



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

Trust
through
reading
Scripture

Balance
through
Prayer

Worship
through
Language

MIDWEEK GUIDE

2017

June

Session 1 – Trust through reading Scripture

In the month of June, we celebrate Pentecost. In our small group sessions, we will be taking some of the points from the Pentecost message and discovering together how we can utilize spiritual disciplines to grow in our faith with the help of the Holy Spirit. In our session today, we will be talking about our trust in God being strengthened through reading and meditating on the Bible. It is through the regular, personal study of the Bible that we grow in our knowledge of the Triune God and the attributes of God's Kingdom, we understand His will for our lives, we equip ourselves to battle temptation, and we develop a deeply rooted trust.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." How do we develop this type of trust? We start by understanding and accepting His love and all that He has done for humankind through the work and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Then we continually learn from God's story that has been written for us in the Bible and we grow in our confidence as we understand that God always fulfills His promises, is faithful to His people, and is worthy of us placing our hope and trust in Him.

Numerous times the Gospel writers tell us that Jesus was fulfilling the words of Scripture with His actions. At key moments of His earthly life, He quoted passages from the Old Testament. One of the most vivid examples of Jesus demonstrating the power of the Scriptures is when He was tempted in the wilderness by the devil as we can read about in Matthew 4. Three times the devil made Jesus an offer and three times Jesus responded with Scripture. After the third time, the devil left Him. When we trust in the word of Scripture as Jesus did, we will read it faithfully and write it in our hearts so it will be available to us during our moments of trial. Let us follow Jesus' example in knowing the words of Scripture, seeing God's power through it, and trusting in Him in times of trouble.

Have you ever invited the Holy Spirit to read the Bible with you? Connecting with the Holy Spirit when you dive into the words of Scripture will help you grab hold of its meaning and will reveal to you new understandings. Though you may have read the same passages several times in the past, the Spirit can make it new for you each time you read. Recall what Jesus said to His disciples in regards to the Holy Spirit – "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come." (John 16:13) Combine that knowledge with what Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 - "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." So when you dedicate time to reading the Bible daily, and invite the Holy Spirit to work with you, He will guide you and reveal to you the truth needed for that day. The Scripture will edify you so your faith is strengthened.

After you read the Word of God, take the time to meditate on it. Meditation allows us to ponder the Word in our hearts, preach it to our own souls, and personally apply it to our own lives and circumstances. It is how we sanctify our thinking and surrender our thoughts to Christ. By allowing the Word of God, when we read and hear it, to transform your mind, you'll find yourself dismissing the distractions of the time we live in. It's so easy today to get distracted and overwhelmed by life. And when life gets overwhelming, our trust in God tends to waver. Secure yourself in His Word by taking the time to meditate on the inspired thoughts from God while taking a walk, driving to work, working out, or sitting on the deck looking up at the stars. Allow what you read to stir your soul all day long.

It's important for Christians to have a strong trust in God. He has created, redeemed, and poured out His love on us. He has promised us an eternal future with Him and because of what is told to us in Scripture, we can fully trust Him to fulfill the promise. Set aside time each day to read the Bible. If you're looking for a place to start, jump to the Gospel of John. Meditate on the message and experience how your trust in Him will grow and give you greater confidence in your life's journey.

Session 2 – Balance through Prayer

Welcome back! In this session we will continue looking at spiritual disciplines, this time focusing in on prayer and how it helps us find spiritual equilibrium when we are feeling unbalanced in our lives.

As a spiritual discipline, prayer is a behavior that increases our spiritual growth and maturity. How does it do this? We see prayer as an essential element of our relationship with God. It is our opportunity to enter into a conversation with Him because we know that in prayer, God is present, He hears us, and He answers us. The more focused time we spend in talking with Him, the more we grow in understanding His will and His plans for our lives, and the more we choose His plans over our own.

Because of Jesus, prayer can also allow us to better understand God's love for us. The relationship between man and God changed fundamentally through Jesus Christ. Christ taught the Jews something completely new about prayer: that prayer is like that of a child who speaks with God as a loving Father in heaven. This also shows us that prayer isn't just a one-way street, but rather is a dialogue we have with God, where we express not only our concerns, but also our praise and thanks. In prayer, we have the opportunity to feel the Father's love for us as His children when we are open with our hearts and our adoration of Him. This love fills us with a complete joy that we cannot find anywhere on this earth, and it gives us a rock to hold onto in any storm we may experience. The security we gain through knowing God's love can bring us to a place of spiritual equilibrium, a spiritual state of calm and rest during times where the earthly and divine influences in our lives are unbalanced or in opposition.

