



followers of
THE WAY

a discipleship pathway

“However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers *as a follower of the Way ...*” Acts 24:14

ABIDE IN CHRIST – Part Four

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Abide 10 – Memorization Will Help You Renew Your Life

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Introduction

As you follow Jesus, you'll face many difficulties still! This surprises many, causes major confusion, and various questions. However, Jesus did not promise his children an easy life, saying, **Matthew 7:14 (ESV)** *For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.* He was clear about what one could expect in this world; troubles (see **John 15:18-21; 16:33**).

The apostles agreed from experience! When Paul and Barnabas returned from a missionary trip, they said, **Acts 14:22 (NIV)** *We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.* Even as God's treasured possession, you'll wrestle with your own brokenness within, while being outwardly attacked by temptations and opposition.

In 2 Corinthians 11:23-29, Paul listed many hardships that he encountered. Very few people have experienced the challenges and pain of Paul. Still, he didn't use these as excuses. Instead, he expected to grow through his suffering, even declaring from prison, **Philippians 3:10 (NIV)** *I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.*

No surrendering or quitting for Paul! In fact, be inspired by his resolve to keep going, **Philippians 3:12 (NIV)** *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.* This passion is why he could effectively challenge the Philippian believers to do the same, **Philippians 2:12 (NIV)** *... as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.*

What made it possible for Paul and the Philippians to persevere in faith despite such trials and troubles?

Why it is Possible to Persevere and Grow in the Faith

First: God's Spirit is living in you

The truth is, you have more going for you than what will come against you. Consider this incredible passage, **Romans 8:31-32 (NIV2011)** *What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

A massive gift that God has given to his children is the Holy Spirit, to live inside of them. This is an incredible blessing for ALL who are followers of the Way. It's a significant part of your salvation, not to be ignored. This blessing, the Spirit, gives you strength on the inside, helping you to keep growing in maturity. Who wouldn't want this help? Or as Paul describes it, **Ephesians 3:16 (NIV)** *I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.*

The Holy Spirit is also a gift from God, freely given by a generous Father. As Jesus declared, **Luke 11:13 (NIV)** *If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?*

Second: you have God's Word, the Bible

As God announced through his prophet, **Isaiah 55:11 (NIV)** ... *so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*

Ultimately, your words express your wishes and desires. But God's Word(s) accomplish exactly what they are sent out for. Wow! Praise God!

Third: you have the ability to feed your spirit/soul on his specific words to you

In previous lessons, you've seen the need for "rhema" words, specific words from God to you. As the Holy Spirit speaks these into your inner being, you'll encounter life. Or as John notes, **John 6:63 (NIV)** *The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.*

You have the ability and responsibility to spiritually EAT. God won't force you to do this. The 'word' that the Bible uses to describe such eating or feeding is "meditating." Consider what it says in Psalm 1, and the promise given to those who meditate, **Psalm 1:2-3 (NIV)** ... *but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers.*

In meditation, you weigh, prayerfully think about, listen or 'chew' on the Bible. This is VERY different than what Eastern religions do, as here you're meditating on the actual words of the living God!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 3 reasons are given for why you can persevere?
3. How can the Holy Spirit help you persevere?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Listen in prayer about this question – "Holy Spirit, are there any patterns or examples of where I have given up in my life? What are they?" Write down what you receive.
2. Humbly ask someone that you live or work with – "do you feel that I am the type of person that perseveres, that approaches life with the ability to endure?"
3. Write out a prayer to God, asking him to help you grow in perseverance. Be specific if the first two questions revealed any examples or patterns of giving up.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 19:1-12.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Memorization is an Extension of Meditation

As you saw in Day 1, the psalmist said to meditate on God's law - day and night. The same instructions were given to Joshua, by God, **Joshua 1:8 (NIV)** *Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.* Now wouldn't it be foolish to ignore the advice of God, about how true success is experienced?

Of course, not allowing God's Word to depart from your mouth has much to do with meditation. In fact, the idea of every believer owning their own Bible wasn't even possible until the 15th century. In 1439 Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press and for the first time in history the mass production of books was made possible. Put another way, the ability to print large numbers of books, newspapers, etc. is a relatively new creation!

So how did people receive the Bible before that? The scrolls would be in the tabernacle or temple or in someone's home, and God's Word was transmitted to people orally through memorization. That's why it says, "Don't let it depart from your MOUTH." Or as you read in the Old Testament, **Deuteronomy 30:14 (NIV)** *The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.*

This is why memorization is an extension of meditation. In meditation, you "chew" on the same passage carefully, over and over. In memorization, you continue this until you can repeat it from memory. Of course, this doesn't replace the need for prayer. The Bible says, "pray without ceasing," and, "meditate day and night." In fact, memorization and meditation will often lead you to prayer.

To further highlight one's need for memorization, here's a story from Pastor Ray Duerksen, about its impact in his life:

"Many years ago, I thought very negatively, and I would often mutter to myself: 'I quit.' What I didn't realize was that my thinking was self-fulfilling – I wanted to quit! I didn't actually quit, because I had gained a fear of the Lord – but I FELT like quitting! And we all know that how you FEEL often determines your responses! But over a period of time, I noticed that I didn't have those same thoughts anymore. And it has already lasted for two to three decades! I often wondered what had changed in me. Did God just do something miraculously in me, so that I was suddenly this positive and persevering person? Well, about that same time, totally unrelated I thought, I sensed I was to memorize verses in the Bible. So I did: 750 verses or so. It wasn't until years later, while meditating and praying on my deck early in the morning, that the Holy Spirit revealed to me WHY my emotions changed! My thinking had been changed through memorization. Even a character trait that stubbornly resisted my attempts to change it, was conquered through memorization."

