

WE

THE VALUES AND MARKS

ARE

THAT DEFINE US

WE

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THAT DEFINE US

We Are ... the Values and Marks that Define Us

David Holcomb

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Vision: Reach-Build-Send 2025	4
Vision Frame	6
Know Before You Go	9
I. Our Values: As Followers of Jesus, We Are ...	
Unit 1: Bible Centered	11
Unit 2: Prayer Fueled	19
Unit 3: Spirit Led	27
Unit 4: Generous Hearted	35
Unit 5: Mission Minded	43
Unit 6: Relationally Connected	51
Unit 7: Next-Gen Focused	59
II. Our Marks: As Followers of Jesus, We Grow In ...	
Unit 8: Missional Living	67
Unit 9: Biblical Understanding	75
Unit 10: Devotion to Praying	83
Unit 11: The Spirit's Empowering	91
Unit 12: Generous Giving	99
Unit 13: Next-Generation Investing	107
Unit 14: Relationship Building	115
Sources Consulted	122

I N T R O D U C T I O N

*And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **Go therefore and make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Matthew 28:18-20

Often referred to as the "Great Commission," these final instructions from Jesus to his followers make clear the expectation for all who would choose to trust and follow him. We are to be in the "disciple-making" business. All of us. Making disciples is Plan A; there is no Plan B.

So, it is in the spirit of this "Plan A" that we begin a new study, intent on inviting all who call on Jesus as Lord and Savior to consider the prospects of making disciples. This call is one of sharing the gospel with unbelievers, and enabling greater spiritual maturity in the life of those who profess belief, with the result of building up Christ-followers. It is a call that moves us toward a natural expectation of going, baptizing, and teaching, as we make disciples in our homes, along our streets, throughout our communities, and across the globe.

Importantly, as we begin this disciple-making journey, the exciting news is that the Lord has already been at work preparing his local body at River Oaks with the unique gifts to accomplish his Great Commission. In fact, it's in the sum of these gifts, personalities, experiences, and passions that we discover our unique identity and culture, a local congregation that reflects a very specific set of values and marks. Over the next several weeks, we will use these values and marks to better understand who we are and how God can use us to better serve him and the world around us.

To start, we want to ensure that our mission is clear. At River Oaks Community Church, we glorify God and make disciples by:

Building followers of Jesus who are sent to reach others.

This mission is our response to "Plan A." It defines the "what" of our existence. But how is this mission advanced?

Though there are many ways this is accomplished, the best way to summarize how God enables *building followers of Jesus who are sent to reach others* from within his church at River Oaks is to consider the *Discipleship Pathway*. We can think of this pathway as including the primary venues where God accomplishes his mission—where followers of Jesus intentionally engage in God’s earthly kingdom activity. It’s where we:

Worship Together
Grow in a Group
Serve on a Team
Go with a Mission

As we prioritize our participation within this discipleship pathway, we see mission fulfilled. And, as mission is lived out in our community, we begin to observe the values that characterize our congregation. These values, as the reflection of the local body that worships at River Oaks, help define our role in kingdom service and create a culture of disciple-making in the future.

In our study, we will first look at the seven values below, identifying the biblical evidence for each value and discussing the practical application for one whose life bears witness to it. Our hope is that by the completion of Unit Seven, each of us will be equipped to better answer the question: “Can you tell me about River Oaks?” Since a good place to begin is with the description of what we value, our answer might look something like, “We are:

**Bible Centered, Prayer Fueled, Spirit Led, Generous Hearted,
Mission Minded, Relationally Connected, and
Next-Gen Focused.”**

In the second part of our study, we consider the ways in which followers of Jesus grow as disciples. We do this by looking at the marks—or the desired outcomes—of a healthy disciple. Note that these areas directly correlate to the values. This is intentional. If values help define who we are, then our measures and marks will naturally be aligned. Here—by studying the Gospel According to Luke—we will consider a life purposed to be more like Christ. We will be challenged by self-assessment in these areas and encouraged to find accountability as a means to growth.

These marks of a healthy disciple, and a healthy church, can be thought of as becoming more Christ-like by growing in:

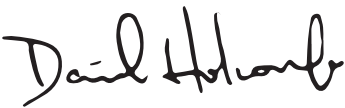
Biblical Understanding, Devotion to Praying, the Spirit's Empowering, Generous Giving, Missional Living, Relationship Building and Next-Generation Investing.

What does all this mean? What exactly is possible when the mission, discipleship pathway, values, and marks come together in a church that is unified in purpose and passionate about seeking the Lord's leading and the Spirit's anointing? Can we only imagine!

Our senior pastor and Session leadership have imagined it. They have spent much time in prayerful consideration of a Spirit-led vision of the Lord's calling on where River Oaks is headed. In the following section, Vision: Reach-Build-Send 2025, the possibilities of God's impact on his River Oaks church and community are outlined. Our prayer is that this vision would provide direction and move us to a time of great prayer and great dependency upon God. May it inspire us toward great revival with a period of life transformation that few of us have ever witnessed. We also hope you will agree that, unless the Lord is in this vision, it will be impossible to actualize. We wouldn't want it any other way.

Though God's universal church has one calling—one great commission—the local bodies of believers live out that calling in especially unique and God-gifted ways. We pray that this study will provide us with a better understanding of how it is that God has gifted his church at River Oaks—our values and our marks—and how he has gifted all of us to *go, baptize, teach, and MAKE DISCIPLES.*

Because he lives,



David Holcomb
Minister of Discipleship, River Oaks Community Church

VISION: REACH - BUILD - SEND 2025

In the year 2025, River Oaks is known as a church where people have a strong knowledge of the Bible, joined with active compassion for those outside of the church. Its mission of “Building followers of Jesus who are sent to reach others” has shaped the church’s ministry of spiritual formation for all ages. Children, students, and adults have a growing knowledge of Scripture that is being formed by active involvement in worship services, small groups, and classes. A distinctive culture of disciple-making is shaping both the church and individual households with a passion to invest in the spiritual growth of others, particularly the next generation. The fruit of this culture is seen in vibrant corporate worship and Christ-centered homes. In addition to other disciple-making environments, over 10% of River Oaks’ attendees are engaged in Missional Discipleship groups.

Those who call River Oaks their church home recognize that biblical knowledge should overflow into concern for the spiritual well-being of others, and that *following Jesus leads to an outreach-focused life*. River Oaks members embrace their calling as Jesus’ disciples to live as ministers and missionaries in our community. This is especially evident among the young, as students and children bring friends they have reached to church. Baptisms are a regular celebration at River Oaks, as those baptized share how a friend led them to faith and helped them begin their own journey of spiritual growth.

The centrality of outreach at River Oaks has shaped a culture of hospitality toward internationals who study, work, and live in Forsyth County. The richness of the church’s corporate worship is enhanced by the presence of worshipers from over two dozen different nations. Members and guests often note that worship services at River Oaks “look like heaven” because of the diversity of race, ethnicity, and age in the congregation.

The emphasis on spiritual formation that leads to gospel-centered outreach is joined with a culture of prayer at River Oaks. It is a common to see people clustered in the Coffee Bar or hallway praying for someone on Sundays. Students frequently gather before and after youth meetings to pray for their friends who do not yet know the Lord. The Prayer Room is one of the most utilized spaces throughout the week as staff and students, ministers and members, young and old gather informally for prayer.

The people of River Oaks recognize that their own *spiritual growth should overflow into God's blessing upon the surrounding community*. Care for the poor and afflicted, service to the schools, and strategic church planting all reflect this overflow. While 80% of River Oaks members serve locally in some way, dozens of others have been called to missions overseas. Many college students and young adults reflect upon a call to pastoral or missions ministry they received while students at River Oaks. Spiritual formation at River Oaks is overflowing with generosity that enables the church to give over \$500,000 annually to global and national missions, local ministries, and church planting. While River Oaks' first daughter church continues to thrive, River Oaks' second church plant is flourishing as it reaches an underserved community in the Triad.

If spiritual formation is the engine that drives the gospel forward in individual relationships, our local community, and around the world, then the prayer-fueled cylinders that power the engine are authentic worship, studying God's Word, serving others, and sharing the gospel. Said another way, we are advancing the mission of *Building followers of Jesus who are sent to reach others* by providing a discipleship pathway that enables people to ***Worship Together, Grow in a Group, Serve on a Team, and Go with a Mission***. Spiritual formation firing on all four cylinders is producing inward life transformation leading to outward gospel proclamation and genuine love of others.

Every person at River Oaks recognizes that spiritual growth and effective outreach is only accomplished through God's enabling power. An increasing dependence upon the Holy Spirit through prayer characterizes the church and those who call River Oaks home. We express this dependence often by quoting a theme verse for the church:

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.

Psalm 127:1

Approved by River Oaks Community Church Session - 2017

The *Vision Frame* (opposite) is a depiction of the Mission-to-Marks framing of Reach-Build-Send 2025. In a real way, it is the mirror reflection of God's local body of believers at River Oaks in pursuit of his call to discipleship. Let it serve as a reminder to the Great Commission charge and an encouragement to live on-mission daily.

