



for the week of June 3, 2012

growing our relationship with God

daily life notes for individuals & couples

Introductions

Welcome to **Life Notes**. This week, we'll be looking at a beautiful opportunity to grow our relationship with God through practicing various spiritual disciplines or soulcare habits of worship and relationship.

Any passages selected this week are copied below in their entirety, but it's best to use your own Bible so you can make note of things that interest you or speak to you in some way. It's always good to read a passage at least twice, so that your mind begins to get involved with what the Holy Spirit is saying. You can view various Bible versions online at sites like www.biblegateway.com

Note: Saturday is used as a "sabbath" or "rest from our every day work responsibilities" experience, but you might work on Saturday and be off some other time during the week that would be more appropriate to celebrating rest. Please feel free to adjust the **Life Notes** schedule to fit your own.

An Overview of this Week: spiritual disciplines or "soulcare"

When we talk about soulcare, we mean the habits or disciplines we use to maintain, restore, deepen, grow or refresh our relationship with God. Spiritual disciplines are simply specific opportunities to engage in an intimate, ongoing relationship with Father, Son and Spirit throughout our faith journey.

Each day this week we will focus on a different spiritual discipline so that you can experience the value of each. If you've been engaged in **Life Notes** but haven't yet practiced a Sabbath, please make a commitment this week to spend at least 3 hours truly enjoying God, your family and/or friends. Sabbath means rest - and a realization that what God has created in and around and through you is "good." If you get in the habit of practicing Sabbath, you'll love the connection it gives you with God and all those you love.

Monday: talking with God

There are so many places we could begin, but let's choose prayer as our starting point this week. Sometimes prayer is the most difficult thing for people, particularly if we're asked to pray "out loud." In reality, prayer is simply our unique, individual way of communicating with our very real, personal God.

We are loved. When we love someone, we communicate with them. God communicates with us through his Word, through his Son, through his Spirit. We communicate with God in a variety of ways - through our thoughts, our "out loud" prayers, our silent cries our journals and lists and the Holy Spirit, who intercedes for us, we're told, with groanings too deep for words (Romans 8:26,27).

As you begin this time of connecting with God today, just let your heart begin to express itself to God. He hears all languages, all emotions, all needs, all thanksgivings, all sounds. *"Prayer is all the ways we communicate and commune with God."* (Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*)

We often see prayer as telling God what we need, what we think, what we want, how we feel, and that is certainly a part of that relationship. But just like a new human relationship, eventually we have to do more than tell. We have to learn to listen. And share. And struggle. And learn. And walk awhile together in silence or even frustration. Prayer is our language of communication with God throughout a lifelong relationship. And our relationship with God is our own...an intimate relationship with Father, Son and Spirit.

The sons of Korah, in Psalm 42, step from confusion and hurt into this beautiful portrait of prayer. Read these verses at least three times and then spend as much time in prayer as you have to spend right now. Allow your heart to step into intimacy with God. See if you can step from words into no words at all and still be communing with God.

*Deep calls to deep
in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers
have swept over me.*

*By day the Lord directs his love,
at night his song is with me—
a prayer to the God of my life.*

Tuesday: Scripture and “lectio divina”

Begin your time today experiencing prayer - conversing with God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. As you pray, reflect on the gift of God’s Word - Jesus, the Son and his written Word that we have in Scripture.

Today, we want to take a look at a different way of reading Scripture. It isn’t new, but it’s been forgotten for a time by our more modern church traditions. It’s called “Lectio Divina” and it simply means, to listen to the divine...to hear Scripture as a letter from God instead of a textbook to be studied.

Begin today by opening your Bible to many different places you’ve underlined or starred or placed a piece of paper. Allow yourself to simply be encouraged by Scripture - by what you’ve read in the past, by what you read today. Allow God to move you through the pages of his word without needing to be taught for the moment. Just let God speak to you.

