." For before he was taken up, he was known as a person who pleased God. And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.

It was by faith that Noah built a large boat to save his family from the flood. He obeyed God, who warned him about things that had never happened before. By his faith Noah condemned the rest of the world, and he received the righteousness that comes by faith.

It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going. And even when he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith—for he was like a foreigner, living in tents. And so did Isaac and Jacob, who inherited the same promise. Abraham was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God.

It was by faith that even Sarah was able to have a child, though she was barren and was too old. She believed that God would keep his promise. And so a whole nation came from this one man who was as good as dead—a nation with so many people that, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, there is no way to count them.

All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and

welcomed it. They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth. Obviously people who say such things are looking forward to a country they can call their own. If they had longed for the country they came from, they could have gone back. But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

It was by faith that Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice when God was testing him. Abraham, who had received God's promises, was ready to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, even though God had told him, "Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted." Abraham reasoned that if Isaac died, God was able to bring him back to life again. And in a sense, Abraham did receive his son back from the dead.

It was by faith that Isaac promised blessings for the future to his sons, Jacob and Esau.

It was by faith that Jacob, when he was old and dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons and bowed in worship as he leaned on his staff.

It was by faith that Joseph, when he was about to die, said confidently that the people of Israel would leave Egypt. He even commanded them to take his bones with them when they left.

It was by faith that Moses' parents hid him for three months when he was born. They saw that God had given them an unusual child, and they were not afraid to disobey the king's command.

It was by faith that Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to share the oppression of God's people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin. He thought it was better to suffer for the sake of Christ than to own the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to his great reward. It was by faith that Moses left the land of Egypt, not fearing the king's anger. He kept right on going because he kept his eyes on the one who is invisible. It was by faith that Moses commanded the people of Israel to keep the Passover and to sprinkle blood on the doorposts so that the angel of death would not kill their firstborn sons.

It was by faith that the people of Israel went right through the Red Sea as though they were on dry ground. But when the Egyptians tried to follow, they were all drowned.

It was by faith that the people of Israel marched around Jericho for seven days, and the walls came crashing down.

It was by faith that Rahab the prostitute was not destroyed with the people in her city who refused to obey God. For she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

How much more do I need to say? It would take too long to recount the stories of the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and all the prophets. By faith these people overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, and received what God had promised them. They shut the mouths of lions, quenched the flames of fire, and escaped death by the edge of the sword. Their weakness was turned to strength. They became strong in battle and put whole armies to flight. Women received their loved ones back again from death.

But others were tortured, refusing to turn from God in order to be set free. They placed their hope in a better life after the resurrection. Some were jeered at, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in prisons. Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half, and others were killed with the sword. Some went about wearing skins of sheep and goats, destitute and oppressed and mistreated. They were too good for this world, wandering over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground.

All these people earned a good reputation because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised. For God had something better in mind for us, so that they would not reach perfection without us.

- Box the descriptions of faith that stand out to you.
- Underline the circumstances that produced faith in the people whose names you circled.
- Circle the text in this passage that inspires your faith in God.

Day 2: Psalm 37:3-6

Trust in the Lord and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires. Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him, and he will help you. He will make your innocence radiate like the dawn, and the justice of your cause will shine like the noonday sun.

- What is the psalmist asking us to do? Circle each action.
- Box the promises given as a result of doing those things.
- Underline the words or phrases in this passage that are of particular comfort to you.

Day 3: Looking to God's faithfulness

Security allows us to feel safe even when things are difficult or uncomfortable. Often, in a desire to regain control of security, we turn to things that can't really offer true security.

In scripture, we see that God has proven to be trustworthy again and again. These scriptures don't call us to deny or ignore our present needs or fears. They serve as examples of God's faithfulness, and offer us hope and encouragement.

Take time to assess where you need to be reminded of God's faithfulness, and select one of the options below. After reading through the passages, reflect and respond.

→ What do these passages teach about God's character?

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For he is present - 1 Kings 18:17-46; 1 Kings 19:1-16; Psalm 56:1-4

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For he rescues and delivers - Daniel 6; Psalm 37:1-11

For he is your peace - Judges 6:1-24; Psalm 23

For he is able to heal - Mark 5:21-43; Revelation 21:1-6

Day 4: A psalm for prayer and study

Psalm 62:1-8

I wait quietly before God,
for my victory comes from him.
He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress where I will never be shaken.