Biblical Understanding • Devotion to Praying
The Spirit's Empowering • Generous Giving
Missional Living • Relationship Building
Next-Generation Investing

MARKS

Vision:

Reach-Build-Send 2025



DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY

Bible Centered
Prayer Fueled
Spirit Led
Generous Hearted
Mission Minded
Relationally Connected
Next-Gen Focused

Worship Together
Grow in a Group
Serve on a Team
Go with a Mission

*We glorify God and
make disciples by...*

*Building followers of
Jesus who are sent
to reach others.*

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

We Are ... is designed as one continuous study, yet comprised of two parts. The following provides a high-level overview of the weekly units, with a few recommendations for groups to consider.

In Units 1-7, you will spend seven weeks with a focus on “Values.” For these units, you will discover a brief definition of each value, followed by several Scripture verses to be used in personal study and group discussion.

Next, and an especially exciting addition to this guide, thoughts from our members have been included. These writings respond to the prompt, “When I reflect on the value of ...” You will certainly enjoy contemplating what is shared; the richness, diversity, insight, and personal experiences of the comments are wonderful.

Discussion questions follow for groups to complete throughout the week and be prepared to share. In a general sense, the questions follow a pattern of ice-breaker, Scripture study, and practical application.

Finally, each week you will be encouraged to record a prayer related to the unit’s topic. This might be a few heartfelt sentences, or perhaps thoughts you have had throughout the week and decided to journal. Either way, pray these prayers daily, and conclude your group time with members praying their prayers aloud. We are hopeful this spiritual discipline results in much growth.

In Units 8-14, you will spend seven weeks with a focus on “Marks.” The primary difference in these units is the replacement of member reflections with a self-assessment tool for you to utilize as a means of growth in each mark. It is suggested that members consider sharing their assessments with one another, encouraging and holding each other accountable to intentional and life-giving growth.

May the Lord anoint your time in his Word and bless your pursuit of building, sending, and reaching others as you journey through the values and marks that define his church at River Oaks!

1

UNIT ONE

We Are ... Bible Centered

We are a *Bible-centered church*. We desire all ages to learn, love, and live out God's Word. This is evidenced by our parallel pursuit of both head knowledge and heart knowledge in prompting us to application and action. God's Word is central to all teaching, counseling, and serving ministries.

IN THE BIBLE

*How can a young man keep his way pure?
By guarding it according to your Word.
With my whole heart I seek you;
let me not wander from your commandments!
I have stored up your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.
Blessed are you, O Lord;
teach me your statutes.
With my lips I declare
All the rules of your mouth.
In the way of your testimonies I delight
As much as in all riches
..... I will not forget your word. - Psalm 119:9-14, 16b*

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. - Romans 15:4

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. - 1 Thessalonians 2:13

Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. - 1 Timothy 4:13

REFLECTIONS

When I reflect on the value of a Bible-centered church...

“Most of us keep a full calendar. But how many of our activities have the potential to truly change our lives? I’ve never met anyone whose life has been changed watching an episode of *The Tonight Show*, catching up on Facebook, or taking in a Panther’s game. Yet these are the activities that have the tendency to fill our free time. The Bible, however, does have the power to change our lives. The psalmist tells us that the person who meditates on Scripture is *“like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in season, and whose leaf does not wither”* (Psalm 1:3). That’s a beautiful image—and that can be us—thriving, fruit-bearing people.

Because all Scripture is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16), we can say that when God’s Word is open, his mouth is open. This should motivate us to grow in our understanding of what the Bible reveals. When we allow God to speak into our lives through his Word, we also invite him to transform our lives, allowing us to know him better, gain wisdom, and grow in our ability to discern his best for our lives.

”

Andrew Wild

“When I think of this value, I think of both the *importance* and the *joy* of rightly understanding the Word of God.

Importance, because the Bible is the primary means by which we come to know about God, about his ways, his purposes, his truth, and his guidelines for living. There is no substitute for the Bible, because it alone is the inerrant Word breathed out by God (2 Timothy 3:16).

And joy—because as we understand and meditate on the Bible—we have the rich, joyous experience of actually coming to know God and having fellowship with him. To paraphrase Jonathan Edwards, there is a difference between knowing in our heads that God is holy and gracious, and “having a deep sense of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace.” God, in his infinite mercy, gives us both types of knowledge when we study and meditate upon his Word. It is there where we can “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8)!

”

Bill Wright

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Charles Spurgeon once said, “Visit many good books, but live in the Bible.” If you were provided an opportunity to truly live in one of the sixty-six books of the Bible for a year, which one might it be? Is there one book that especially interests you? It might be a favorite, or it might be one that you know little about? Perhaps you would like to literally go back in time to experience the events, or simply become so intimately engaged in a book—its characters and context—that you could teach others.

2. When you read Psalm 119:1-24, and reflect on the comments by River Oaks’ members this week, is there any specific thought that you have? Do any of the words, phrases, or testimonies resonate with you? How do they help you visualize what it means to be Bible centered?

3. God’s Word has much to say about itself. In addition to the verses provided in this unit, consider: 2 Timothy 3:16, Matthew 4:4, Hebrews 4:12, Isaiah 40:8. How do you summarize all that is said of God’s Word?

4. The Westminster Confession of Faith begins with *Chapter One: The Holy Scripture*. The first point concludes with: “Holy Scripture is absolutely essential,” and then provides ten confessional points stating this case. Likewise, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) “Essentials of our Faith” begins with:

All Scripture is self-attesting and being Truth, requires our unreserved submission in all areas of life. The infallible Word of God, the 66 books of the Old and New Testament, is a complete and unified witness to God’s redemptive acts culminating in the incarnation of the Living Word, Jesus Christ. The Bible, uniquely and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the supreme and final authority on all matters on which it speaks.

Given the Scriptural evidence, along with the confessional experiences of those who have come before us, is it possible to mature in our faith without an intentional pursuit of loving, learning, and living out God’s Word? Have you ever tried to do this in your own life? Conversely, have you experienced a season of growth because of your grounding in God’s Word?

5. Consider the present-day opinion of the Bible. Have you ever heard anyone challenge the infallible (*reliable, trustworthy, without any defect*), inerrant (*without contradictions*), inspirational, or authoritative nature of God's Word? How did you respond? What are some ways we can be better prepared in our response?

6. What questions do you have about the Bible? Maybe you're curious about all the translations? Or the origin? You may be curious about the genres and order of the books in our Bible? Share these with your group and seek out the answers together. The Bible is a truly remarkable book in its inspiration, its preservation, and its illumination. A biblically-centered community is a strong force for truth and grace. Dig in, go deep!

MY PRAYER

for Bible-Centeredness

Take time this week to consider the value of Bible-centeredness and how you, your family, and your small group, might grow in this area. Write out a personal prayer below. If you are involved in a small group and are comfortable doing so, we suggest that group members close out their weekly gathering by praying these prayers aloud.

Lord,

2

UNIT TWO

We Are ... Prayer Fueled

We are a **prayer-fueled church**. We desire that prayer be a primary expression of our growing relationship with God. This is evidenced by members who naturally move to prayer in times of worship, praise, thanksgiving, confession, petition, and intercession. This value is most fully realized when a majority of families pray together, individuals pray without ceasing, and ministries completely rely upon prayer as the conduit to discernment, direction, and power.

IN THE BIBLE

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

- Matthew 6:9-13 (The Lord's Prayer)

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison, that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

- Colossians 4:2-4

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. - Philippians 4:6-8

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

REFLECTIONS

When I reflect on the value of a prayer-fueled church...

“When I think of prayer, I think of a box containing priceless treasures. The first treasure—as I bring my burdens before the Sovereign God of the universe—is the assurance that *God knows the concerns* of my heart. Then, it is a treasure to realize God not only *hears* my prayer and *knows* my need, he is *able* to do above and beyond all that I can ask or imagine about that need. Another treasure is freedom from *anxiety*. Knowing that God is able to respond on my behalf enables me to be free from that which would make me anxious, and allows me to experience the *peace of God* in prayer. Not an earthly peace, but the same peace that God enjoys as Sovereign over all.

Finally, opening the box of prayer reminds me of all the prayers he has already answered. Thanking God for answered prayers fuels my faith to believe him for whatever I am facing today.

Go ahead ... go to the hidden closet where you keep these most precious possessions. Open the box and embrace all the treasures the Father has for you in prayer.

”

Wes Tuttle

“ In prayer, I try to begin by having a quiet time in his presence. This allows me to rejoice and praise God through a time of confession, thanksgiving, and gratitude for his great goodness and blessings. Knowing that I can trust him to hear my request and answer my prayers relieves my anxieties.

In my time of prayer, I pray for my family, church, friends, our country, revival in our community ... and the list goes on; there is nothing too insignificant to bring before our Father. Although we may not always feel it, His comfort and peace are always available.