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What is the difference between meditation and memorization?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Would you say that you read the Bible quickly or that you meditate on it?
2. What is your own personal journey with memorization? Write it down. If you've never memorized, write down the reasons why.
3. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22.
4. Memorize Psalm 1:1-2.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 19:13-30.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Benefits Of Meditation and Memorization

Benefit 1: it changes your perspective, motivating you to reorder your priorities

This is the most important reason for meditation and memorization. The Bible commands followers of Jesus to store up treasures in heaven rather than on earth. And the key for storing up treasures in the right place is your perspective. Put another way, if you have an eternal perspective, it will shape your priorities – where you'll invest your time, talents, prayers, and money.

The best way to get this correct perspective is to think about and meditate on eternal matters. Or in Paul's words, **Colossians 3:2 (NIV)** *Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.* He also said, **Romans 12:2 (NIV)** *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind ...*

Of course, this proper perspective will only be more clear in your mind if you memorize verses that relate to eternity (these will be introduced in Abide 11). Here is one example, **Psalm 39:4 (NIV)** *Show me, LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is.* Memorizing and meditating on such passages will help you resist the temptations of the world as you'll begin to see that this world is not ultimate reality – it is, as C.S. Lewis put it, the “shadowlands” of the real thing coming.

Benefit 2: it transforms your behaviors, making you successful

There's a very BIG reason why people cannot change their thoughts, emotions, attitudes, behaviors, and their speech! For sure, you have to PUT OFF all sinful practices and habits, but also PUT ON or CLOTHE yourself with the thoughts, emotions, attitudes, behaviors, and speech that were demonstrated by Jesus. This is actually one of the goals for the life of a follower of Jesus, as Paul affirms, **Galatians 4:19 (NIV)** *My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.*

This includes adding traits such as: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, goodness, self-control, love, and so on! They're also referred to as the fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22-**

23). But the question is this: “How do you PUT ON Jesus’ character?” Many believers try and try, but they just can’t change. Why? It’s usually because they’re thinking about the wrong things!

Your character will be transformed by first renewing your mind. That’s where the war is being waged for men, women, teens, and children. Consider this longer passage and the challenge at the end, to take every thought captive, **2 Corinthians 10:3-5 (NIV)** *For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

And how do you take captive your thoughts? By intentionally thinking on the right things – that’s how. And this is exactly where memorization will help you immensely!

The apostle Paul knew the value of how minds are shaped, saying, **Philippians 4:8 (NIV)** *Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. What 2 benefits of meditation and memorization are mentioned in today’s reading?
3. How does a person start to change their character? What often has to come first?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Ask God to show you a time when a perspective change really helped you out. Write this down. And thank him for guiding your thoughts (or using others to help you).
2. Spend some time in prayer over this question – “Jesus, what do I worry about, or stress over, that can be impacted by thinking about eternity instead?” Write this down.
3. Review Psalm 1:1-2.
4. Memorize Psalm 1:3-4.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 20:1-16.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

On Day 3, two benefits of meditation/memorization were introduced. Today, you’ll look at a third one.

Benefit 3: it revives your emotions, making you emotionally whole

In some places, there is opposition to followers of the Way showing emotion. Further, for many, their faith is mainly a matter of the head and not the heart. However, there are at least three important purposes for your emotions:

Purpose 1: you are to love and worship God with your emotions

Jesus instructs you to love God like this: **Matthew 22:37 (NIV)** *Love the Lord your God with all your HEART and with all your SOUL and with all your MIND.* Men and women are emotional beings – it’s a major part of who you are. You can also see in the Bible that God discourages lukewarmness in one’s faith (see **Revelation 3:16**). Real worship, on the other hand, taps into and uses emotions. That’s what music, singing, praise, and rejoicing are for! If you never or seldom experience emotion in your worship, something is wrong.

Consider the words of David, **Psalms 4:7 (NIV)** *You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound.* Or what Peter confirmed, **1 Peter 1:8 (NIV)** *Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.*

Then there’s the example of Jesus himself, which Luke describes, **Luke 10:21 (NIV)** *At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure."*

The problem isn’t that most people use too MUCH emotion in worship – they use it too little! Of course, just as people have varying degrees of intellectual capacity (or IQ), they also have differences in emotional capacity (or EQ). But to employ virtually no emotion in one’s walk with God is an indication of needed growth.

Purpose 2: you are to receive love in your emotions

Just as the love of a spouse was never intended to be a purely rational experience, in the same way, God’s love for you is to go beyond intellectual understanding. In fact, you were designed to EXPERIENCE God’s love! Don’t sell yourself short! It’s that good.

Purpose 3: emotions are for motivation, not for direction

But here’s where many go wrong. Some use emotions for directional purposes and decision-making. They make choices based on what ‘feels’ right or good. That’s the wrong use of emotions. Instead, you’re not to be guided by your emotions in making decisions, but by your mind as it considers God’s Word. Paul makes this clear when he says, **Romans 12:2 (NIV)** *... be transformed by the renewing of your MIND. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.* There it is!

Your mind is to be guided by the Bible and the Spirit. And once the mind has made the proper decision about something, then emotion can be very helpful as a MOTIVATOR for doing the right thing. Put another way, emotions can move you to obedient actions!