So many enemies against one man—
all of them trying to kill me.
To them I'm just a broken-down wall
or a tottering fence.
They plan to topple me from my high position.
They delight in telling lies about me.
They praise me to my face
but curse me in their hearts.

Let all that I am wait quietly before God,
for my hope is in him.
He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress where I will not be shaken.
My victory and honor come from God alone.
He is my refuge, a rock where no enemy can reach me.
O my people, trust in him at all times.
Pour out your heart to him,
for God is our refuge.



Psalm Worksheet

Author of this psalm:

☐ named _____ ☐ unnamed

What emotions are present in the psalm? Check all that apply:

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
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What does this psalm say about the psalmist's circumstances?

How does the psalmist describe himself?

What requests are made to God? What instructions are given to the reader?

How is God addressed and/or described?

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Day 6: Reflection

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- Based on what we've learned and studied, what is the Holy Spirit teaching you about how to manage disappointment and unfulfilled desires? Are there any next steps the Holy Spirit is prompting you to take?

Pray

Bring what you know to be true about what God is calling you toward in prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to do a transforming work in your life. This can look like: prayer to surrender our ways of thinking and living to God, confessing our need for him, and asking him to transform us. As you pray, ask God to give you the strength to partner with him as we take steps towards transformation. Take time to listen, and ask the Holy Spirit for courage to do what he is asking you to do.



Day 7: Practice resting in the presence of God

Today, quiet your heart and rest in God alone.

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- Rest in the center of God's love. Trust the Holy Spirit to connect you with God.
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Week 5: Relational Conflict

When we experience relational conflict, as much as it depends on us, God asks us to live at peace with others. When we choose humility, seek understanding, and own up to our faults, we extend a bridge toward reconciliation with the people we are in conflict with.

Week 5 Message

Teacher:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines, similar to standard notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Day 1: Romans 12:9-21

Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!

Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the scriptures say,

"I will take revenge;
I will pay them back,"
says the Lord.

Instead,

"If your enemies are hungry, feed them.
If they are thirsty, give them something to drink.
In doing this, you will heap
burning coals of shame on their heads."

Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

→ Circle all the action words in the passage above. Which actions toward others stand out to you today? Take time to ask the Holy Spirit how he wants you to live that out toward those you are in relationship with.

→ Notice how the passage directs us to resolve conflict and how it challenges us to live toward those who we are in conflict with.

Day 2: Colossians 3:12-17

Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.

Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.

→ Notice how peace is used in today's and yesterday's passages. In reading the instructions in both passages, what does it mean to truly live at peace with others?

→ Notice the things we are to clothe ourselves with before we enter into conflict resolution. Take time in prayer to ask the Holy Spirit what this would look like in your own life and write that down.

Day 3: Looking to God's faithfulness

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For he is just - Numbers 14:1-21; Jeremiah 32:17-19

For he is present - 1 Kings 18:17-46; 1 Kings 19:1-16; Psalm 56:1-4

For he will fight for you - Nehemiah 4; Psalm 27

For he sees you and hears you - Genesis 16:1-16; Psalm 34:1-10

For the battle is his - 2 Chronicles 20:1-30; Psalm 16

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For he rescues and delivers - Daniel 6; Psalm 37:1-11

For he is your peace - Judges 6:1-24; Psalm 23

For he is able to heal - Mark 5:21-43; Revelation 21:1-6

Day 4: A psalm for prayer and study

Psalm 143 - A psalm of David.

Hear my prayer, O Lord;

listen to my plea!

Answer me because you are faithful and righteous.

Don't put your servant on trial,

for no one is innocent before you.

My enemy has chased me.

He has knocked me to the ground

and forces me to live in darkness like those in the grave.

I am losing all hope;

I am paralyzed with fear.

I remember the days of old.

I ponder all your great works

and think about what you have done.

I lift my hands to you in prayer.

I thirst for you as parched land thirsts for rain.

Come quickly, Lord, and answer me,

for my depression deepens.

Don't turn away from me,

or I will die.