Prayer is all about our relationship with God. It is wonderful that we can start our day with a time focused on God, and—as the Bible tells us—that we can pray without ceasing, meaning we can come to God anytime during our day and utter a quick sentence in prayer.

God also gives us opportunities to pray for and with others. Not only is corporate prayer beneficial to our spiritual growth, sharing answered prayer is especially encouraging.

I have learned over the years that the more I pray, the more I want to pray!

”

Faye Brendle

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The pilot comes over the intercom, just as you notice increased turbulence and hear an unnerving noise: “Ladies and Gentlemen, at this moment, in accordance with International Aviation Codes, it is my obligation to inform you that if you believe in God, you should commence praying.”

What do you pray? How do you pray? What does this reflection tell you regarding our call to prayer without ceasing? Share with your group.

2. When we read the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13), we recognize that Jesus is providing a model prayer, or a template, for our ongoing worship through prayer. Have you ever thought about the five “aims” of prayer that are included in this passage? Consider that Jesus, when he says, “Pray then like this,” is actually directing us to pray for: God’s honor, God’s kingdom, God’s provision, God’s forgiveness, and God’s power. Do you see these “aims” in the Lord’s prayer? How might they move you to pray?

3. God's Word has much to say about prayer. In addition to the verses provided in this unit, consider: Psalm 17:6, Matthew 5:44, Matthew 26:41, I Timothy 2:8, James 5:13. How do you summarize all that is said of prayer?

4. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17) is often described as an ongoing conversation with God. What do you think about that? How might that work itself out in a practical, daily way? Is it possible that our praying ever becomes too informal? Too formal? What does Scripture warn us about in praying? (See Matthew 6:5-7.)

5. Throughout the Bible, the call to prayer points to four specific reasons, or results, for the activity of praying to God: we grow in our relationship with the Lord, we find peace from our worries, we are used as instruments in God's revealing of himself, and we express our obedience to God through prayer. Have you discovered prayer as having resulted in any, or all, of these results?

6. What questions do you have about prayer? Maybe you're curious about praying directly to God and not through someone else? Perhaps you're wondering about written prayers or the various ways we address God in prayer? Share these with your group and seek out the answers together. A prayer-fueled community discovers the blessings of ongoing communication with God. Dig in, go deep!

MY PRAYER

for Being Prayer Fueled

Take time this week to consider the value of being prayer fueled and how you, your family, and your small group, might grow in this area. Write out a personal prayer below. If you are involved in a small group and are comfortable doing so, we suggest that group members close out their weekly gathering by praying these prayers aloud.

Lord,

3

UNIT THREE

We Are ... Spirit Led

We are a **Spirit-led church**. We desire to be a people humbly relying upon the Holy Spirit for his gifts, grace, and guidance. This is evidenced by a willingness to call upon the Holy Spirit's presence in times of worship, ministry, and administration. It is the Spirit's leading that we follow and obey, and it is his power that enables us to be used for kingdom purposes.

IN THE BIBLE

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. - Acts 1:8

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. - Romans 8:5-6

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. - Romans 8:9-10

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. - Galatians 5:22-25

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. - 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

REFLECTIONS

When I reflect on the value of a Spirit-led church...

“ One aspect of my early faith community was a constant emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. Despite this emphasis, it has taken me many years to gain real insight into being led by the Spirit. There were always questions: Was it some sort of mystical experience, where the Holy Spirit communicates with me directly? How does one become proficient at discerning the leading of the Holy Spirit?

Ultimately, I came to understand the enemy of our souls loves nothing more than to keep us confused by complicating and distorting the truths of the Word. The Holy Spirit opened my understanding of passages such as Romans 8:5-15, Galatians 5:13-25, and 1 Peter 5:6-10—that the primary obstacle to being led by the Spirit is our sinful flesh. This is said well by Dr. Thomas Tarrants, who writes: “The word ‘led’ implies we should continuously surrender and yield ourselves to the desires of the Spirit, whose leading is always diametrically opposed to the desires of our sinful flesh (our old self).”¹ In other words, our humble submission to the Lord clears our perception and helps us to stay alert to the Spirit’s leading. ”

Fran Crew

¹ Thomas A. Tarrants, “Being Led and Transformed by the Holy Spirit,” *Knowing & Doing: C.S. Lewis Institute* (20 November 2016): http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/Being_Led_and_Transformed_by_the_Holy_Spirit_FullArticle

“When I think of being Spirit-led, I think of the song, “Oceans,” and having “trust without borders.” I think about my own sin and how ill-equipped I am to do anything apart from him (John 15:5). I think about who I am apart from God’s grace, which helps push away pride and increases my love for him and others. I think of humbly relying upon his power, seeking his will, and praying on all occasions (Ephesians 6:18). All the while, I trust the Holy Spirit to lead me into all truth (John 16:13), and—as Charles Spurgeon once said on this subject—“We are to do with the Spirit’s truth as a snail does with his shell: live inside it as well as carry it on his back and bear it perpetually about him.”

In seeking to fulfill the Great Commission of making disciples and sharing the gospel here at River Oaks, and around the world, this reliance on all that the Spirit provides is critical. After all, Jesus said we will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on us; and we will be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Note: He didn’t say, “may,” but “will.”

”

Martin Harrison

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Humility is fundamental to living a life that is Christ-like and Spirit-led. When you think back over the course of your life, is there anyone who comes to mind as having exhibited humility in an especially consistent manner? What did that look like? Was there any lasting impact on your own life?

2. Galatians 5:16-25 not only provides us with the “fruit of the Spirit,” but also includes a passage in which Paul emphasizes the opposite, or the “fruit of the flesh.” This contradiction is at the heart of his instruction to “walk by” and “live in” the Spirit. Read these verses and consider how you might explain them to an unbeliever? To a believer? Is there a different emphasis? What is the application for you personally?

3. What does Jesus tell his followers in Luke 24:44-49? If we are to believe that Scripture was inspired, preserved, and revealed as a conduit of God's instructions to those who would follow, then we must hear these words as being spoken directly to us—for our benefit. We are in this huddle of disciples. What should this mean for us? What is the promise?

4. Of all the ways that Scripture tells us the Holy Spirit works in our lives—comforting, counseling, teaching, convicting—perhaps the least realized is his empowering work. As in Luke 24, Acts 1:8 specifically identifies power as the attribute that the Holy Spirit would bring to believers. How are we empowered by the Holy Spirit?

5. How have you experienced the leading of the Holy Spirit? In what way(s)? Or, do you find it difficult to attribute the work of the Spirit to your life's journey? If not directly in leading you, do you recognize the fruit or the gifts of the Spirit in your life?

6. What questions do you have about the Holy Spirit? Maybe you're curious about the Pentecostal perspective of the Spirit's work? Perhaps you're wondering about discerning the Spirit's guidance, gifts, grace, and power in your life? Maybe you desire to be filled more completely with the Spirit? Share with your group and seek out the answers together. A humble, Spirit-led community is a powerful witness in this world. Dig in, go deep!

MY PRAYER

for Being Spirit Led

Take time this week to consider the value of being Spirit led, and how you, your family, and your small group, might grow in this area. Write out a personal prayer below. If you are involved in a small group and are comfortable doing so, we suggest that group members close out their weekly gathering by praying these prayers aloud.

Lord,

4

UNIT FOUR

We Are ... Generous Hearted

We are a **generous-hearted church**. We desire to glorify God and serve his kingdom with our time, talents, and treasures. This is evidenced by a commitment to support missions, meet compassion and care needs, and partner with community ministries through tithes and offerings, and by way of hands and feet projects. Generosity is a motive of the heart, grounded in the generous gift of grace that we have received.

IN THE BIBLE

Honor the Lord with your wealth, and with the firstfruits of all your produce. - Proverbs 3:9

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. - Isaiah 58:7-8

Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.
- Matthew 6:2

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.
- 2 Corinthians 9:7-8

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share. - 1 Timothy 6:17-18

REFLECTIONS

When I reflect on the value of a generous-hearted church...

“When I think of generosity, I try to first remember that we are managers—not owners—of all that we have. A retail store manager watches the store, manages all aspects of it, and tries to deliver a profitable return for the store owner. But, the manager does not own the inventory or the revenue; the owner does. Likewise, we are managers of God’s resources. Remembering this can free us to think more generously with our spiritual gifts and financial resources.

I also think of a generous heart as being a blessing. Scripture tells us that God blessed Abraham so that he could be a blessing. In the same way, we’re called to view our many blessings with an open hand, not a tightly-closed fist, so that God’s blessings can flow through us to others.

Today’s world, for the most part, is acquisition focused, not giving focused. As believers, this gives us an opportunity to stand out by modeling generosity in a way that points people to Christ and the generous free gift he provides. Our giving and serving do not have to be a burdensome obligation; instead, they can be a cheerful, fulfilling partnership with a Holy God to advance his kingdom.