Now focus on a passage that you are particularly drawn to today. Read that passage again and then walk through four steps as you focus on God’s Word: ***reading or listening, meditation, prayer or conversation with God about the passage, contemplation or quiet/resting in God’s presence with his Word.***

“The Word of Scripture should never stop sounding in your ears and working in you all day long, just like the words of someone you love. And just as you do not analyze the words of someone you love, but accept them as they are said to you, accept the word of Scripture and ponder it in your heart, as Mary did. That is all...do not ask, ‘How shall I pass this on?’ but ‘What does it say to me?’ Then ponder this Word long in your heart until it has gone right into you and taken possession of you.” Deitrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*

The Lectio is a great way to “be” with God and His Word. Let God’s Word simply flow into your heart and life today.

Wednesday: listening to God through silence

As we begin our time today, find yourself resting in God's presence. Get in a comfortable place. Read Psalm 139 once again and then put everything else aside. Reflect, first, on a few questions:

How easy or hard is it for others to get to know the real you?

What about for God? How easy or hard is it for you to open up the real you to God?

What hinders and what helps you receive from others?

What hinders and what helps you receive from God?

What would help you sit in this place and simply "be still" for 10 minutes? (If something comes to mind that would help you and that you can quickly do, then make it happen - close the door, let your family know that you need to be alone for 10 minutes, turn off the radio, for example.)

Ten minutes is all we ask today. Sit and "be" with God for 10 minutes. When you find your mind wandering, it's all right. Finish the thought and then pull your mind back to simply listening to God. Ask God to be with you, and then prepare to receive whatever he has to offer today.

"Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10)

Record anything you learned with God in your journal before ending your time today. And plan to do this again - often. Learn to develop intimacy in aloneness with God.

Thursday: being satisfied with our daily bread

Today's discipline is one of the more difficult, but it will change the way you live with God and others each day. Take a deep breath, ask God to "show up" and be present to you in this time. Open your Bible to a familiar passage: Matthew 6:9-13.

"This, then, is how you should pray:

*'Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,*

*your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.*

Give us today our daily bread.

*Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

*And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one."*

What do you see in this prayer? What stands out for you? Step into a Lectio Divina with this passage: *read or listen to God's Word, meditate, pray or converse with God about the passage, contemplate or quietly rest in God's presence with his Word.*

Now let's look now at Psalm 23 from The Message.

*God, my shepherd! I don't need a thing.
You have bedded me down in lush meadows,
you find me quiet pools to drink from.
True to your word,
you let me catch my breath
and send me in the right direction.*

*Even when the way goes through
Death Valley,
I'm not afraid
when you walk at my side.
Your trusty shepherd's crook
makes me feel secure.*

*You serve me a six-course dinner
right in front of my enemies.
You revive my drooping head;
my cup brims with blessing.*

*Your beauty and love chase after me
every day of my life.
I'm back home in the house of God
for the rest of my life.*

One of the most difficult things for us to do is receive our daily bread or provision from God. We usually want more...or less...or different. We can probably all remember wanting something other than what our moms or dads provided at a meal and “whining” about their provision (or at least wanting to). We rarely feel satisfied, at least for long.

But if we believe what Scripture says, God provides exactly what we need. It's just difficult for us to receive what he provides at times - we see something different or more that we think would better meet our needs. Here's the great news - God knows, before we even give voice to our disappointments or concerns. He knows us, through and through.

What is the daily bread that God is providing for you right now?

What do you find yourself wanting God to change about his provision? Why?

What do you need to release in order to be satisfied with what he is offering?

For each of us, learning to receive what God provides - our daily bread - and be satisfied takes practice. It takes time alone with God spent in learning his heart, sharing our own, seeing from his perspective. And it takes balance - God asks us to come to him with our needs and David models a life of intimacy with God - he shares everything about his life with God. So we come to him, we express our hearts and then we receive - we learn to be satisfied and to trust what he is providing. So rest today in the bread that God is offering you.

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?”

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” (Matthew 6:25-34)

If you have additional moments available, practice 10 minutes of “being still” as you close your time today.

Friday: Rule of Life

The “rule of life” is a term borrowed from early church fathers, and it simply means a “practice” or “habit” that you commit to in order to grow/deepen your relationship with God or others. Before we address the rule of life, take a moment to respond to the following questions.

When you think about spiritual disciplines or practices, what comes to mind?