Let me hear of your unfailing love each morning,

for I am trusting you.

Show me where to walk,

for I give myself to you.

Rescue me from my enemies, Lord;

I run to you to hide me.

Teach me to do your will,

for you are my God.

May your gracious Spirit lead me forward

on a firm footing.

For the glory of your name, O Lord, preserve my life.

Because of your faithfulness, bring me out of this distress.

In your unfailing love, silence all my enemies

and destroy all my foes,

for I am your servant.



Psalm Worksheet

Author of this psalm:

☐ named _____ ☐ unnamed

What emotions are present in the psalm? Check all that apply:

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ☐ anger | ☐ anxiety | ☐ delight | ☐ fear |
| ☐ gratitude | ☐ grief | ☐ hope | ☐ joy |
| ☐ longing | ☐ love | ☐ optimism | ☐ peace |
| ☐ remorse | ☐ sorrow | ☐ sympathy | |
| ☐ other _____ | | | |

What does this psalm say about the psalmist's circumstances?

How does the psalmist describe himself?

What requests are made to God? What instructions are given to the reader?

How is God addressed and/or described?

What situation in my life does this psalm call to mind?

Day 5: Write a psalm for prayer

Write your own psalm below as a prayer of gratitude, petition/request, or lament. Use the psalm structure described in the *What Are the Psalms?* feature, as well as the other resources provided on pages 6-9 to craft your psalm.

Day 6: Reflection

- Take time to reflect on how you deal with relational conflict.
- Based on what we've learned and studied, what is the Holy Spirit teaching you about how to deal with relational conflict? Are there any next steps the Holy Spirit is prompting you to take?

Pray

Bring what you know to be true about what God is calling you toward in prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to do a transforming work in your life. This can look like: prayer to surrender our ways of thinking and living to God, confessing our need for him, and asking him to transform us. As you pray, ask God to give you the strength to partner with him as we take steps towards transformation. Take time to listen, and ask the Holy Spirit for courage to do what he is asking you to do.



Day 7: Practice resting in the presence of God

Today, quiet your heart and rest in God alone.

- Set 15 minutes aside for a centering prayer. Use a timer if it helps you relax.
- Find a comfortable position.
- Intentionally place yourself in the presence of God, in the center of his love.
- Choose a simple word, phrase or verse from scripture that expresses your desire for God (e.g., love, peace, grace, Jesus, Great Shepherd). Let this word guard your attention.
- Take time to become quiet. Be with Jesus. Listen. Be still. When distractions persist, acknowledge the distractions, but continually return to Jesus through your prayer word.
- Rest in the center of God's love. Trust the Holy Spirit to connect you with God.
- Take several minutes to come out of prayer. Don't hurry. Breathe in the presence of Christ. Offer yourself to God for the tasks awaiting you (e.g., "I am yours," or "Remain with me").

**Adapted from Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun*



Week 6: Addiction

We all have ways of dealing with stress, disappointment, uncontrollable circumstances and unfulfilled longings - but not all of them are beneficial. One of the main coping mechanisms we rely on for stress (one that we are now hearing is a growing concern in our church community) is addiction.

Addiction is:

A hole being filled by another hole
An attempt to solve inside pain with an outside solution
A short-term survival technique
Something enjoyed in the short term that undermines
the long term - Mike Foster

"Addiction happens when we seek horizontally
what can only be found vertically." - Paul Tripp

When it comes to our addiction, we often want the immediate gratification of the coping mechanism because we believe what God wants for us won't solve the problem. The power of the Holy Spirit can break our bad habits and lead us to live in freedom.

Week 6 Message

Teacher:

[illegible]

Day 1: Romans 8:1-13

So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.

Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace. For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God.

But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all.) And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God. The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.

Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live.

→ Addiction is often a worship issue. It is enslaving ourselves to something or someone that has no rights over us. How does this passage help us reframe our worth?

→ This text speaks to being dominated by our sinful nature. Is there something that is dominating your thoughts, actions, or relationships more than it should be? Do you find yourself rearranging your schedule or time around something you know is not healthy for you?

→ Because Jesus' spirit is in us, we are no longer obligated to give in to the things that dominate us in unhealthy ways. How might you put a plan in place now to say no to temptation the next time it arises?