”

Garrett Ball

“I grew up in Winston-Salem. I was blessed to know a family who loved Jesus. I recently attended the funeral for the mother of this family. It was essentially a revival. One after another, friends and family shared the impact this woman of God had on their lives. The picture that was painted carried a common theme. This was a lady who lived like Jesus. A friend of mine who also knew this family sent this note to me: “I used to wonder what it meant to live like Christ. I always figured it meant to live a life committing as few sins as possible. Now I realize it means being a servant of others, while keeping Jesus at the forefront.”

This was a woman who actively tried to do anything for anyone at any time. Her home, heart, hands, and calendar were always open. She shared generously of her time, her talents, and her treasure. Most of all, she consistently shared the love of Jesus. Her life glorified God. Her actions served his kingdom. Her time, talent, and treasure were generous gifts that showed the love of Jesus to everyone. I pray that generosity will be a defining characteristic of our lives as well.

Paul Scott

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Can you recall the most generous act that anyone has ever done for you? Was it a helping hand, a financial gift, or the use of a special skill. It may, or may not, have been the most “valuable” of gifts. How did it make you feel? Have you passed it on? Have you considered extending an encouraging word of gratitude to that individual for the lasting impact it has made?

2. A generous heart is often a direct correlation to trust, contentment, and an eternal perspective. What do these passages say about the idea of contentment: Matthew 6:24-26, Philippians 4:12 (Philippians 4:13 is the “secret”).

3. The author of Proverbs 30:7-9 has an interesting request of the Lord. What is being implied in terms of the spiritual advantage to having neither “too much” nor “too little”? What challenges do both situations bring?

4. In 2 Samuel 24, David is offered everything he needs to worship God through a burnt offering. He refuses to accept it without paying for it. Why? What does this scene tell us about offerings that are acceptable to God? About worship as the motive for giving?

5. If you have a desire to be a good steward of God's gifts—financial , spiritual, time, presence—but feel that you have not been, what do you find is holding you back? For some it may be unhealthy financial habits or poor planning or lack of faith? Others may struggle with busyness or misguided priorities? Write a few thoughts on what comes to mind in your own life.

6. What questions do you have about biblical generosity? You may be curious about the teaching of prosperity preachers. Perhaps you're wondering about discerning the conviction of your heart for giving? Or maybe you desire to find a place to more regularly serve others? Share with your group and seek out the answers together. A generous-hearted community provides great healing to a hurting world. Dig in, go deep!

MY PRAYER

for Being Generous Hearted

Take time this week to consider the value of being generous hearted and how you, your family, and your small group, might grow in this area. Write out a personal prayer below. If you are involved in a small group and are comfortable doing so, we suggest that group members close out their weekly gathering by praying these prayers aloud.

Lord,

5

UNIT FIVE

We Are ... Mission Minded

We are a **mission-minded church**. We desire to know and share the gospel through Christ-centered teaching that is coupled with intentional life-on-life missional living. This is evidenced by the utilization of Jesus' model for making disciples: small group community, proclamation of the Word, sending members into the community and around the world, and relationship-based personal evangelism. A church on a mission is comprised of members who purpose their daily walks to serve as carriers of the Good News.

IN THE BIBLE

And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. - Matthew 4:19

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria ... Now, those who were scattered went about preaching the word. - Acts 8:1,4

For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" - Romans 10:13-15

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. - Colossians 1:28-29

Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. - 1 John 2:6

REFLECTIONS

When I reflect on the value of a mission-minded church...

“When we live in a mission-minded manner, God’s purposes are our highest priorities, as we pursue the life he has called us to live. So, the question is: “What are God’s purposes in community with others?” To show God’s love to one another, and to share the good news of Jesus. We do this only by submitting our plans to God and becoming available daily to these purposes.

God calls all believers to live on-mission, in whatever context he has placed us. A friend once asked me how things were going with “my ministry.” I thought he had me confused with someone else and fumbled with my response. Later, I realized that he was perhaps making a point. We are all engaged in daily ministry, and we should regularly examine the vitality of our personal ministry.

John writes, *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing”* (John 15:5), When we remain in Christ and continuously seek God’s will for our life, he will provide a kingdom mission for us.

”

Steve Minnich

“After I went on my first short-term trip into the mission field, I realized that there was no such thing as “*short term*” or a specific “*field*” for mission. Mission had been happening all around me regardless of the time or my location. I was sleepwalking through it—a metaphysical zombie.

The writings of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—as well as authors like Augustine of Hippo, Bernard of Clairvaux, John of the Cross, and Theresa of Avila—have a simple yet profound message: “Wake up.” To the church of Ephesus, Paul summarized Isaiah’s writing on this message:

“Awake. O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

To be mission-minded is to wake up to what is happening around us. Where our to-do list takes us each day is divinely appointed, but rarely are our missions the accomplishments of those to-do tasks. Mission happens along the way and in the spaces in-between that only the Holy Spirit can reveal to us. If we aren’t awake, we’ll sleepwalk right through them.

”

Brett Kanode

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. A suggested approach to living missionally is to consider the opportunities for sharing the gospel across three locales: across the street, across the tracks, and across the ocean. Each of these might be geographical, cultural, or demographical. If using the Great Commission as your template, Jerusalem would be those nearest and most similar to you, Samaria, those farther away and more different, and ends of the earth, different nations and people groups. Can you list the opportunities that come to mind in each of these areas for you?

2. In Luke 19:10, Jesus makes clear his personal mission statement. What does that mean to those who would be called to follow him, to become imitators of him, to find the disciple-making model in him? How would your personal, spiritual mission statement read?

3. If seeking and saving is a primary mission objective for Jesus, one of the means to accomplishing this mission is found in Mark 10:45. How do we follow his example when we are mission minded?

4. We find humility as a necessary component of following the example of Jesus. In Philippians 2:5-11, Paul writes of the way in which Jesus carried out his mission-minded ministry. Though we are likely not called to as extreme a journey, what can we incorporate into our daily, 24/7, lives to more effectively serve others and honor God?

5. When you first heard the term “mission minded,” what image did it invoke? Does the idea of living missionally excite you? Do you think there are daily opportunities in sharing God’s love and the good news we simply miss because we aren’t thinking of ourselves as being on-mission?

6. What questions do you have about living a mission-minded life? Maybe you would like to know how others share the gospel. What passages, questions, prayers are used in sharing? Perhaps you have questions about being on-mission in the workplace, particularly when it can seem restrictive to be so? Maybe you’re looking for accountability from someone close, in your home or your friend circle, to help stay mission-minded? Share with your group and seek out the answers together. A mission-minded community can be used of God to enable miraculous life transformation. Dig in, go deep!

MY PRAYER

for Being Mission Minded

Take time this week to consider the value of being mission minded and how you, your family, and your small group, might grow in this area. Write out a personal prayer below. If you are involved in a small group and are comfortable doing so, we suggest that group members close out their weekly gathering by praying these prayers aloud.

Lord,

6

UNIT SIX

We Are ... Relationally Connected

We are a **relationally-connected church**. We desire to encourage and nurture authentic and meaningful relationships with other believers. This is evidenced through the intentional emphasis placed on the “one-another” of congregational friendships, service teams, and discipleship ministries. This emphasis on others is based on God’s nature, design, and discipleship model.

IN THE BIBLE

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another. - Proverbs 27:17

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow ... And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken. - Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” - John 17:20-21

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.
- 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.
- Colossians 1:28-29

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another. - Hebrews 10:24-25

REFLECTIONS

When I reflect on the value of a relationally-connected church...

“One of the most difficult things in life is to find, develop, and nurture authentic meaningful relationships. This is true in our society as a whole and in the church. Yet, it is a vital part of our growth as believers and followers of Christ.

Jesus came to earth as real person and had authentic interactions with everyone who encountered him. From the shepherds at the manger to the thief on the cross, Jesus understood and spoke directly to their needs.

As he did in his own time, Jesus bids us today to drop our masks, be real with God, and get real with other people.

At River Oaks, authentic and meaningful relationships are often developed through small group Bible studies. It is in the context of a small group that we meet people, develop relationships, and slowly get to really know each other. We learn to trust, be vulnerable, and love each other. As we do, we slowly become more like Christ.

Galatians 6:10 reminds us to “do good to all people, especially to those that belong to the family of believers.”

”

Ben and Lynn Bentley

“As a stay-at-home mom to young children, my entire day is spent in the presence of two tiny, needy humans. To say I crave alone time is an understatement, and yet—even in this season of life—I’m reminded that God made me for community.

Recently, my husband and I connected with two couples at church. While chatting, I shared our struggles with our three-year-old. Without hesitation, they gave assurances that we’d survive this stage. Later that day, I opened an email from friends with whom I’ve exchanged weekly prayer requests for fourteen years. While reading, a text came in reminding me of a supper club event, which included mostly people who have been in small groups with us.