So, what does this all have to do with meditation and memorization? Well, if you store up verses in your mind about who God is, it will help you relate to him in your emotions as he really is. You will begin to think of him like that in your own journey, and that brings great enjoyment of his person and ways.

By memorizing, you'll confront where you're emotionally broken, and healing occurs. For example, you can memorize the emotional expressions of the Bible and speak them to God and to others, until they start to transform your soul. One such example is, **Psalm 103:1-2 (ESV)** *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What benefit of meditation and memorization is mentioned in today's reading?
3. What are 3 important purposes for your emotions?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Would you say that you love God fully with your emotions? Invite God to speak to you about your "emotional journey" with him. Write down a summary of this part of your life.
2. Review Psalm 1:1-4.
3. Memorize Psalm 1:5-6.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 20:17-28.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 5

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

On Days 3 and 4, three benefits for meditation/memorization were noted. Today, you'll learn about four more.

Benefit 4: it helps you resist temptation, making you victorious

Temptation is NOT fun! It's tough! However, a great way to resist temptation is by committing to memory relevant verses from the Bible. Matthew 4 records three temptations that Satan brought against Jesus, and Jesus resisted all three by reciting the Bible from memory! Here's how the psalmist described it, **Psalm 119:11 (NIV)** *I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.*

Satan hates followers of the Way! He does everything possible to rob you and to steal what has been planted in your heart. Or as Jesus taught, using a parable, **Matthew 13:19 (NIV)** *When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.* One of the best ways to avoid being robbed is to make sure that you have God's Word hidden deep in your heart through memorization.

Benefit 5: it sharpens your witness and ministry, making you fruitful

As Jesus ministered, he quoted twenty-four Old Testament books almost 180 times in the New Testament. Did you know that the moment a person starts following Jesus, they receive the mission to witness to others (to share God's goodness) and to minister to others (to serve them)? Having Bible

verses stored up in your heart will only increase your impact and success! If the Bible is powerful for you, it will be powerful for many others as well.

Think of this command, given through Peter, **1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)** *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.* Obeying this command is easier if you have the Bible ready in your heart and mind.

Benefit 6: it gives you spiritual understanding

There are three ways in which you can receive wisdom and understanding. First, you can receive it from others. Second, you can ask for wisdom as you pray. Third, you can meditate on and memorize God's Word. Here's a great attitude to aim for, **Psalm 119:15-16 (NIV)** *I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.* And here's a powerful prayer, **Psalm 119:18 (ESV)** *Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.*

Benefit 7: it energizes your prayer life

Much of the Psalms are a collection of prayers. Some have called it the Bible's prayer book. What's fascinating, however, is that the book doesn't begin with a prayer. Instead, it starts with a psalm on the value of meditation! This is because when you meditate on the Bible, you'll begin to understand the mind of God. And if you have the mind of God, praying becomes much more lively and powerful!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 4 benefits of meditation and memorization are mentioned in today's reading?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Some people suggest that they cannot memorize. This isn't true, as everyone has certain things that they remember very well. Confess if you have believed this lie that, "you can't."
2. Ask 2 or 3 mature believers about their journey with memorization.
3. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 20:29-34.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 6

Final Steps

Steps to Memorization

Step 1: pray for a desire to memorize

You may doubt that you can do this – particularly if you are older. But if you were offered \$1000 for every verse you memorized in the next week, how many do you think you could memorize? Yet God

says of his Word, **Psalm 19:10-11 (NIV)** *They (laws) are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.*

Step 2: choose the Bible verses intentionally

Don't be random in the way you choose verses to memorize – be intentional about this. Even the verses throughout the Abide lessons have been carefully chosen. Of course, many will want to memorize passages like Psalm 23, which bring comfort and encouragement. This is both necessary and good. However, don't stay stuck in the "comfort" category.

For example, you are alive for a purpose and for an assignment which God has for you (**Ephesians 2:10**). And the most helpful verses for this are those that give you an eternal perspective, as mentioned previously.

Step 3: start small

Choose whatever is manageable for you. If you can only do a couple of verses for the week, that's fine. Begin with one verse and repeat it over and over until you can say it. Then do the same with the second verse, repeating it until you can say it. Next, if the verses link next to each other in the Bible, connect them as you review, so that you can say them together.

Review these throughout your day whenever you have a moment. In the days following, keep reviewing them. Over the long term, if you memorized just 1 verse per week, after one year you would have 52 verses. If you continued this for 10 years, you'd be at 520 verses! That's a lot, yet possible!

Step 4: Choose a tool to help you

This can include 3 x 5 index cards, or a spreadsheet, or a phone app such as "The Bible Memory" app.

Abide 11 – Jesus Expects You to Obey

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Obedience is the Measure of One's Love for God

There's some preaching and writing online, even from popular authors and teachers, suggesting that talking about obedience is unhelpful, or even harmful. However, the Bible is FILLED with verses on obedience – both Old and New Testament. In fact, it's not an overstatement to conclude that to be a follower of the Way is *to obey*. Put another way, you're following someone, with specific commands!

Whether you're seeking God and his will through the Bible, by getting advice from others, or by hearing personal words for you from God (rhemas), obedience is a very important issue.

Earlier in Abide, obedience was introduced in the SMORP acronym:

- Scripture – Refers to reading and memorizing the Bible
- Message – Refers to anything the Lord may be saying to you
- Obedience – Refers to obeying what God instructs you to do
- Repentance – Refers to sin the Holy Spirit requires you to confess and repent of
- Prayer – Refers to your prayers to God

It can be easy to make huge announcements – “I love God so much!” But what is the real test of this? What you say with your lips, or what your actions are?

