

Week 1: “Life Map”

Reflecting and discovering God’s faithfulness over the course of our Past & our Present.

LIFE MAP INSTRUCTIONS:

Supplies:

- Large poster paper, Journal or spread sheet
- Three different colored small post-it notes or colored pens.

Divide your paper into 4 to 6 columns. Each column will represent a season of your life that you will determine (you can divide into equal time increments, or different chronological stages that have felt important to you). The stages may appear as you work through your life map, Do what makes sense to you - there are no right or wrong answers.

Step 1: Memory Recall

Prayerfully consider all that you can remember of your life:

1. Who have been significant people in your life and why?
2. What are the significant places in your life? What makes them significant?
3. What are the events and experiences that stand out in your life?
4. What happened? What was your emotional response to what happened?
5. Consider other categories:
 - a. Education
 - b. Interests
 - c. Jobs/Career
 - d. Process of salvation
 - e. Failures
 - f. Joyful times
 - g. Sorrowful times

Step 2: Chronology

In this step, you will put the notes in your columns in chronological order, and arrange them into the columns as it makes sense to you.

- Use one color for painful events/people and a different color for joyful/delightful events/people.
- Create short titles/captions for each of your columns (this will help you give an overview when you share your story) that summarize that column.

Step 3: Consider God’s Work

As you review your life map, ponder in prayer: What was God doing in this time? Where was He? What did I learn about myself and what did I learn about God? Consider even the negative or false things you learned, (e.g. the world is not safe, I am always alone, I am unseen).

Carefully consider with the Lord the following questions:

- What are your insights about how God has shaped you?
- What did God show you in the different chapters of your life?
- What circumstances could have or have elicited your cries to God for help?

- How has He met you in times of stress? in times of decision-making?
- What or who helped you see the lessons God was showing you?
- What has been the good and/or bad fruit of these lessons?

Author Sharon Garlough Brown gives this encouragement: "Don't put your confidence in how well you can hear [or see] God, but rather put your confidence in His ability to uniquely communicate with you. Allow this to help you relax, and also help you see where He has been evident in your story."

Use the third color to summarize the primary lesson(s) learned about God/yourself for each column, and put it at the bottom of the column.

Week 2: “Unceasing Prayer”

Practicing/becoming aware of God’s presence.

Ending each day with the prayer of examine

As we attempt this practice of becoming aware of God’s Presence and Glory, we want to take some time this week to look at our daily rhythms and schedule. The invitation is to look for opportunities to engage and follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit. It could look something like this:

Each morning, before you look at your phone, you take 2 minutes to breathe in deeply and say, “Come, Holy Spirit,” and then pause to receive from him — a feeling of peace, a prophetic word, a passage of Scripture, or simply the gift of quiet.

It could also look like posturing yourself in scheduled moments throughout your day to notice where the Spirit is moving, working, and speaking in and around you.

You could end your day by celebrating the ways in which you saw the Spirit work and inviting him to reveal to you the ways he was working that you didn’t notice.

Whatever it ends up being, take time to be with the Holy Spirit and begin to invite him into more of your life. The goal of this practice is to allow the Holy Spirit to unveil our eyes to see more clearly how God’s presence and glory is on display all around us.

THE PRAYER OF EXAMEN

- Each day in this coming week, set aside ten or fifteen minutes at the end of your day (but before you are too sleepy to make yourself attentive to the practice) to practice the *Examen*.
- The key to this practice is not to fail to practice it each day!
- Follow the four steps above.
- If the four steps above are too in depth, here’s an easy alliteration to remember it by:
 1. **Replay** - What happened today?
 2. **Rejoice** - Where did I feel grace today? Where was God particularly present?
 3. **Repent** - Where did I feel emotional pain today? Where did I sin?
 4. **Resolve** - To live differently tomorrow, if need be. And sleep with gratitude.

Week 3: Hearing God (silence, solitude & Listening)

BEGIN WITH PRAYER:

You, Holy Spirit, are a whisper. Tender and gentle. A frequency so humble that our city noise would and does drown you out but for desperately longing hearts. Here and now would you tune our hearts to you, as we are still O God we would see you, hear you. - Amen

Have someone pray and ask the Holy Spirit to come to this house, guide us through this practice and speak to our hearts.