In all these moments, the Lord reminded me that this is the church. The church which happens on Sunday morning with our congregation, also happens in email chains with friends who are like sisters, and around tables set with big salads and lots of laughter. It happens over years of friendship, shared requests, and answered prayers. It happens in words of encouragement and quick hugs. I love his church. And I’m so thankful for God’s provision in giving us one another—even when we think we most need silence.

”

Shannon Speight

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Where is your happy place? You know, that space—familiar, yet not overly routine—where you experience moments of complete contentment and soulful renewal. Where the busyness of the everyday melts away and you find yourself wanting to bottle it up: the sights, the sounds, the emotions, all of it. Think about where that might be, and why you call it your “happy place.”

2. As a book of wisdom, Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 is written from the positive perspective of the benefits of community. What are the poetic images provided in this passage? What practical applications might we induce from this wisdom?

3. When it comes to God’s desire for us to be relationally connected, we often speak of God’s nature (who he is), design (how he made us), and discipleship model (how he lived). Why would we connect these attributes to his desire for our connectedness?

4. In Jesus' high priestly prayer (John 17), and in passages such as 1 Corinthians 1:10 and Colossians 3:13-14, there are pleas that believers live in unity and harmony with one another. Notice, it is not suggested that believers simply avoid one another in order to keep the peace, but that—as they live life together—the relationships would be so counter-cultural that the church would be different from the world around her. As you read these passages, consider our responsibility to be deeply connected and remain deeply united in Christ. What does this look like to you? How do we engage in meaningful and authentic relationships in this manner?

5. Scripture warns us about being unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14). We are to avoid the truly intimate relationships in which unbelievers may significantly influence the direction and outcome of our moral decisions and spiritual growth. However, the Bible is clear that we are not to avoid association with the world; we are sent into the world. How might the forming of intimate, transparent, genuinely-connected relationships (being yoked) with believers enable us to form life-changing relationships in the community? Have you experienced this? How do you determine in which relationships you are yoked?

6. What questions do you have about pursuing relational connectedness? Maybe you are looking for a venue to find these types of life-giving relationships? You may be struggling with how to transition from a relationship that is currently limiting your spiritual growth? Perhaps your passion is helping others get connected and simply want to serve in that way? Share with your group and seek out the answers together. A relationally-connected community is the heart and soul of growing in spiritual maturity. Dig in, go deep!

MY PRAYER

for Being Relationally Connected

Take time this week to consider the value of being relationally connected and how you, your family, and your small group, might grow in this area. Write out a personal prayer below. If you are involved in a small group and are comfortable doing so, we suggest that group members close out their weekly gathering by praying these prayers aloud.

Lord,

7

UNIT SEVEN

We Are ... Next-Gen Focused

We are a **next-generation focused church**. We desire to invest in the lives of children, students, young adults, and future leaders for the glory and advancement of God's kingdom. This is evidenced by the heart of our volunteers across the various children's and youth ministries, and includes the priority of resources, facilities, and effort dedicated to each. Reaching new generations with the gospel is a critical calling and clear responsibility..

IN THE BIBLE

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. - Deuteronomy 6:6-7

Things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments. - Psalm 78:3-7

Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. - Matthew 18:5-6

So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. - 1 Thessalonians 2:8

REFLECTIONS

When I reflect on the value of a next-generation focused church...

“Any survey of the contemporary church reveals a significant decline in personal belief in God and engagement with his church. This is true across all ages, but is most dramatic with those who are classified as Millennials and Gen Z (or, the under-forty groups).

This reminds me of Judges 2:7-10, and the rather chilling portrayal of the faith legacy of Joshua and the people of his generation. We are told that Joshua’s generation “served the Lord throughout Joshua’s lifetime.” Yet, after Joshua and his generation “had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel.” How tragic. A generation experienced so much of God’s faithfulness, then failed to pass those experiences on to those coming behind them!

So, what does next-generation focused look like to me? How am I embracing a lifestyle that is marked by an ever-deepening love for, and investment in, those that are coming behind me? Who am I pursuing that is younger than me for the purposes of passing on the faith? These are the questions we must reflect on, personally and as a church, if we are serious about impacting the next generation for the kingdom of God.

”

Charlie Barham

“ I think of being next-generation focused as planting seeds for God’s kingdom ... seeds that—with intentional nourishment—will grow and flourish to bear fruit for the kingdom. It is our duty to prepare them, pray for them, and demonstrate Christ to them in the way we live and love.

This reflection has new meaning to me, as my four-day-old newborn sleeps next to me while I write. I take a look at him and envision the life ahead of him. Just thinking about the potential impact for the Lord—the mighty force for the kingdom—that this little man might have, invigorates me all the more to pour into, pray for, and demonstrate Christ-like love to all who are younger than me.

And I pray that, as a church, we will continue to act upon the importance of investing in the next generation—passing on the legacy of kingdom living and Christ-mindedness. For if we don’t act in obedience to our calling, they will be shaped by things around them that are neither holy nor eternally motivated. Will you join in watering and sowing next-generation seeds, that they may grow and flourish as kingdom fruit?

”

Elizabeth Geigler

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you recall the most misunderstood you ever felt as a child or teenager? Was it over something minor or especially significant? How did the feelings, relationships, behaviors get resolved, if at all? Share and let your reflections move you into the next-generation discussion.

2. Where do biblical passages like Deuteronomy 6:6-7 and Ephesians 6:4 imply is the most critical place of training up children? Is this a reality or a missed opportunity in your home—thinking on your own childhood and with your children?

3. In addition to the priority of the home, the Bible makes clear a responsibility of our building up, teaching, and encouraging one another in the disciple-making process. What do you find in Psalm 78, Proverbs 22:6, and Colossians 3:14-18 that reinforces this responsibility?

4. A vibrant next-generation church is one that not only focuses much energy on children and youth, but also facilitates next-generation mentoring. Titus 2:3, Philippians 4:9, Proverbs 13:20—and almost all of what Paul writes to Timothy, his younger prodigy in the mission field—are examples of the importance of passing along wisdom, receiving instruction, and crossing generational lines. How do you feel when you read these passages or discuss the idea of mentoring in the Christian walk? Are there examples in your past, someone who invested in you as a youth? Are there individuals that come to mind now for whom you have been led to mentor, or seek accountability and wisdom?

5. Can you list the ministry opportunities that exist today for investing in the next-generation? There are more than we often consider. Share your list with the group and, if you are not already investing in some way, prayerfully consider committing to serve. You might want to think “outside of the bulletin” in that many serve the next generation through our local mission partners and through informal channels.

6. What questions do you have about pursuing a next-gen focus? Are you aware of both the short and long-term service opportunities within next-gen ministries? Have you considered next-gen focused as being a relationship with any generation that has come after you: a mentor, accountability partner, or spiritual friend? Maybe your questions regard what to do when you believe that Children’s or Youth Ministry is “just not your thing.” Is that okay, or an excuse? Share with your group and seek out the answers together. A next-generation-focused community participates in the handing down of the gospel and the knowledge of God, and is grateful for those who have come before. Dig in, go deep!

MY PRAYER

for Being Next-Gen Focused

Take time this week to consider the value of being next-gen focused and how you, your family, and your small group, might grow in this area. Write out a personal prayer below. If you are involved in a small group and are comfortable doing so, we suggest that group members close out their weekly gathering by praying these prayers aloud.

Lord,

8

UNIT EIGHT

We Grow In ... Missional Living

Followers of Jesus possess certain “marks” that set them apart from an unbelieving world. These marks are evidence of the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives and the outward identification of one who desires to grow in relationship with God, even unto Christ-like maturity.

In the second half of our *We Are ...* series (Units 8-14), we look at seven such marks. These marks will closely align with the God-given values we introduced in Units 1-7 as characterizing the culture of River Oaks Community Church. In this way, they provide a measure, or assessment, of how each of our lives strengthens and supports who we are.

Using the specific mark for this unit, consider: **“As followers of Jesus, seeking to glorify God and make disciples through reaching, building, and sending, we grow in Missional Living.”** We can do this by determining the biblical and practical application of missional living, and by providing an opportunity for each of us to assess our current state as a baseline to future growth.

IN THE BIBLE

He entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

- Luke 19:1-10

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Luke 19:1-10 a few times through, perhaps in a couple of different translations. Next, without using the text, retell the story of Zacchaeus. Can you see the scene play out in your mind? Are you able to recall the highlights of this narrative? If you are asked to explain the “so what” of the passage about Zacchaeus, how would you summarize the moral of the story?

2. Aside from the fact that Zacchaeus was a “wee little man and a wee little man was he,” what else should we know about Zacchaeus? What makes this interaction between Jesus and Zacchaeus especially encouraging for you and me? How might the person of Zacchaeus look in contemporary culture?

3. We are not told directly that Zacchaeus had confessed belief in Jesus as Lord and Savior; however, we are told indirectly. How is this? What do verses 19:8-9 tell us about the transformation of salvation? Contrast Zacchaeus' actions with those of the "rich ruler" in Luke 18:18-27.