In the Bible, David is called a man after God's own heart. For example, in the New Testament, it states, **Acts 13:22 (NIV)** *After removing Saul, he made David their king. He testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.'*

Did you observe what is highlighted about David? It says he is a man after God's own heart BECAUSE of what he was willing to do; everything God wanted him to do. This is not an impossible requirement for perfection, but a clear expectation to AIM for obedience. This is the goal; to be a person who is ready to honor God, to have enthusiasm for him and his ways!

In the New Testament, a Pharisee (a religious leader) asked Jesus which of the commandments in the Law was the greatest. Was he curious? Was he trying to trap Jesus? Either way, Jesus was clear with his answer, **Matthew 22:37-38 (NIV)** *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.*

Can a person measure this love for God? What does it mean? Jesus answered this question as well when he said, **John 14:21 (ESV)** *Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.* You see that your love for Christ is measured by your obedience!

Now this is a sobering thought because many people think that loving God is about becoming emotional during a personal or corporate worship time. Of course, as was noted in Abide 10 – you ARE to worship

God with your heart and soul (that's the emotional side) and mind. HOWEVER, it is only measured to be TRUE love if it is linked to obedience!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What is a person after God's own heart focused on?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. There are different types of people when it comes to obedience: i) those who obey, but do so reluctantly ii) those who obey joyfully iii) those who are stubborn and don't care iv) those who want to do right, but struggle consistently to do so. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you which one describes you best.
2. Write down an example of when God asked you to obey something and you followed through.
3. Write down an example of when God asked you to obey something and you disobeyed.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 21:1-17.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

True Faith Leads To Obedience

Today, you'll look at a story from Luke 17. Jesus had instructed his disciples (another way to say, "followers") that if a brother or sister sinned against them and then repented, they were to forgive, even if it happened seven times in one day (see Luke **17:3-4**). What is the disciples' reaction to this incredible teaching? It's recorded, **Luke 17:5 (NIV)** *The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"*

In verse 6, Jesus tells them what they could do if they acted on the faith given to them. He is highlighting that faith IS powerful! However, he then goes on to explain, through a parable, a key part of faith. Don't rush through this – it can be hard to understand, but is vital to grasp! Here it is:

Luke 17:7-10 (NIV) *Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, "Come along now and sit down to eat"? Would he not rather say, "Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink"? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty."*

What's going on here? The disciples were upset at the hard things Jesus was requiring of them, such as radical forgiveness. So they demanded: "Well then, increase our faith because such forgiveness is too hard!" In other words, they were "lipping off."

Jesus' telling of the parable in response to the disciples' reaction was his way of setting the matter straight. He was saying to them that when a master tells them to do something, they don't need more faith. What they needed was to obey – to act on what he had already said! The proper response would have been not to “lip off” as the disciples had just done; but to simply say, “Yes, sir!” Jesus was saying: “One of us here is Lord; and it isn't you.”

For his readers, Luke pressed the point further, sharing a story from Jesus' ministry, which illustrated what a proper response to Jesus would look like. It's found in verses 11-17. In the story, ten lepers cried out to Jesus, begging him to have mercy on them and to heal them. Jesus could have simply given a word, and they would have been healed on the spot! Instead, he tested their obedience, telling them to go and show themselves to the priest.

It's unmistakable what he was doing: if the lepers went, they would be healed; if they refused, demanding instead that he heal them instantly, they wouldn't be healed. The response of these lepers to Jesus' command stands in complete opposition to the disciples' response. The verse simply offers: “As they went, they were cleansed.” That's it! They didn't bargain; nor offer alternative suggestions. Nothing! They just went!

The disciples didn't need more faith; they simply needed to obey. This is true faith! And this is a reality for all followers of the Way.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What is taught about faith and obedience in today's reading?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you anything that you are asking God to do in your life, YET is being held up because you have not obeyed something he has previously commanded (either through the Word or prayer).
2. Take your answer from question 1, and share it with someone else.
3. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1.
4. Memorize Colossians 3:2.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 21:18-32.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Obedience Is Better Than Sacrifice!

The life of King Saul provides a vivid and sad picture of what happens when a person disobeys. The prophet Samuel was sent to Saul with a very specific command, **1 Samuel 15:3 (NIV)** *Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.* What does Saul do after Samuel leaves him?

First: he immediately gathered his army and attacked Amalek, killing everyone ...

EXCEPT, he spared the King of Amalek. Perhaps he was conforming to the culture? In that day, if you conquered a nation, you often took its leader alive – a trophy of sorts!

Second: Saul also slaughtered thousands of animals ...

BUT he spared the best of the sheep, oxen, lambs and all that was good, and gave it to his people so they could sacrifice to God! People must have thought they had a godly king – putting the Lord first! But here's God's reaction, **1 Samuel 15:11 (NIV)** *I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.*

God saw partial obedience as disobedience, calling it rebellion (verse 23). Samuel returned to meet Saul again, and when Samuel reached him, Saul gave an enthusiastic greeting, **1 Samuel 15:13 (NIV)** *The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD's instructions.*

But Saul was fooling himself; he had only obeyed the instructions to a certain point! The warning found in the book of James is relevant here, **James 1:22 (NIV)** *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*

Here's what Samuel states in response to Saul's excitement, **1 Samuel 15:14 (NIV)**, *"What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"* Quickly, Saul shifted the blame to the people: **1 Samuel 15:15 (NIV)** *"The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest."* What a character!