READ THIS OVERVIEW:

Jesus shows us that prayer is all about our relationship and life with the Father. We learn how to relate to the Father in different ways and through different types of prayer. With Prayers of contemplation & listening we ask the questions: "What is it like to be with God's presence?" And "What is it like to actually hear from God?" We will explore what it is like to hear from the Spirit. In this Practice we allow the Holy Spirit access to our imaginations, which were created and given by God.

As you begin, remember that all of relationship with God starts and ends with God being good and loving. Imagine yourself as a child crawling up into the lap of your good Father, who loves you unconditionally. He wants nothing more than to be close to you and remind you of his love. While it is hard it begins with being still and being quite.

DO THIS PRACTICE AS A COMMUNITY RIGHT NOW:

As we begin this time of contemplative prayer here are a couple poems to probe your minds:

"Never alone. Never any breathe alone. Never any thought or quiver alone of any kind. Never a beat or pulse or love for any human soul alone. Alone is impossible, alone is death but even then, never alone. Alone would be to live without the womb of divine oxygen surrounding human spark and cell - there can be no alone. Not even for enemies. Not even for emptiness itself in its vast taunts and separation-intent. There can be no alone. There is no space not filled with divine presence, nor an envelope of creator-breath. Alone is an invitation, lowbrow imagination built to shelter human shame, the weapon that tried to slay its maker. yet , even still, never alone"

Strahan Coleman

"Father of the heavens, thin the veil between Yourself and me, the veil that I myself create, that thief of peace and love and you." *Strahan Coleman*

"Blessed are you, Sovereign God of all, to you be praise and glory for ever. In your tender compassion the dawn from on high is breaking in upon us to dispel the lingering shadows of

night. As we look for your coming among us this day, open our eyes to behold your presence and strengthen our hands to do your will, that the world may rejoice and give you praise. Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Blessed be God forever." *Common book of prayer*

1. Start by asking Jesus to silence all other voices in the room, so that you can only hear the voice of the Father. Specifically ask Jesus to silence the voice of our enemy and any demonic forces. Also, ask Jesus to quiet any of the distracting thoughts in your mind.
2. Begin with forgiveness. Ask the Father to bring to mind anything you don't feel forgiven for. If there is anything, imagine taking it to the cross and leaving it there. Then ask the Father if there is anyone you need to forgive. If there is, imagine releasing this person and any offenses.
3. Invite God to bring to mind what he wants to address. Perhaps explore some of these prompts:
 - Is there anything I believe about myself that is not true? What does the Father want to replace it with?
 - Ask the Father if there are any other things that he wants to speak to you about.
4. When the Father brings something to mind, ask some follow up questions:
 - What do you want me to know about this?
 - Is there anything else? (Don't be afraid to wait longer and just enjoy the time of stillness in the presence of the Father.)

Here are a couple common frustrations when doing listening prayer:

- What if you ask God to speak and there is nothing or you see just blackness in your mind? If this is the case then ask the Father, "What do you want me to know about this?" Perhaps the blackness is an invitation into peace or rest. Press in and wait in his presence.
- What if it's really hard to focus? Ask the Father, "What do you want me to know about this?" And remember that this is a Practice, it can take some time.
- If you are not hearing anything, ask the Father if there is a Scripture that He wants to bring to mind.
- Remember that, overall, this is a time to be deepening your relationship with the Father. Maybe this is just a time to relax with the God and receive his love.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Week 4: Lectio Divina - meditation of scripture

READ THIS OVERVIEW

We get frustrated with the Bible when we approach it as an encyclopedia—an entirely literal, linear one-size-fits-all manual for life in the modern world. But the Bible wasn't designed as a convenient reference manual or as a textbook. The Bible describes itself as a library designed for a lifetime of *ongoing meditation*. For this, the way of Jesus proposes the ancient spiritual discipline of *Lectio Divina*.

Lectio divina is not a new method of Bible *Study*. Whereas study of the Bible sets its focus on *learning*, lectio divina is an ancient time-tested method of *meeting God* in the Scriptures. In doing so, the disciple allows the Scriptures (in cooperation with the Spirit) to lead the reader into further intimacy with God as they move slowly, carefully, and repeatedly through the text. The practice consists of five distinct movements:

Preparing to meet with God, Reading (*lectio*), Reflection (*meditatio*), Response (*oratio*) & Rest (*contemplatio*)

Establish a time and place that are both quiet and free from distraction, set aside 3-5 times this week to practice lectio divina.