4. Luke 19:10 might just be the most important verse in the entire Gospel of Luke. If you recall from our discussion on the value of being mission minded, this is very much a mission statement of Jesus. How does this translate to the expectation for followers of Jesus? Do you have a personal mission statement that speaks to your life as a witness?

5. Have you been Zacchaeus? Have you known a Zacchaeus? Describe your experience of having been, or having known, someone who was consumed with worldly pleasures before encountering Jesus and being changed by his grace.

6. How might we grow in missional living? What does it look like in our daily lives, the Monday-morning-through-Saturday-night part of our worship? What does it look like in our participation in missions—in the church, in the community, or around the world? Most importantly, what action can I take today that will enable me to grow in missional living as a follower of Jesus?

MY PRAYER

for Missional Living

Take time this week to consider the mark of missional living and how you, your family, and your small group, might grow in this area. Write out a personal prayer below. If you are involved in a small group and are comfortable doing so, we suggest that group members close out their weekly gathering by praying these prayers aloud.

A thought for your prayer: **When did I last share the gospel of Jesus Christ?**

Lord,

THE MARK

of Missional Living: How Am I Doing?

Use the continuum below to assess where you currently stand in the area of missional living. This is not a test, a report card, or an evaluation to be used as a comparison or judgment. We all have areas that need more attention than others, and we all need spiritual accountability. The goal is to mature in our sanctification, to be a little further along tomorrow than we are today. As we grow in Christ-likeness, these gentle nudges will remind us of our priorities, our relationship with God, and our call to be servants and disciple-makers.

Missional Living: As you reflect on your current faith walk, how are you doing as a follower who is on-mission? This is someone who is equipped and active in personally sharing the gospel, intentional in building relationships that enable the sharing of one's life and love for Jesus, and engaged in the work of dedicated mission service—inside the church, within our local community, or around the globe. Missional living requires a blurring of the secular and sacred as distinct areas of our lives, and rather sees the sacred in all areas of life. Missional living affects our priorities, our behaviors, our words, our desires, and our heart's attitude toward others, seeing all as image bearers of God.



Place an indicator where you currently view yourself. Pray and seek accountability for growth. Revisit this measure in the future, and may you experience the blessing of a more intimate relationship with God and the reward of a fulfilling life of discipleship as a result of your growth.

9

UNIT NINE

We Grow In ... Biblical Understanding

Followers of Jesus possess certain “marks” that set them apart from an unbelieving world. These marks are evidence of the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives and the outward identification of one who desires to grow in relationship with God, even unto Christ-like maturity.

In the second half of our *We Are ...* series (Units 8-14), we look at seven such marks. These marks will closely align with the God-given values we introduced in Units 1-7 as characterizing the culture of River Oaks Community Church. In this way, they provide a measure, or assessment, of how each of our lives strengthens and supports who we are.

Using the specific mark for this unit, consider: **“As followers of Jesus, seeking to glorify God and make disciples through reaching, building, and sending, we grow in Biblical Understanding.”** We can do this by determining the biblical and practical application of biblical understanding, and by providing an opportunity for each of us to assess our current state as a baseline to future growth.

IN THE BIBLE

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’” And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’” And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, it is written, “‘He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,’ and “‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time. - Luke 4:1-13

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Luke 4:1-13 a few times through, perhaps in a couple of different translations. Next, without using the text, retell the story of Jesus' wilderness temptation. Can you see the scene play out in your mind? Are you able to recall the highlights of this narrative? If asked to explain the "so what" of this passage; how would you summarize the moral of the story?

2. At the heart of the temptation of Jesus is the model of how we should be more prepared to respond when temptations come our way. Do you recognize it? Jesus is tempted three times; twice he responds on this basis, and—on the final temptation—he corrects his accuser on this basis. Other examples include Matthew 11:9-10, Luke 18:31, Luke 24:44-45.

3. What does Luke 6:46-49 tell us about the importance of loving, learning, and living out God's Word? How do you explain the necessity for heart, head, and hand knowledge as the three-legged stool of discipleship?

4. Biblical understanding is an important defense against those who choose to "proof-text" the Bible, or use verses out of context in order to support a particular ideology or doctrine. It is also important in disciple-making as you come alongside another, teaching and encouraging in truth and grace. Are there particular passages of Scripture that you have found to be frequently misinterpreted, taken out of context, or simply misunderstood? How might you be prepared to respond in the future with, "As it is written"

5. Why do you think many contemporary theologians, pastors, and Christian authors, have determined “biblical illiteracy” to be one of the most crucial issues impacting the effectiveness of the church today? What cultural dynamics are at play? In the church and in the greater society at large? How would you define biblical illiteracy, or—better yet—how might you define biblical literacy? Aside from being able to respond to others, as we have seen in the previous questions, why else is it important that we are literate in the Bible? (hint: this is the most important reason of all)

6. How might we grow in biblical understanding? What does it look like in our daily lives, the Monday-morning-through-Saturday-night part of our worship? What does it look like in our participation in small groups, Bible studies, or accountability groups? Most importantly, what action can I take today that will enable me to grow in biblical understanding as a follower of Jesus?

MY PRAYER

for Biblical Understanding

Take time this week to consider the mark of biblical understanding and how you, your family, and your small group, might grow in this area. Write out a personal prayer below. If you are involved in a small group and are comfortable doing so, we suggest that group members close out their weekly gathering by praying these prayers aloud.

A thought for your prayer: **What is my Scripture passage this week? For this season of life?**

Lord,

THE MARK

of Biblical Understanding: How Am I Doing?

Use the continuum below to assess where you currently stand in the area of biblical understanding. This is not a test, a report card, or an evaluation to be used as a comparison or judgment. We all have areas that need more attention than others, and we all need spiritual accountability. The goal is to mature in our sanctification, to be a little further along tomorrow than we are today. As we grow in Christ-likeness, these gentle nudges will remind us of our priorities, our relationship with God, and our call to be servants and disciple-makers.

Biblical Understanding: As you reflect on your current faith walk, how are you doing as a follower who desires biblical understanding? This is someone who is seeking to love, learn, and live out God's Word, just a little bit more each day. Growing in the knowledge of the Bible, through regular reading, meditation, study, memorization, and edifying discussions as the means to an end of growing in relationship with, and love for, God. Biblical understanding enables a follower of Jesus to engage in conversations of faith with the truth and grace of Scripture as a ready defense, a word of comfort, a seed of the gospel, and an accountable word to a friend.



Place an indicator where you currently view yourself. Pray and seek accountability for growth. Revisit this measure in the future, and may you experience the blessing of a more intimate relationship with God and the reward of a fulfilling life of discipleship as a result of your growth.

10

UNIT TEN

We Grow In ... Devotion to Praying

Followers of Jesus possess certain “marks” that set them apart from an unbelieving world. These marks are evidence of the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives and the outward identification of one who desires to grow in relationship with God, even unto Christ-like maturity.

In the second half of our *We Are ...* series (Units 8-14), we look at seven such marks. These marks will closely align with the God-given values we introduced in Units 1-7 as characterizing the culture of River Oaks Community Church. In this way, they provide a measure, or assessment, of how each of our lives strengthens and supports who we are.

Using the specific mark for this unit, consider: **“As followers of Jesus, seeking to glorify God and make disciples through reaching, building, and sending, we grow in Devotion to Praying.”** We can do this by determining the biblical and practical application of praying, and by providing an opportunity for each of us to assess our current state as a baseline to future growth.

IN THE BIBLE

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” And he said to them, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.’” And he said to them, “Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything?’ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” - Luke 11:1-13

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Luke 11:1-13 a few times through, maybe in a couple of different translations. Next, without using the text, retell the story of Jesus' teaching his disciples how to pray. Can you see the scene play out in your mind? Are you able to recall the highlights of this narrative? If asked to explain the "so what" of this passage; how would you summarize the moral of the story?

2. In Unit 2, we took a closer look at the Lord's Prayer from Matthew's account. Although Luke provides us with a condensed account, he highlights the same "aims" of this model prayer. Can you name what it is that we are to pray for? Further, can you describe the aspects of our prayer life that Jesus is emphasizing with these two analogies (Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:1-13)?

3. Have you ever thought to enter into prayer as Moses prays: “Please show me your glory”? As you read Exodus 33:12-18, what attributes are present in Moses’ relationship with God and in his prayer life that the Lord honors? How does that apply to you and me?

4. Read Psalm 145:17-19. David is describing the faithful prayer of one with right motives and “truth.” What comfort do you find in this passage? What does it mean to “call upon him in truth”? What is the right motive for prayer? (Maybe the words of Jesus in Luke 22:42 are a good place to start.)

5. How do you reconcile passages like Jesus' garden prayer in Luke 22 and James 4:13-17, ("...if the Lord wills..."), with those in Matthew 21:21-22 and James 4:2 ("You have not, because you ask not)? Recall from Unit 2 the four "reasons" to pray: we draw closer in relationship to God, we receive a promised peace, we are obedient, and we are used by God to reveal his glory through answered prayers. It's the final reason that is in view with this question. How does that happen if not all prayers are answered as we ask them? How are the ways that God uses us in answered prayers?