Saul further tried to excuse his disobedience, saying the animals were for sacrifice. This is a caution - when you suggest that your disobedience could be an acceptable sacrifice or service to God, it's called deception! Samuel, of course, got to the heart of the matter, **1 Samuel 15:22 (NIV)** *"Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice."*

A follower of the Way must not forget that obedience is the highest form of worship there is! You WILL be called to sacrifice for God, but it needs to be rooted in obedience. With such strong roots, you'll find yourself with a beautiful harvest of godly fruit in your life.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.

2. Why were Saul's actions considered disobedience?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. The story of Saul is very striking. Partial obedience IS disobedience. Therefore, do not rush on this next question. With a humble and soft heart, ask God – “God, reveal any area of my life where I am partially obeying you?” When God reveals something (most struggle with this), confess it.
2. Based on what was received in Question 1, ask God to show you what obedience would look like.
3. Finally, ask him for any promises that he wants to give in response to your desire to completely obey him.
4. Review Colossians 3:2.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 21:33-46.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Disobedience Can be an Open Door to Demonic Influence

Returning to the story of Saul and Samuel, consider this very serious statement, **1 Samuel 15:23 (NKJV)** *For rebellion [is as] the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.* It's important to know that the phrase, “is as,” did not appear in the original text. It was added later by translators. Instead, the verse should read: “For rebellion is witchcraft.”

Of course, witchcraft brings up all sorts of images of witches dressed in black, saying spells and declaring curses, etc. But this is noteworthy: the actual practice of witchcraft opens one directly to the realm of demons (which are very real!). Further, the goal in witchcraft is to control circumstances, situations, or people, often without the participant's understanding of what is happening in the spirit realm. In fact, in witchcraft, the participants are taught that the more they rebel, the more they give access to demonic powers to influence and control them. Scary!

When you consider this, it now makes sense when Samuel warns Saul about rebellion and its connection to witchcraft. And the Bible sadly reveals that not long after his rebellion, an evil, tormenting spirit did come into Saul's life to trouble him, **1 Samuel 16:14 (NIV)** *Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him.*

Saul became a very different man from this point onward. He had been a modest young man, who obeyed his parents, the prophet Samuel, and God. If you had predicted in his early years that the day would come when he would kill 85 innocent priests, their wives, and their children in a fit of rage, no one would have believed you. But the sad truth is – he did just that! (**1 Samuel 22**)

The evil spirit manipulated Saul into a life of jealousy, anger, hatred, strife, murder, and deception. At his lowest point, just before his death, Saul even consulted a witch! Of course, he could have made a change by admitting what he had done, and by turning back to a life of obedience. But he didn't.

Sadly, when demons begin to deceive someone, due to disobedience, they are moving down a pathway that can even lead to abandonment of the faith. Of course, moments of weakness do not automatically lead to this place! But caution is needed.

It's a sad journey: a person refuses to obey; they are deceived more until they cannot hear God's promptings about their sin anymore; they open themselves up to demonic influence and do things no one could have imagined they would ever do; and finally, they abandon the faith!

People like Saul can start off well – but along the way they became disobedient.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What is taught about disobedience in today's reading?
3. If a person continues to disobey, are they able to sense the Holy Spirit's conviction as easily? What begins to happen over time?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Make a list of other believers that you know – from your family, or small group, or friends. Spend some time in prayer for them. Pray that God would help them to take obedience seriously in their lives. This is not a time for judging others, but to lovingly pray for them. You can even ask the Holy Spirit to give you specific things to pray for– specific things they may struggle to obey. But this is between you and God – don't share it with them.
2. Of course, if you sense that you have opened the door to the demonic in your life through disobedience, confess and walk away from this. Because of the seriousness of this, you may want to find someone to help you.
3. Review Colossians 3:2.
4. Memorize Psalm 39:4.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 22:1-22.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 5

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Obedience Helps People Experience God's Friendship & Love

Listen to this promise, directly from Jesus, **John 15:10 (ESV)** *If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.* (see also **1 John 2:4-6**) Abiding in Jesus' love – what a beautiful thing! But notice that it's conditional – IF! You can experience greater amounts of God's love IF you obey him!

Friendship with God is also connected to obedience. Jesus also said, **John 15:14 (ESV)** *You are my friends if you do what I command you.* Too many believers quickly declare their friendship with God, while living in disobedience to him.

Of course, friendship with God is worth it! Jesus describes it when he says, **John 15:15 (ESV)** *No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.*

When you become a friend with God, it means that he will reveal things to you! This is incredible! Or as Proverbs, the primary book of wisdom affirms, **Proverbs 3:32 (NIV)** *For the LORD detests the perverse but takes the upright into his confidence.*

You can see this in the life of Abraham, who was called a friend of God (see **Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23**). For example, before God judged Sodom and Gomorrah, he told Abraham about it (**Genesis 18:17**). What a privilege!

Stories of Obedience

Story 1: the testing of Abraham

This test began with God's call for Abraham to follow him. You can read about it early in the Bible, **Genesis 12:1 (NIV)** *The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."* There were three things that Abraham was to leave: his country; his people; his father's household. Did Abraham do this? Not exactly...

He left his country and his people, yes, but what about his father's household? If you go back two verses, you'll see what happened ... **Genesis 11:31 (NIV)** *Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there.*

Evidently Terah talked Abraham into going along and they set out for Canaan. However, they never got past Haran, where they stopped and settled. Abraham's father Terah died there, and THEN Abraham continued on to Canaan. And did he go alone at this point? NO. He took along his nephew Lot and what a disaster that ended up being!