Day 2: Genesis 9:21, 8:21-22

Genesis 9:21

One day he drank some wine he had made, and he became drunk and lay naked inside his tent.

Genesis 8:21-22

And the Lord was pleased with the aroma of the sacrifice and said to himself, “I will never again curse the ground because of the human race, even though everything they think or imagine is bent toward evil from childhood. I will never again destroy all living things. As long as the earth remains, there will be planting and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night.”

Noah used alcohol to cope when he was stressed and disillusioned, and circumstances were out of his control. Drinking was an expression of his problems and an attempt to solve them. He was one of the few survivors of the global flood, and he witnessed firsthand the result of sin and the death that it brought. He coped with the stress of building the Ark, caring for the animals during the storm, and surviving the flood on the Ark, by drinking until he passed out naked in his tent.

The story of Noah reminds us that “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”(Ephesians 4:12) - which is why addiction is an unseen battle with real life consequences.

➔ Addictions come in all shapes and sizes. As you look at the list below ask God to reveal to you where you may have an unhealthy relationship with something listed, then circle it.

Alcohol	Anger	Love
Chocolate	Compulsive eating	People
Exercise	Gambling	Shoplifting
Lying	Nicotine	Sugar
Pornography	Caffeine	Videogames
Sex	Sleep	Sports
TV	Work	Phone
Other		

→ Everyone has been mortally wounded spiritually, psychologically, and physically by sin. Honesty with ourselves and Jesus about the roots of our sin and addictions help to break their grip. Knowing that there is no condemnation for those in Jesus, what might it look like to not worry about your addiction, but to instead ask God to help you understand the source of your addiction?

→ Spend time in prayer asking God to reveal the root of the addiction you circled on the previous page.

Day 3: Looking to God's faithfulness

Security allows us to feel safe even when things are difficult or uncomfortable. Often, in a desire to regain control of security, we turn to things that can't really offer true security.

In scripture, we see that God has proven to be trustworthy again and again. These scriptures don't call us to deny or ignore our present needs or fears. They serve as examples of God's faithfulness, and offer us hope and encouragement.

Take time to assess where you need to be reminded of God's faithfulness, and select one of the options below. After reading through the passages, reflect and respond.

→ What do these passages teach about God's character?

→ How do today's scriptures speak to similar circumstances in your life?

God is faithful and worthy of trust. Do not fear:

For he will strengthen you - Isaiah 41:1-20; Romans 8:12-17, 31-39

For nothing is impossible with God - Luke 1:26-38, 46-55; Proverbs 3:1-7

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For he is able to heal - Mark 5:21-43; Revelation 21:1-6

Day 4: A psalm for prayer and study

Psalm 107:1-16

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good!

His faithful love endures forever.

Has the LORD redeemed you? Then speak out!

Tell others he has redeemed you from your enemies.

For he has gathered the exiles from many lands,

from east and west,

from north and south.

Some wandered in the wilderness,

lost and homeless.

Hungry and thirsty,

they nearly died.

“LORD, help!” they cried in their trouble,

and he rescued them from their distress.

He led them straight to safety,

to a city where they could live.

Let them praise the LORD for his great love

and for the wonderful things he has done for them.

For he satisfies the thirsty

and fills the hungry with good things.

Some sat in darkness and deepest gloom,

imprisoned in iron chains of misery.

They rebelled against the words of God,

scorning the counsel of the Most High.

That is why he broke them with hard labor;

they fell, and no one was there to help them.

“LORD, help!” they cried in their trouble,

and he saved them from their distress.

He led them from the darkness and deepest gloom;

he snapped their chains.

Let them praise the LORD for his great love

and for the wonderful things he has done for them.

For he broke down their prison gates of bronze;

he cut apart their bars of iron.



Psalm Worksheet

Author of this psalm:

☐ named _____ ☐ unnamed

What emotions are present in the psalm? Check all that apply:

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ☐ anger | ☐ anxiety | ☐ delight | ☐ fear |
| ☐ gratitude | ☐ grief | ☐ hope | ☐ joy |
| ☐ longing | ☐ love | ☐ optimism | ☐ peace |
| ☐ remorse | ☐ sorrow | ☐ sympathy | |
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Day 6: Reflection

- Take time to reflect on whether there are areas in your life in which you deal with addiction.
- Based on what we've learned and studied, what is the Holy Spirit teaching you about addiction in your life? Are there any next steps the Holy Spirit is prompting you to take?