Any passage of Scripture can be utilized for the practice of lectio divina. Here are a few suggestions with which to start:

Psalm 1, Psalm 23, Psalm 100, John 15v1-17, Romans 12

After selecting one passage, read and move slowly through each of the five movements of spiritual reading.

Prepare to meet with God: Turn your phone off and leave it in another room. Situate yourself comfortably in a quiet, solitary place. Quiet your mind before God as you work to prepare your heart to receive what God has spoken through the text. Finally, invite the Holy Spirit to guide you as you read.

Read (*lectio*): Read the passage slowly and carefully. Take your time. As you move through the text, pay close attention to what words and ideas draw your attention in unique ways. When your focus is drawn to a particular word or thought, pause momentarily to reflect on them.

Reflect (*mediatio*): Return to the beginning and read again. On your second journey through the text, allow the text to connect with you personally. Which words or phrases assume a particular resonance in your heart, your season of

life, your person in this moment. Ask, “What do I need to know, or be, or do in light of the text? What does this mean for my life today?”

Respond (*oratio*): Talk to God about your experience. If you’re confused, say that. Moved? Express gratitude to God. Upset? Tell him about it. Compelled to worship? Worship. If the text has brought something else to mind, talk to God about that.

Rest (*contemplatio*): Pause to sit in God’s presence before fleeing from the moment. You might express wonder, awe, gratitude, or praise through words, or you might allow yourself to feel and experience these things quietly before God.

Week 5: Celebration - Practicing Joy

Celebration of the practice of Joy can be hard, especially when we look around the world or scroll through our social media feeds.

This week we want to take time to stop, reflect on God's present goodness in our lives and praise him. As the well known hymn says "count your blessings name them one by one, count your blessings see what God has done."

THIS COMING WEEK'S PRACTICE:

Below are a few options to help you celebrate each day.

1. At supper time with your family or before bed, take a moment to replay the day and have each family member say out loud something you can celebrate together. A simple question to ask could be "What happened today that we can give thanks for?"
2. Meditate through the psalms of praise such as Psalm 65, 138, 145, 149

Week 6: Lament - unanswered prayer

Unanswered prayer is the source of doubt and despair for millions of people. And for good reason – it’s confusing. Why is it that sometimes we pray and immediately our prayer is answered! But other times we pray and... *nothing happens*. Or why is it that sometimes we pray, and then we pray *again*, and then we pray *again*, and finally, after months, the answer to our prayer comes out of heaven? Why the delay?

How do we live in the waiting? And in the tension between Jesus’ promise that “If you ask anything in my name, I will do it,” and the reality of our experience with unanswered prayer? Really, the question is: How do we live in the liminal space of faith *and* doubt, hope *and* despair, expectation *and* frustration?

One answer is an ancient form of prayer called lament. In the middle of the Bible is a prayer book called *The Psalms*. It’s there to teach you and me how to pray. And over *two-thirds* of the psalms are prayers of lament - venting anger and rage and disillusionment and confusion and questions and frustrated longing to God, in a posture not of whining, but of worship.

As a general rule, Americans know very little about lament. So this week, our goal is to learn, at least a little, about this ancient form of prayer.

THIS COMING WEEK’S PRACTICE

We have three exercises that we think are helpful to learn how to lament. Pick one, or do all three, depending on your week and what you feel you’re emotionally up for:

Exercise 1: Praying the lament psalms

- Pick out a lament psalm, and use it as a “liturgy” to give voice to your prayers.
- Here’s some great examples: Psalm 10, 13, 60, 79, or 80.
- Don’t just read/pray it and move on. Sit in the discomfort and let God comfort you. Don’t be scared to feel, even to feel deeply, and to meet God in that emotional pain.

Exercise 2: Writing your own lament psalm

- Get out a journal or scrap of paper and write your own lament psalm.
- Remember: prayer isn’t a place to be good; it’s a place to be honest. God already knows what’s in your heart! And nobody else has to ever see this. Just write out all your dreams, doubts, hopes, fears, questions, confusion, disillusionment, disappointment, etc.

- Then pray your lament psalm to God.

Exercise 3: Journaling

- Get a journal if you don't already have one.
- Make a list of unanswered prayers in your life.
- Go over each one, just hovering for a moment, and see if the Spirit stirs anything in your heart.
- Write out how it feels to live with unanswered prayer. It's helpful to write your journal *to* God, like a letter, just getting everything off your chest.

Note: Again, feel free to just pick one of the three exercises.