Abraham placed family before God, when God had clearly told him not to; it was an idol in his life. Therefore, it isn't surprising that he again would be tested, through this command, **Genesis 22:2 (NIV)** *Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."*

Thankfully, Abraham passed this test. Now God would come before family, even before his one and only son, Isaac, the son of promise! It is one thing to obey when the command is logical. It is quite another when obedience calls for something that doesn't make any sense.

Story 2: from Pastor Ray Duerksen, doubling our giving

One day I was praying in the basement, when the Spirit spoke to me, asking me to double the amount we were giving to the church. It didn't make any sense, as I was a student at the time, and was just barely able to keep my young family fed and clothed. With EVEN less money, I didn't know how we'd

be able to survive. I told Fran about it and she replied, "If that's what God is asking us to do, then we better do it." For two weeks we gave the agreed 20%. But only two weeks later the bottom dropped out. The company I was working for announced that due to the staggering interest rates of over 20%, it was shutting down its operations, and all employees would be laid off. When I got home that night, I informed Fran of what had just transpired. Her first response was: "But what about the 20% we promised to give God?" I replied, "I think God knew I would lose my job when he asked us to double our giving." It was a test!

We held to our end of the bargain. Of course, 20% of nothing, is nothing! But money and food did in fact begin to come in, without us saying one word to anyone! For the next two months, though we had no savings, no income, no support from churches or individuals, and NO money coming from the government, we lived at the same level we had before. And when I finally got another job, our giving had not dipped at all! God requires unconditional obedience. Our responsibility is to obey; God is responsible for the results.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What is taught about obedience in today's reading?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Spend some time praising God for his desire to be your friend and to reveal things to you! Write down your praises.
2. If you feel like you have a story that relates to obedience, write it down, and share it with as many others as you can. Remember to keep the emphasis on God's blessing, not on you.
3. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1, Colossians 3:2, Psalm 39:4.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 22:23-46.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 6

Final Steps

1. You've now completed 11 Abide lessons! Congratulations! Spend some time considering where you are on your journey with God. Have a conversation with him. Ask him what he is pleased by in your life. Also ask him what he desires to change.
2. If you have fallen behind on the memory verses, take some time to make a plan for how you'll catch up.

Abide 12 – Repent & Confess

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Introduction

The idea of repentance was first mentioned when SMORP was introduced.

Scripture – Refers to reading and memorizing the Bible

Message – Refers to anything the Lord may be saying to you

Obedience – Refers to obeying what God instructs you to do

Repentance – Refers to sin the Holy Spirit requires you to confess and repent of

Prayer – Refers to your prayers to God

Unfortunately, some believe and teach that once a person becomes a follower of Jesus, they no longer need to practice confession or repentance. While those who communicate this may have good motives, in Abide 12, you'll learn about the continuing need for what some have called, "the holy habit of repentance."

Saints Still Need to Repent and Confess Their Sins After Salvation

First: believers still sin after salvation

When you became a follower of the Way, one of the names you're given is, "saint." While many churches no longer use this name to refer to each other, it does point to your value before God. However, while valuable, saints still sin!

For example, in Ephesians 4, Paul provides a list of sins that the saints are to stay away from, stating, **Ephesians 4:30 (NIV)** *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

Writing to the church in Corinth, Paul actually rebuked believers for sinful actions while they met, **1 Corinthians 11:17 (NIV)** *In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good ...* In his second letter to this same church, Paul is clear that they aren't yet perfect in their behaviour, **2 Corinthians 7:1 (NIV)** *Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*

John echoed what Paul said, **1 John 1:8 (NIV)** *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.* John is saying that if you claim that you have no sin, the denial itself is sinful. Sadly, many followers of the Way shrink back from this truth!

Of course, Jesus himself taught that his children still sin. For example, in his seven letters to the churches (**Revelation 1-3**), Jesus rebuked five out of the seven because he was displeased with them. To the church at Sardis, he warned, **Revelation 3:2 (NIV)** *Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.*

Second: believers still need to confess and repent of these ongoing sins

Take a look at what John says in 1 John, **1 John 1:9 (NIV)** *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* It mentions confession, and it's important to know that the verb, "confess," is in the present tense. This means that you're to REGULARLY confess your sins.

Further, James included the confession of sins in the middle of his instructions concerning healing prayer, **James 5:16 (NIV)** *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*

Finally, Jesus plainly told the churches of Revelation what to do with their sins. For example, he commanded the church at Ephesus to repent, saying, **Revelation 2:5 (NIV)** *Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.* This is a part of what Jesus is doing today! He encourages, BUT he also calls his children to confess and repent.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Why do you need to continue to confess and repent? What are some verses or passages that support this?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Can you think of a time in your life when you confessed or acknowledged a sin or failure? Did you experience a, "weight lifted off of your shoulders?" Write down an example or two.
2. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1, Colossians 3:2, Psalm 39:4.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 23:1-22.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

The Difference Between Judicial and Relational Forgiveness

The forgiveness that you'll STILL need is not the forgiveness that you receive when you first become a follower of the Way. When you receive salvation from Jesus, you're forgiven in a *judicial* sense. It's as if you had never sinned! The judge, God, has declared you innocent. Praise God!

Instead, the forgiveness that you still can experience is *relational*. A great way to understand this is through marriage.