Pray

Bring what you know to be true about what God is calling you toward in prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to do a transforming work in your life. This can look like: prayer to surrender our ways of thinking and living to God, confessing our need for him, and asking him to transform us. As you pray, ask God to give you the strength to partner with him as we take steps towards transformation. Take time to listen, and ask the Holy Spirit for courage to do what he is asking you to do.



Day 7: Practice resting in the presence of God

- Set 15 minutes aside for a centering prayer. Use a timer if it helps you relax.
- Find a comfortable position.
- Intentionally place yourself in the presence of God, in the center of his love.
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**Adapted from Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun*



Week 7: Stressed and Overwhelmed

When we feel stressed and overwhelmed, our passion fades, we can't think straight, we start having irrational fears, make poor decisions, forget God's goodness, and feel alone. When we feel overwhelmed, God restores us by meeting our needs, encouraging self care, and filling our lives with his love and grace.

Week 7 Message

Teacher:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines, similar to standard notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Day 1: Elijah under stress

I Kings 19:1-9

When Ahab got home, he told Jezebel everything Elijah had done, including the way he had killed all the prophets of Baal. So Jezebel sent this message to Elijah: “May the gods strike me and even kill me if by this time tomorrow I have not killed you just as you killed them.”

Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there. Then he went on alone into the wilderness, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died.”

Then he lay down and slept under the broom tree. But as he was sleeping, an angel touched him and told him, “Get up and eat!” He looked around and there beside his head was some bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water! So he ate and drank and lay down again.

Then the angel of the Lord came again and touched him and said, “Get up and eat some more, or the journey ahead will be too much for you.”

So he got up and ate and drank, and the food gave him enough strength to travel forty days and forty nights to Mount Sinai, the mountain of God. There he came to a cave, where he spent the night.

→ In I Kings 18, Elijah experiences the Lord’s miraculous victory, but the victorious joy doesn’t last long. Underline the cause of Elijah’s current stress.

→ Note Elijah’s response to this new stress. Is it rational? Fearful? Trust-filled?

→ Circle the Lord’s response to Elijah. What does this response tell you about the Lord?

Day 2: Jesus the comforter

Matthew 11:28-30

Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”

- Note our role in dealing with our burdens, underlining them. Then, putting a rectangle around them, note Jesus’ role and promises when we turn to him.
- Highlight words that describe the character of God.
- Remembering how God has given us rest in the past is an important part of our faith. Can you remember a stressful time in which God gave you rest when you came to him? Draw a picture/icon that represents your story.

Day 3: Looking to God's faithfulness

Security allows us to feel safe even when things are difficult or uncomfortable. Often, in a desire to regain control of security, we turn to things that can't really offer true security.

In scripture, we see that God has proven to be trustworthy again and again. These scriptures don't call us to deny or ignore our present needs or fears. They serve as examples of God's faithfulness, and offer us hope and encouragement.

Take time to assess where you need to be reminded of God's faithfulness, and select one of the options below. After reading through the passages, reflect and respond.

→ What do these passages teach about God's character?

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For he is your peace - Judges 6:1-24; Psalm 23

For he is able to heal - Mark 5:21-43; Revelation 21:1-6

Day 4: A psalm for prayer and study

Psalm 142:1-7

I cry out to the Lord;

I plead for the Lord's mercy.

I pour out my complaints before him
and tell him all my troubles.

When I am overwhelmed,
you alone know the way I should turn.

Wherever I go, my enemies have set traps for me.

I look for someone to come and help me,
but no one gives me a passing thought!

No one will help me;
no one cares a bit what happens to me.

Then I pray to you, O Lord.

I say, "You are my place of refuge.
You are all I really want in life.

Hear my cry, for I am very low.

Rescue me from my persecutors,
for they are too strong for me.

Bring me out of prison
so I can thank you.

The godly will crowd around me,
for you are good to me."