We can look at one of David's psalms and discover how, through his conversation with God in prayer, he is moved to a place of spiritual equilibrium. The third psalm was written as a response when David fled from his son, Absalom. Let's read it together:

Lord, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me. Many are they who say of me, "There is no help for him in God." But You, O Lord, are a shield for me, my glory and the One who lifts up my head. I cried to the Lord with my voice, and He heard me from His holy hill. I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around. Arise, O Lord; save me, O my God! For You have struck all my enemies on the cheekbone; You have broken the teeth of the ungodly. Salvation belongs to the Lord. Your blessing is upon Your people. (Psalm 3)

From David's words, we can see the great earthly stress he is under: his enemies, who want to take away his crown and kill him, are growing in number and are mocking him that he will have no help from God. And yet, David is firm in his knowledge and experience of God's love. His prayer to God reveals this and helps him overcome any fears he may have because of his situation. David calls the Lord his shield, knowing that God's love for His children protects them. David then speaks of his past actions and God's response: David cried out to God and knew he was heard by God, David laid down and experienced that God had sustained him during his sleep. Reflecting on God's presence in his life through his prayer and understanding that he knew God's love, David discovers that he does not have to be afraid of his enemies, that God will protect him and bless him because that was what He had always done.

The power of prayer assured David of God's love for him and brought balance back into his life during moments of fear and uncertainty. We can also be assured of the same thing when we pray to our God. We may not experience the same actionable response from God that David did, such as striking down his enemies, but with guidance from the Holy Spirit, we will experience the love of God and His Son.

We can turn to God again and again, throughout the course of the day, to feel His nearness and find balance again in our lives. We can firmly believe that He hears us in prayer. And when He does not respond in the expected way, we remain assured that in His love, He guides everything for good for those who love Him.

Prayer is a necessary part of our faith. When we come to God to express our love and reverence, and allow the Holy Spirit to influence our prayers, we are open to His truth for our lives, that we may always be secure and rested in the knowledge that He loves us perfectly.

Session 3 – Worship through Language

Welcome back. Our first two sessions this month focused on the spiritual disciplines of reading the Bible and prayer, and how those relate to points from the recent Pentecost service of having trust in God and our spiritual equilibrium. In this week's session, we'll explore the spiritual discipline of worship.

When we hear the word "worship," we may think of music and its various styles, or perhaps the window of time specifically before the start of a divine service that is to prepare us for word and sacrament. While these are both examples of worship, our understanding of worship cannot be limited to just music or a time slot on Sunday mornings. When used as a verb, "worship" is defined as "to show reverence and adoration for." Our catechism explains that only God is worthy of worship. Only He is to be served. The forms of worshipping God in the old covenant are various. The Psalms attest that praise and adoration come to expression in prayer. The sacrificial service in the temple was also a form of worship.

In John 4, Jesus, having seen that worship had become ritualistic and purely external, said to the woman at the well, "...the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24). Thus, the proper worship of God is not just a formal act, but rather consists of a person's complete devotion to God.

One of the most evident avenues of this devotion is our conversation. In the recent Pentecost service, we were challenged to think about our speech. Can others recognize that we are children of God by our language? Not just the words we use, but the tone, context, and intention of what we say? How do we speak about the past? Do we see the good gifts we have received from God and worship Him by thanking Him for His provision in our lives? What about the present? When we speak about the situations and circumstances of our lives in the present, can people see and hear that our absolute priority is fellowship with Jesus? And the future; is our language and speech about the future reflective of our hope and trust in God? We have a great opportunity, and holy responsibility, to worship God through our language and speech.

Worship is our response to God and our expression of what He means to us. In addition to our conversations and speech, we can worship God through our actions. You may remember our yearly theme about Glorifying God, specifically through our behavior. Our daily words and behavior can express worship to God. Worship is a spiritual discipline because it requires intentionality and focus on our part. There is a fine line though. While disciplines help create patterns of behavior, the discipline and pattern itself is not the goal. The goal of a spiritual discipline is to be intentional and set aside time, space, and focus to connect with God and allow Him to transform us.

Think of a farmer. All that a farmer can do is provide the right conditions to grow a crop, he can't force the seed to grow. Jesus spoke about the right conditions for seeds to grow in His parable of the sower in Matthew 13. In the parable, the only seeds that produced a crop were the ones that fell on the good soil, not the ones that fell among the stones, or the weeds, or the thorns. Spiritual disciplines help cultivate us and get our souls to a place where they can be changed and strengthened by Him.

There will always be things to fill up our time like Netflix, or even positive things like family time. Again, those aren't bad, and we especially encourage building and strengthening relationships among families and those around you. However, please don't neglect the time that your soul needs to be in a place where God can do amazing things. This coming month, set up a plan to intentionally and strategically make the time and space to dive deeper into Scripture, allow God to speak with you in prayer, and find new ways to worship God in your daily routine, both in your words and in your behavior.