Suppose a husband ignores his wife and takes her for granted; perhaps he even says some unkind things to her. It gets, to use an old expression, “chilly in the room!” Now she might no longer respond to him and though they are living under the same roof, there’s little or no communication. Are they still legally married? Yes. Are they still in love? No. Are they communicating? No. Do they have a great relationship? No. They are relationally distant.

It’s similar in your relationship with God. When you sin, are you still his legally adopted child? Yes. But when you sin, there’s an issue to resolve, a disruption in the relationship. Jesus made this perfectly clear when he washed his disciples’ feet (**John 13**). In a culture where people walked long distances on dusty roads in sandals, it was normal for the host to arrange for water, to wash the guests’ feet.

When Peter objected to what Jesus was doing – washing his feet - Jesus replied, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me” (verse 8). To this Peter responded, “Then wash me all over” (verse 9), to which Jesus answered, **John 13:10 (NIV)** *A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you* (referring to Judas – verse 11).

What was Jesus getting at? Washing is elsewhere used to symbolize the cleansing from sin (**1 Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 5:26; Titus 3:5**). Notice Jesus says that the one who has bathed doesn’t need to be washed all over, as Peter had suggested – they just need their feet washed. All his disciples, except Judas, were in good standing with him. Jesus had received them as his own, forgiving their sins, and in his words, they were clean all over.

What Jesus is teaching is that when you are forgiven of your sins you get bathed from head to toe – he washes you white as snow (**Isaiah 1:18**)! You’re clean all over! But as the washing of feet demonstrates, you’ll still need regular cleansing/forgiveness from the sin that piles up from living in this broken world!

Paul taught the same. On the one hand he told the church at Corinth, **1 Corinthians 6:11 (NIV)** *And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.* Yet in the same letter Paul challenged them to examine themselves for sin before taking the Lord’s Supper (communion).

Other verses in the Bible that instruct believers to examine their lives include: **Psalms 119:59-60; Lamentations 3:40; Matthew 7:3-5; 2 Corinthians 13:5**. Therefore, when the Spirit reminds you of a sin, you need to ask for forgiveness and deal with it in a way that he asks.

Put another way, when you are conscious of doing wrong or when you realize that your actions or attitudes or words grieved God, as his beloved child, confess your sin and ask him to cleanse you, without for a second thinking, “I hope I’m still saved!”

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. What’s the difference between judicial and relational forgiveness? How did Jesus illustrate it? Explain these as best as you can.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Since confession is discussed today, it's a good time to practice! And it's REALLY useful to do this with someone else (this is usually easier than a person might fear), but it can be adapted to do it alone.
2. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any sins that you need to confess. Then go through Question 3.
3. **Use the Peer-to-Peer Prayer Ministry Guide below to confess your sins**

Terminology:

- a. **Person:** refers to the person receiving ministry
- b. **Minister:** refers to the person giving or guiding the time
- c. If you use the tool alone, then you are both the Person and the Minister

Steps:

- a. **Person** confesses their sin: "Heavenly Father, I confess name of sin as my sin. I repent of it and ask you to forgive me"
- b. **Minister** assures them of forgiveness: "Name of person, God's Word promises that when you confess your sin, he is faithful and just to forgive you of your sin and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. So, in Jesus' name I declare that you are forgiven"
- c. **Minister** breaks all bondages to that sin: "In Jesus' name I break all bondages to name of sin in name of person and cleanse them with the blood of Jesus"

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 23:23-39.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

What Repentance Includes

First: repentance includes the mind

Repentance begins with agreeing in your mind – "what I did is wrong!" There is no place for denial in the journey that you walk with Jesus.

This need for agreement can be seen in the story of the prodigal son, **Luke 15:17-19 (NIV)** *When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.'*

Second: repentance includes the heart or emotions

If you take your sin seriously, it will produce a godly sorrow or grief. Here is what Paul says in response to the right kind of attitude about sin, **2 Corinthians 7:9-10 (NIV)** ... *for you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.*

You observe in this passage that emotions can produce either a godly or worldly kind of sorrow. The worldly sorrow ends up in pain and death because it only grieves over the consequences of the sin, and because it's self-centered. Godly sorrow, on the other hand, grieves over the *cause* of those results – your own choices.

Third: repentance includes the will

Repentance is a choice, an act of the will to change direction and behavior. Feeling bad, but continuing to repeat the behaviour is not repentance. As John the Baptist said, **Luke 3:8 (NIV)** *Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.* Fruit is the result; the different actions.

Another verse that links repentance and action includes some encouragement from Paul, **Acts 26:20 (NIV)** ... *I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.*

You Are to Examine Yourself Before the Lord

Jesus calls all followers of the Way to regularly examine themselves, so that by his Spirit he can point out sin. Just as people are advised to receive regular medical checkups, the Bible wisely encourages you to do spiritual checkups as well.

In discussing communion, Paul says, **1 Corinthians 11:27-28, 31 (NIV)** *Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup ...³¹ But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.* What does it mean to judge yourself? It means to judge or deal with your sins!

In another passage, Paul even urged the believers at Corinth to test themselves to ensure that they were still in the faith! **2 Corinthians 13:5 (NIV)** *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test?*

If you need help on knowing how to do this, sincerely and with an open heart, imitate the prayer of David. He prayed, **Psalms 139:23-24 (NIV)** *Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

This is so important for followers of the Way. And as you confess and repent, you'll experience two amazing benefits: relational forgiveness AND less discipline from God (which 1 Corinthians 11 also talks about in verse 30).