Psalm Worksheet

Author of this psalm:

☐ named _____ ☐ unnamed

What emotions are present in the psalm? Check all that apply:

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
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| ☐ longing | ☐ love | ☐ optimism | ☐ peace |
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What does this psalm say about the psalmist's circumstances?

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- Take time to reflect on how you deal with being stressed and overwhelmed.
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Bring what you know to be true about what God is calling you toward in prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to do a transforming work in your life. This can look like: prayer to surrender our ways of thinking and living to God, confessing our need for him, and asking him to transform us. As you pray, ask God to give you the strength to partner with him as we take steps towards transformation. Take time to listen, and ask the Holy Spirit for courage to do what he is asking you to do.



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Week 8: Can't Always Get What You Want

When we don't get what we want, we often fight for it. One coping mechanism is fighting to gain control over other people and our circumstances to get what we want. Instead, Jesus invites us to check our motives, ask God for what we need, and walk in humility.

Week 8 Message

Teacher:

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Day 1: Drawing close to God

James 4:1-6

What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you? You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.

You adulterers! Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God. Do you think the scriptures have no meaning? They say that God is passionate that the spirit he has placed within us should be faithful to him. And he gives grace generously. As the scriptures say,

“God opposes the proud
but gives grace to the humble.”

→ Take a moment to notice the desires that are within your heart. Try saying them out loud or writing them down.

→ Circle the words “you,” “your,” and “you're,” within the passage. Reflect on how this passage may be relevant to your heart and your desires right now. Focus on one of these desires in which you feel like you are not getting what you want (or think of a time in your past when you have felt a desire like this). In what ways have you given this desire over to God?

Day 2: Isaiah 55:6-13

Seek the Lord while you can find him.

Call on him now while he is near.

Let the wicked change their ways

and banish the very thought of doing wrong.

Let them turn to the Lord that he may have mercy on them.

Yes, turn to our God, for he will forgive generously.

“My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the Lord.

“And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.

For just as the heavens are higher than the earth,

so my ways are higher than your ways

and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.

“The rain and snow come down from the heavens

and stay on the ground to water the earth.

They cause the grain to grow,

producing seed for the farmer

and bread for the hungry.

It is the same with my word.

I send it out, and it always produces fruit.

It will accomplish all I want it to,

and it will prosper everywhere I send it.

You will live in joy and peace.

The mountains and hills will burst into song,

and the trees of the field will clap their hands!

Where once there were thorns, cypress trees will grow.

Where nettles grew, myrtles will sprout up.

These events will bring great honor to the Lord's name;

they will be an everlasting sign of his power and love.”

→ In this passage, the Lord says his ways are higher than our ways and his thoughts are higher than our thoughts. Take some time to remember when God's plan turned out to be better than what you wanted.

→ In what areas of your life are you trying to take control? Give space for the Lord to reveal to you where you need to give him control.

Day 3: Looking to God's faithfulness

Security allows us to feel safe even when things are difficult or uncomfortable. Often, in a desire to regain control of security, we turn to things that can't really offer true security.

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For he is able to heal - Mark 5:21-43; Revelation 21:1-6

Day 4: A psalm for prayer and study

Psalm 37 – A psalm of David.

Don't worry about the wicked
or envy those who do wrong.
For like grass, they soon fade away.
Like spring flowers, they soon wither.

Trust in the Lord and do good.
Then you will live safely in the land and prosper.
Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you your heart's desires.

Commit everything you do to the Lord.
Trust him, and he will help you.
He will make your innocence radiate like the dawn,
and the justice of your cause will shine like the noonday sun.

Be still in the presence of the Lord,
and wait patiently for him to act.
Don't worry about evil people who prosper
or fret about their wicked schemes.

Stop being angry!
Turn from your rage!
Do not lose your temper—
it only leads to harm.
For the wicked will be destroyed,
but those who trust in the Lord will possess the land.

Soon the wicked will disappear.
Though you look for them, they will be gone.
The lowly will possess the land
and will live in peace and prosperity.

The wicked plot against the godly;
they snarl at them in defiance.
But the Lord just laughs,
for he sees their day of judgment coming.

The wicked draw their swords
and string their bows
to kill the poor and the oppressed,
to slaughter those who do right.
But their swords will stab their own hearts,
and their bows will be broken.