6. How might we grow in our devotion to praying? What does it look like in our daily lives, the Monday-morning-through-Saturday-night part of our worship? What does it look like in our participation in small groups, Bible studies, or accountability groups? Most importantly what action can I take today that will enable me to grow in devotion to praying as a follower of Jesus?

THE MARK

of Devotion to Praying: How Am I Doing?

Use the continuum below to assess where you currently stand in the area of devotion to praying. This is not a test, a report card, or an evaluation to be used as a comparison or judgment. We all have areas that need more attention than others, and we all need spiritual accountability. The goal is to mature in our sanctification, to be a little further along tomorrow than we are today. As we grow in Christ-likeness, these gentle nudges will remind us of our priorities, our relationship with God, and our call to be servants and disciple-makers.

Devotion to Praying: As you reflect on your current faith walk, how are you doing as a follower who desires a strong devotion to praying? This is someone who is seeking to pray without ceasing, with regularly-appointed times of prayer and an openness to enter into prayer at any time. A follower of Jesus who is devoted to praying is available and willing to pray with others—children, spouse, friend, stranger—and does so not “as the hypocrites do,” but as a private encounter with God, without thought of performance, word choice, or ego. Devotion to praying guides us into other related spiritual disciplines—prayer walks, retreats, solitude, breath prayers, journaling, and so forth.



Place an indicator where you currently view yourself. Pray and seek accountability for growth. Revisit this measure in the future, and may you experience the blessing of a more intimate relationship with God and the reward of a fulfilling life of discipleship as a result of your growth.

11

UNIT ELEVEN

We Grow In ... The Spirit's Empowering

Followers of Jesus possess certain “marks” that set them apart from an unbelieving world. These marks are evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives and the outward identification of one who desires to grow in relationship with God, even unto Christ-like maturity.

In the second half of our *We Are ...* series (Units 8-14), we look at seven such marks. These marks will closely align with the God-given values we introduced in Units 1-7 as characterizing the culture of River Oaks Community Church. In this way, they provide a measure, or assessment, of how each of our lives strengthens and supports who we are.

Using the specific mark for this unit, consider: **“As followers of Jesus, seeking to glorify God and make disciples through reaching, building, and sending, we grow in the Spirit's Empowering.”** We can do this by determining the biblical and practical application of the Holy Spirit's empowering, and by providing an opportunity for each of us to assess our current state as a baseline to future growth.

IN THE BIBLE

“But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”

He also told them a parable: “Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother’s eye. “For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”

- Luke 6:27-45

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Luke 6:27-45 a few times through, maybe in a couple of different translations. Next, without using the text, retell what Jesus is teaching about loving, judging, and bearing good fruit. What major points do you highlight in your summary of this teaching? If asked to explain the “so what” of this passage, how would you summarize the moral of the story?

2. Even unbelievers will agree that these teachings of Jesus are profitable. However, it's important to realize that Jesus is not speaking to a general audience in this context, but to his disciples—to those who had decided to follow him as Lord and Master. Why is this important? What does it say about how we can consistently live in obedience to God? Why should we not be surprised when an unbelieving world does not live out of unconditional love, does not reserve judgment, and does not bear good, godly fruit? Consider: John 15:4-5, 1 Corinthians 2:10-14.

3. The Holy Spirit's empowering includes the fruit of the Spirit, as seen in Galatians 5:18-26. Make a list of the fruit and consider which of these would empower us to fulfill Jesus' instructions in Luke 6: to love, judge, and speak out of the abundance of a "good treasure" heart. Think about the past twenty-four hours. Were each of these fruit present in your life witness? If not, why not? (Bonus: What is difference between the fruit of the Spirit and the spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, which are also granted to us through his empowering presence?)

4. When we grow in the Spirit's empowering, we mature in more ways than fruit and gifts. What do 2 Timothy 1:7, 14 and 1 Corinthians 2:9-16 tell us about the benefits of drawing on the Spirit's presence within us?

5. Romans 8:6-10 reminds us of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in all believers. Paul says, “Anyone who does not have the Spirit does not belong to him.” Yet, Ephesians 5:18 speaks to “being filled” with the Holy Spirit in the present tense. In other words, the level of empowering that we allow for in our life is an ongoing experience, not a once-and-for-all. To what does Paul compare this daily act of submission? According to Ephesians 5:19-21, what are the five characteristics of a Spirit-filled follower of Jesus?

6. How might we grow in the Spirit’s empowering? What does that look like in our daily lives, the Monday-morning-through-Saturday-night part of our worship? What does it look like in our participation in small groups, Bible studies, or accountability groups? Most importantly, what action can I take today that will enable me to grow in the Spirit’s empowering presence as a follower of Jesus?

THE MARK

of The Spirit's Empowering: How Am I Doing?

Use the continuum below to assess where you currently stand in the area of the Spirit's empowering. This is not a test, a report card, or an evaluation to be used as a comparison or judgment. We all have areas that need more attention than others, and we all need spiritual accountability. The goal is to mature in our sanctification, to be a little further along tomorrow than we are today. As we grow in Christ-likeness, these gentle nudges will remind us of our priorities, our relationship with God, and our call to be servants and disciple-makers.

The Spirit's Empowering: As you reflect on your current faith walk, how are you doing as a follower who desires to be filled with the Spirit's empowering presence? This is someone who is seeking to be grounded in humility, with a life that consistently expresses itself through the fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit's empowering is evident in a believer who routinely seeks guidance, accountability, comfort, wisdom, and power from the Holy Spirit, utilizing the gifts that the Spirit has equipped them to use in kingdom service.



Place an indicator where you currently view yourself. Pray and seek accountability for growth. Revisit this measure in the future, and may you experience the blessing of a more intimate relationship with God and the reward of a fulfilling life of discipleship as a result of your growth.

12

UNIT TWELVE

We Grow In ... Generous Giving

Followers of Jesus possess certain “marks” that set them apart from an unbelieving world. These marks are evidence of the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives and the outward identification of one who desires to grow in relationship with God, even unto Christ-like maturity.

In the second half of our *We Are ...* series (Units 8-14), we look at seven such marks. These marks will closely align with the God-given values we introduced in Units 1-7 as characterizing the culture of River Oaks Community Church. In this way, they provide a measure, or assessment, of how each of our lives strengthens and supports who we are.

Using the specific mark for this unit, consider: **“As followers of Jesus, seeking to glorify God and make disciples through reaching, building, and sending, we grow in Generous Giving.”** We can do this by determining the biblical and practical application of generous giving, and by providing an opportunity for each of us to assess our current state, as a baseline to future growth.

IN THE BIBLE

And a ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.’” And he said, “All these I have kept from my youth.” When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” But he said, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.” And Peter said, “See, we have left our homes and followed you.” And he said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.” - Luke 18:18-30

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Luke 18:18-30 a few times through, maybe in a couple of different translations. Next, without using the text, retell the story of this interaction between Jesus, the rich ruler, and the disciples. Can you see the scene play out in your mind? Are you able to recall the highlights of this narrative? If asked to explain the “so what” of this passage, how would you summarize the moral of the story?

2. There are a few things that this rich ruler did not understand about “inheriting eternal life.” What were these misunderstandings? How does Paul’s message to Timothy (1 Timothy 6:8-10) correspond to what Jesus had seen in this man’s life? Is there anything in your life that you could not give up to follow Jesus? What would be most difficult? Do you think God is asking all followers to give up their homes and family? What is Jesus really teaching in these remarks?

3. The Bible speaks often of generosity through good stewardship. Can you determine the general lesson and life application of the following: Luke 16:10-13, 1 Corinthians 9:6-8, Proverbs 3:9-10?

4. There seem to be four primary heart attitudes, or characteristics, that enable us to live a generous life: contentment, kingdom motives, intentionality, and trust. How do you describe the correlation between these traits and generosity? Do you have a testimony of these characteristics being genuinely lived out? What did it look like and what was the impact?

5. C.S. Lewis once said, “It will not bother me in the hour of death to reflect that I have been ‘had for a sucker’ by any number of imposters; but it would be an eternal torment to know that I had refused even one person in need.” (Letters to an American Lady, 1962.)²

Translate what C.S. Lewis is saying with a view to 2018. Do you agree with Lewis? Why or why not? Would it change anything if you believed that everything you have is on loan? If discernment and good financial stewardship are valid arguments in this situation, then what is to be said about our refusal to be generous with our time, talents, and acquired resources? Do you find that your thoughts regarding generosity are the same across all manners of generous living?

6. How might we grow in generous giving? What does it look like in our daily lives, the Monday-morning-through-Saturday-night part of our worship? What does it look like in our participation in small groups, Bible studies, or accountability groups? Most importantly, what action can I take today that will enable me to grow in living a more generous life as a follower of Jesus?