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are the 3 things that repentance includes?
3. What are 2 benefits of first examining yourself for any sin?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Can you think of a time in your life when you had worldly sorrow (sorry only for yourself, sorry that you had consequences), rather than godly sorrow? Write this down.

2. Can you think of a time in your life when you had godly sorrow (you were disappointed that you sinned against your Father and against others), rather than worldly sorrow?

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 24:1-22.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Confessing to One Another

There's something deeply significant about learning to confess to others, and receive their confessions. Some churches believe that this should only take place with a pastor or priest, or between God and the individual, but the Bible is clear that this for the entire family of God.

For example, if a brother/sister offends another, the hurt brother/sister is to confront the offender, and the offender is then to confess and repent. The hurt brother/sister is then commanded to forgive, **Luke 17:3 (NIV)** *So watch yourselves. "If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them, and if they repent, forgive them."* How powerful this is when it is practiced!

The writer of Hebrews also instructs believers to warn one another, as a protection, **Hebrews 3:13 (NIV)** *But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.*

Paul said something similar, **Galatians 6:1 (NIV)** *Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently ...* You may not find such a task enjoyable – whether you're the one who has sinned or the one confronting. However, it's a vital part of being a follower of the Way.

James has something further to think about, reminding the church, **James 5:19-20 (NIV)** *My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.* Wow!

Now it would really stretch things if you were instructed to confront someone about their sin, without expecting a response (confession and repentance) in return! Which is why James says matter-of-factly, **James 5:16 (NIV)** *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.* Mutual confession should happen!

From Acts, here is another example of public confession and repentance, **Acts 19:18 (NIV)** *Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds.*

Of course, the Bible does not require that you confess to others every single sin you confess to God. In fact, at times it would be quite inappropriate. For example, you wouldn't confess certain sins to your child. However, for good reasons, God does at times require it. Some of the benefits are:

- it can release healing (inner & outer) and set you free
- it can break pride – which is at the root of all sin!
- it encourages others to confess
- it can lead to mutual accountability
- it can encourage prayer support
- it seals the decision to deal with the sin

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Does the Bible teach that some of your sins should be confessed to others and vice versa? Explain.
3. What are some benefits of confessing to one another?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Spend some time in prayer and ask – “God, is there anything that I need to confess to another person?” Many are pleasantly surprised by the kind of breakthroughs which can happen when they confess to others!
2. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1, Colossians 3:2, Psalm 39:4.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 24:23-35.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 5

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Jesus Judges Believers Who Do Not Confess and Repent

First: Jesus will judge believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ

Paul teaches in the book of Romans that believers will still be judged after they die, **Romans 14:10 (NIV)** *You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.* He's saying – don't judge your fellow brother or sister! Jesus will deal with it.

In a letter to the Church at Corinth he says something similar, **2 Corinthians 5:10 (NIV)** *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.* Now that's clear!

Second: Jesus is judging believers in the present

Your faith is so important to God that he sometimes disciplines his children when they stumble along in an area. For example, consider the matter of believing or trusting God in Zacharias' life (Zacharias was told that he and his wife would have a child). He simply asked the angel, **Luke 1:18 (NIV)** *How can*

I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years. And for daring to question the greatness of God's power, he immediately could not speak until Elizabeth gave birth to their son John! Without God's discipline, it's easy to forget that Jesus is also to be Lord of everything in your life.

Sometimes God's discipline even ended up in ultimate judgment. In the sobering story of Ananias and Sapphira, Luke gives a real-life example of this (**Acts 5:1-11**). This couple told the apostles that they had given all of the proceeds from the sale of their land; but they hadn't. What was the consequence for their lying? God struck them dead!

Paul also emphasizes another possible result of God's discipline for sin, **1 Corinthians 11:30 (NIV)** *That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.* According to this verse, God's discipline includes, "weakness," "sickness," and "falling asleep" (premature death!).

There's also the story of Jesus healing a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years, at the Pool of Bethesda. Jesus sent him on his way with these words, **John 5:14 (NIV)** *"See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."* Wow!

Clarification: Jesus was equally clear that not ALL sickness was directly connected to a person's sin (see **John 9:1-3**).

Finally, if churches don't repent, Jesus judges and disciplines them – even now! To the church at Pergamum he said, **Revelation 2:16 (NIV)** *Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.*

Some might view this as harsh, but there are three amazing reasons why God disciplines his children now:

- it results in holiness for you, and it's for your good! **Hebrews 12:10 (NIV)** *Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness*
- you won't have to be judged with the world later on. **1 Corinthians 11:32 (NIV)** *When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world*
- discipline will warn others, bringing about a healthy fear of the Lord and respect for his commands. Again, this is for everyone's good (e.g. the rule – "don't touch a hot stove" and the healthy awe of its heat)

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are 2 ways/times that Jesus judges sin? Write this down with an explanation, as finding the right words can help you explain this to others as well.
3. What are 3 reasons for Jesus disciplining his children in the present?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Spend some time in prayer. Ask God – "have I experienced anything in the past or am I experiencing anything presently, due to sins I was or am not repenting of?"

2. In response to your answer in Question 1, thank him for loving you enough to discipline you now.
3. Also, in response to your answer in Question 1, ask God if there are any corrective steps that you need to currently take.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 24:36-51.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 6

Final Steps

1. This lesson, Abide 12, had some pretty intense stuff! Take some time to re-read the verses included during Days 1-5, while asking the Holy Spirit to gently teach you and encourage you.