It is better to be godly and have little
than to be evil and rich.
For the strength of the wicked will be shattered,
but the Lord takes care of the godly.

Day by day the Lord takes care of the innocent,
and they will receive an inheritance that lasts forever.
They will not be disgraced in hard times;
even in famine they will have more than enough.

But the wicked will die.
The Lord's enemies are like flowers in a field—
they will disappear like smoke.

The wicked borrow and never repay,
but the godly are generous givers.
Those the Lord blesses will possess the land,
but those he curses will die.

The Lord directs the steps of the godly.
He delights in every detail of their lives.
Though they stumble, they will never fall,
for the Lord holds them by the hand.

Once I was young, and now I am old.
Yet I have never seen the godly abandoned
or their children begging for bread.
The godly always give generous loans to others,
and their children are a blessing.

Turn from evil and do good,
and you will live in the land forever.
For the Lord loves justice,
and he will never abandon the godly.

He will keep them safe forever,
but the children of the wicked will die.
The godly will possess the land
and will live there forever.

The godly offer good counsel;
they teach right from wrong.
They have made God's law their own,
so they will never slip from his path.

The wicked wait in ambush for the godly,
looking for an excuse to kill them.
But the Lord will not let the wicked succeed
or let the godly be condemned when they are put on trial.

Put your hope in the Lord.
Travel steadily along his path.
He will honor you by giving you the land.
You will see the wicked destroyed.

I have seen wicked and ruthless people
flourishing like a tree in its native soil.
But when I looked again, they were gone!
Though I searched for them, I could not find them!

Look at those who are honest and good,
for a wonderful future awaits those who love peace.
But the rebellious will be destroyed;
they have no future.

The Lord rescues the godly;
he is their fortress in times of trouble.
The Lord helps them,
rescuing them from the wicked.
He saves them,
and they find shelter in him.



Psalm Worksheet

Author of this psalm:

☐ named _____ ☐ unnamed

What emotions are present in the psalm? Check all that apply:

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ☐ anger | ☐ anxiety | ☐ delight | ☐ fear |
| ☐ gratitude | ☐ grief | ☐ hope | ☐ joy |
| ☐ longing | ☐ love | ☐ optimism | ☐ peace |
| ☐ remorse | ☐ sorrow | ☐ sympathy | |
| ☐ other _____ | | | |

What does this psalm say about the psalmist's circumstances?

How does the psalmist describe himself?

What requests are made to God? What instructions are given to the reader?

How is God addressed and/or described?

What situation in my life does this psalm call to mind?

Day 5: Write a psalm for prayer

Write your own psalm below as a prayer of gratitude, petition/request, or lament. Use the psalm structure described in the *What Are the Psalms?* feature, as well as the other resources provided on pages 6-9 to craft your psalm.

Day 6: Reflection

- Take time to reflect on how you respond when you don't get what you want.
- Based on what we've learned and studied, what is the Holy Spirit teaching you about not getting what you want? Are there any next steps the Holy Spirit is prompting you to take?

Pray

Bring what you know to be true about what God is calling you toward in prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to do a transforming work in your life. This can look like: prayer to surrender our ways of thinking and living to God, confessing our need for him, and asking him to transform us. As you pray, ask God to give you the strength to partner with him as we take steps towards transformation. Take time to listen, and ask the Holy Spirit for courage to do what he is asking you to do.



Day 7: Practice resting in the presence of God

Today, quiet your heart and rest in God alone.

- Set 15 minutes aside for a centering prayer. Use a timer if it helps you relax.
- Find a comfortable position.
- Intentionally place yourself in the presence of God, in the center of his love.
- Choose a simple word, phrase or verse from scripture that expresses your desire for God (e.g., love, peace, grace, Jesus, Great Shepherd). Let this word guard your attention.
- Take time to become quiet. Be with Jesus. Listen. Be still. When distractions persist, acknowledge the distractions, but continually return to Jesus through your prayer word.
- Rest in the center of God's love. Trust the Holy Spirit to connect you with God.
- Take several minutes to come out of prayer. Don't hurry. Breathe in the presence of Christ. Offer yourself to God for the tasks awaiting you (e.g., "I am yours," or "Remain with me").

**Adapted from Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun*