What experience have you had with spiritual practices in the past? What form did they take? How did they help or hinder your relationship with God and why?

Is the thought of spiritual disciplines or practices comforting or does the sound of it make you feel apprehensive, bored or unsure?

What is your current routine, if any? How effective has it been in caring for your soul or helping you deepen your relationship with God?

In what area of your life would you most like your experience of God to deepen or increase?

Now let’s create a “rule of life” or a practice designed to awaken your love for God and your awareness of his love for you.

There are many things you can choose from - but we suggest that you start slowly and add to your experience as you go rather than committing to too much and finding yourself feeling guilty or avoiding God. For example, perhaps your “rule of life” for now is simply to find 5 minutes a day to spend truly alone with God. That would be amazing. You’d be surprised at how few people truly set aside 5 minutes a day to be alone with Father, Son and Spirit.

Perhaps you’re feeling God’s urging to read Scripture several days a week or every day. Maybe you choose to read what Pastor Mark has just preached on each day for the following week. This practice alone would increase your understanding of God at work in and around you.

Perhaps you’re like my husband and myself and you want to hear from God as a couple or as a family. Our “rule of life” includes a simple commitment each day. We wake up together, even if one of us has to leave before the other, and we pray for each other about the day. If you’re not comfortable praying out loud, then simply “be” together or maybe read a Psalm as your prayer. Prayer is simply talking with God - there is no right or wrong way to pray, no right or wrong words to use.

As you can see, a “rule of life” can be anything that helps you daily connect your heart with God’s heart. What it’s NOT is a time of intense study. The study of God’s Word is so important, but it doesn’t take the place of learning to hear him, “be with” him, meditate, pray, deepen your relationship. The practice of spiritual disciplines or soulcare is about developing a growing intimacy with God.

Here are some sample “rule of life” commitments. Choose from the list or create your own and literally write it out as a schedule to be honored. Put it in your calendar.

- Greet God before I rise each day. Become aware of him first thing.
- Breakfast with the family around this statement, “This is where I need God to show up today.”
- Prayer with the family before everyone leaves the house.
- Lunchtime or afternoon break, 10-15 minutes of reading a passage, praying or being silent with God.
- Family bedtime around this statement, “This is where God showed up in my life today.”
- Listen to worship songs on the way to or from work.
- Do **Life Notes** each day.
- Read a psalm each morning before I start the day.
- Journal how God worked in my day each night before I go to sleep.
- Talk to my spouse or my family about how God specifically loved me today.
- Read a favorite daily devotional.
- Take a walk with the express purpose of simply “being with” God in his creation.
- Set aside a specific time for silence.
- Create a “place” that is uniquely you and conducive to time alone with God.
- Read a book that encourages soulcare.
- Journal your prayers.
- Sing with your family (every song is on youtube and you can easily get lyrics or download a CD or DVD).
- Create and experience a Sabbath rest every week.
- Schedule a periodic spiritual retreat in the calendar.

Have fun. Create something you can honor and keep. This isn’t about a ritual, it’s about making time for relationship.

Saturday: Sabbath

We encourage you to let Saturdays be a “mini Sabbath” moment. If Saturday is a work day for you, simply exchange this day in Life Notes for the day you have off. It’s really important to learn to simply “be” with Jesus, with yourself, with those you love, without an “agenda.” Sabbath simply means “cease” and “rest.” So, today, spend moments truly resting with God the Father, Son and Spirit. “Cease” all of the detailed work and worries that creep into your life everyday.

Couples, if possible, spend some Sabbath moments together reading, taking a walk, drinking coffee outside, sharing a song you both like, inviting friends over and cooking for them, taking a drive or a bike ride, exercising, watching a movie. Whatever you might like to do to truly rest, do it together. You might laugh or cry with God about things that have happened in your life together this week. Just let the time unfold. Sense God’s love for you; seek his peace and pursue it.

Families, spend a Sabbath day together. Let different members of the family choose what to do each week. Simply enjoy God’s company together. Or maybe serve somewhere as a family or invite neighbors over, simply because you care.

Discover Jesus in all you do. He’ll delight and amaze you.