² Wayne Martindale and Jerry Roots, eds., *The Quotable Lewis* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishing), 1990.

THE MARK

of Generous Giving: How Am I Doing?

Use the continuum below to assess where you currently stand in the area of the generous giving. This is not a test, a report card, or an evaluation to be used as a comparison or judgment. We all have areas that need more attention than others, and we all need spiritual accountability. The goal is to mature in our sanctification, to be a little further along tomorrow than we are today. As we grow in Christ-likeness, these gentle nudges will remind us of our priorities, our relationship with God, and our call to be servants and disciple-makers.

Generous Giving: As you reflect on your current faith walk, how are you doing as a follower who desires to give generously? This is someone who is joyfully and regularly willing to give of their time, talents, and treasures—one who desires to be a good steward of the resources with which God has gifted them, prioritizing those things that advance kingdom mission and reach, teach, care for others. Generous giving (and living) is characterized by a life of contentment relative to material possessions and worldly pleasures—intentionality, pure motives, and great trust in the promises and provision of God.



Place an indicator where you currently view yourself. Pray and seek accountability for growth. Revisit this measure in the future, and may you experience the blessing of a more intimate relationship with God and the reward of a fulfilling life of discipleship as a result of your growth.

13

UNIT THIRTEEN

We Grow In ... Next Generation Investing

Followers of Jesus possess certain “marks” that set them apart from an unbelieving world. These marks are evidence of the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives and the outward identification of one who desires to grow in relationship with God, even unto Christ-like maturity.

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Using the specific mark for this unit, consider: **“As followers of Jesus, seeking to glorify God and make disciples through reaching, building, and sending, we grow in Next-Generation Investing.”** We can do this by determining the biblical and practical application of next-generation investing, and by providing an opportunity for each of us to assess our current state as a baseline to future growth.

IN THE BIBLE

Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." - Luke 18:15-17

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days, they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. - Luke 2:41-52

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Luke 18:15-17 and Luke 2:41-52 a few times through, perhaps in a couple of different translations. Next, without using the text, retell the stories of these two narratives. Can you see the scenes play out in your mind? Are you able to recall the highlights? If asked to explain the “so what” of these passages, how would you summarize them?

2. In Luke 18, what was the motive behind the disciples rebuking those who brought children to Jesus? We might not openly “rebuke” parents and children today, but in what ways might we convey the same message regarding our perspective of engaging children (infants, youth, young adults) in discipleship? What is it about the character of a child that Jesus tells his disciples makes them ideally suited for the kingdom?

3. In the passage of Jesus in the temple, what model of discipleship do we see, even for children (v. 46). Yes, Jesus was a special child, yet the importance of inter-generational biblical training cannot be dismissed. What are some intentional ways that you can engage a next-generation student in discipleship? In what ways do you engage your own children in biblical training, regardless of your children's age (from 2 - 52)?

4. Might Psalm 102:18 or 78:4, or—perhaps best of all, Psalm 71:16-20—act as motivators for our investing in a next generation? When you read these verses, what are your immediate thoughts? Is there a sense of urgency and persistence within the church today to proclaim and train up and remind a next generation of “the mighty deeds of God”? If not, what might be some of the barriers that exist?

5. Isn't it easy to do life-on-life with those who are like us? Yet, in many of the Apostle Paul's mentoring and congregational relationships, we find a wide variety of those who are different than he was ... in age, nationality, maturity, and social status. Paul sought disciple-making opportunities, or—as he wrote the Thessalonians, he sought “to impart not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives”—with those who were hungry to follow, regardless of differences. Are you currently in a discipleship relationship (group, one-on-one, or otherwise) with those of another generation, ethnicity, social status, or level of spiritual maturity? What are the advantages of these relationships? If not, what holds you back from seeking them out?

6. How might we grow in next-generation investing? What does it look like in our daily lives, the Monday-morning-through-Saturday-night part of our worship? What does it look like in our participation in small groups, Bible studies, or accountability groups? Most importantly, what action can I take today that will enable me to grow in my investing across generations as a follower of Jesus?

THE MARK

of Next-Generation Investing: How Am I Doing?

Use the continuum below to assess where you currently stand in the area of the next generation investing. This is not a test, a report card, or an evaluation to be used as a comparison or judgment. We all have areas that need more attention than others, and we all need spiritual accountability. The goal is to mature in our sanctification, to be a little further along tomorrow than we are today. As we grow in Christ-likeness, these gentle nudges will remind us of our priorities, our relationship with God, and our call to be servants and disciple-makers.

Next-Generation Investing: As you reflect on your current faith walk, how are you doing as a follower who invests in the next generation? This is someone who takes an active interest in the spiritual development of children, youth, and young adults—one who serves the next generation through volunteering in ministry activities, leading discipleship groups, mentoring, teaching, or providing resources that encourage and enable the next generation to be better equipped to follow Jesus. Next-generation investing often requires patience and sacrificing comfort, looking to our Father as we realize our own shortcomings and frustrations.



Place an indicator where you currently view yourself. Pray and seek accountability for growth. Revisit this measure in the future, and may you experience the blessing of a more intimate relationship with God and the reward of a fulfilling life of discipleship as a result of your growth.

14

UNIT FOURTEEN

We Grow In ... Relationship Building

Followers of Jesus possess certain “marks” that set them apart from an unbelieving world. These marks are evidence of the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives and the outward identification of one who desires to grow in relationship with God, even unto Christ-like maturity.

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Using the specific mark for this unit, consider: **“As followers of Jesus, seeking to glorify God and make disciples through reaching, building, and sending, we grow in Relationship Building.”** We can do this by determining the biblical and practical application of relationship building, and by providing an opportunity for each of us to assess our current state as a baseline to future growth.

IN THE BIBLE

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So, Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it." They said to him, "Where will you have us prepare it?" He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him into the house that he enters and tell the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' And he will show you a large upper room furnished; prepare it there." And they went and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover. And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise, the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!"

- Luke 22:7-22

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Luke 22:7-22 a few times through, maybe in a couple of different translations. Next, retell the story of upper room Passover meal. Can you see the scene play out in your mind? Are you able to recall the highlights of this narrative? How might you express the relational aspect of what is going on at this “Last Supper”?

2. Jesus says that he “earnestly desired” to eat this meal with his disciples? Some translations say, “fervently desired.” Both are Hebraisms that, when taken literally, would say, “With desire I have desired.” In other words, I wanted so badly to share this meal with you. Have you ever had this type of desire to share a meal with another? What was the situation? What keeps us from having that same desire more often?

3. The Lord's Supper (communion, the Eucharist) allows believers the opportunity to share three perspectives with one another—a past, a present, and a future. Can you identify them in 1 Corinthians 11:7-26? Additionally, in the partaking of communion, there is an emphasis on the participation of common-union. Given this shared fellowship, how should the Lord's Supper affect our desire to build purposed relationships with other believers?

4. Proverbs provides several words of wisdom for building strong, lasting, intentional, God-honoring friendships. How might this advice enable us to discern good from bad relationships: Proverbs 12:26, 13:20, 17:17, 18:24, 22:24-25, 27:17. Consider also Paul's proverb-like advice in 1 Corinthians 15:33-34. Can you think of any others?

5. When you consider your closest relationships, in what would you say they are most grounded? What are the common denominators of your friendship? Do they encourage or prevent spiritual growth? Are you unequally yoked in your closest relationships, in that the direction of the friendship dictates the direction of your own priorities, values, and beliefs? Are you equally yoked, in that the direction of your relationship is steered toward Christ-like maturity, with mutual encouragement and accountability?

6. How might we grow in relationship building? What does it look like in our daily lives, the Monday-morning-through-Saturday-night part of our worship? What does it look like in our participation in small groups, Bible studies, or accountability groups? Most importantly, what action can I take that will enable me to grow in building relationships as a follower of Jesus?

THE MARK

of Relationship Building: How Am I Doing?

Use the continuum below to assess where you currently stand in the area of building meaningful and genuine relationships. This is not a test, a report card, or an evaluation to be used as a comparison or judgment. We all have areas that need more attention than others, and we all need spiritual accountability. The goal is to mature in our sanctification, to be a little further along tomorrow than we are today. As we grow in Christ-likeness, these gentle nudges will remind us of our priorities, our relationship with God, and our call to be servants and disciple-makers.

Relationship Building: As you reflect on your current faith walk, how are you doing as a follower who is intentional in relationships with other followers of Jesus? These are spiritual friendships that are meaningful, authentic, honest, fully satisfying, and uplifting—relationships that are the byproduct of connection in worshipping together, serving together, growing together, and going together. Purposed relationship building begins and ends in prayer for one another, and includes the knowledge that a “2 AM call of distress” will be met with an immediate response of assistance.



Place an indicator where you currently view yourself. Pray and seek accountability for growth. Revisit this measure in the future, and may you experience the blessing of a more intimate relationship with God and the reward of a fulfilling life of discipleship as a result of your growth.

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