

# Growth Group Study Guide



Let's face it: the holidays can be hard. Winter can be rough, especially once January hits. And when the hustle and bustle of Christmas quiets down, the volume of our inner battles often gets louder. Our culture pushes the idea of "New Year, New You." So, every year just as the push of the holidays end, the messages we get are "Now take it up a notch and be better, get better, live better."

The truth is, we DO want growth, we DO need change but what does that look like as we live our lives in the context of God's grace and power? This series we will look at the plight of the Israelites leaving Egypt and apply how we see God intervening, carrying, and leading His people in the midst of their weaknesses and struggles. Not only do we not HAVE to face tough times alone, but it is our Christian calling to lean on God and bear witness to His awesome power and love to carry us through.

January 7, 2024

## Session 1 | How to Make the Hard Changes?

***Before you begin*** this Growth Group session, read the summary found inside the cover of your Growth Group materials and watch this video:



What To Do When You're Feeling Defeated

<https://youtu.be/wykQmabPoZY?si=T-IbsjJnKdt2ZuRRwatch?v=B10IqVg3S7M>

### Background:

*This will help set the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.*

In the Exodus passage for this week, we read that after 430 years in Egypt, the people of Israel were told to leave.

*"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."*

Isaiah 43:18-19

Like Abraham before them, they had never seen their destination, but were expected to trust God, get up, and go. Some of us may be able to identify with the people of Israel, but for most of us, we have no similar experience. Regardless of whether or not you've moved to an unknown destination, all of us deal with changes in our lives. After all, it's a new year, so it's time for a new you. Right? That's what the world tells us with all the talk about resolutions and advertisements for exercise equipment and diet plans. But what about your spiritual life? Are you looking to step up your prayer life or get serious about Bible study? Maybe you're

thinking about becoming involved in a mission or ministry of the church. Maybe you've made a decision. Now what? Why is it so hard to follow through and make lasting changes after the decision has been made?

Maybe you look at others and wonder why it's so easy for them and yet so hard for you. If you were to ask, you may find that sustaining change isn't easy for them either. This resistance to change is not a recent development. If you read further in Exodus, you will read that the people of Israel complained constantly. They wanted to escape the unknown and go back to the slavery that they knew. Nor is this limited to people who struggle with their faith. In Romans 7:15, Paul tells us *"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."* In this passage, Paul was writing about sin, but the words also apply to making and sustaining spiritual change. We don't do what we want, instead we go back to doing what we intended to stop doing.

That doesn't mean that sustainable change is a fool's dream, but it does mean that we need to seek God's help and guidance as we endeavor to persevere in making the desired changes in our spiritual lives. In Matthew 19:26 Jesus tells the disciples *"With man that is impossible, but with God all things are possible."* And in this week's Isaiah passage, we read that God tells us *"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not*

*With God, all things are possible.*  
Matthew 19:26b

*perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”* God is telling us that He knows where we are headed and that He has prepared the way before us.

Are you ready to make some hard changes in your spiritual life? If you are, remember to trust God to guide and help you. If necessary, start with small changes that take you step by step towards your desired goal.

**Scripture:** Exodus 12:31-42, Isaiah 43:16-19

*Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passages aloud.*

### **Sermon Reflection:**

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?
2. What challenged you about this sermon?
3. What do you think Jesus is trying to teach you through this sermon? How will this affect your daily life?

### **Questions from the Bible:**

1. In Exodus 12:31, Pharaoh tells Moses and Aaron “*Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord as you have requested.*” Why did Pharaoh order them to leave?
2. How does the Exodus passage emphasize God’s sovereignty? How can this understanding affect your daily decision-making?
3. In Isaiah 43:16 we read: “*This is what the Lord says – he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick.*” To what event in the history of Israel does this passage refer?

4. In Exodus 12:32 Pharaoh says, “*Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me.*” Why do you think Pharaoh told Moses and Aaron to bless him? Was the God of Moses and Aaron the God of Pharaoh?
  
5. Why do you suppose that Pharaoh resisted giving the Israelites their freedom through plague after plague? (Skim the headings of Exodus 7-12 for reminders of the various plagues.) Consider whether you have ever experienced hardship because you resisted making changes that God wanted you to make. Do you consider that your actions influenced the outcome of your situation? How so?
  
6. In Exodus 12:40 we read that the Israelites lived in Egypt for 430 years. Now read Genesis 15:12-14. What did God tell Abram (Abraham) about his descendants, the people of Israel? Why is it important for Israel to understand this about their history?
  
7. In Exodus 12:35 Moses instructed the Israelites to ask the Egyptians for silver and gold and clothing. Why was Moses confident that the Egyptians would fulfill their requests?
  
8. When the Israelites were leaving Egypt, why did the bread dough they carried not rise?

### Questions for Application:

1. Reflect on the current challenges in your life and discuss how the promises in Isaiah 43 can be a source of comfort.
  
2. Why is it important to recall the great deeds of God when facing challenges in your life that appear to be insurmountable?

3. Romans 5:3-4 reads, “...we also glory in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.” According to this Scripture reading, we “know that suffering produces perseverance...” Recall an example of perseverance producing character and hope in you.
  
4. Have you experienced a time in your life when, “With God, all things are possible.,” applied to your situation? How was it resolved?
  
5. In light of God’s commitment to redeem Israel despite their unfaithfulness, how should we approach God when we fall short?
  
6. Read Romans 10:17 and Hebrews 11:6. According to these two verses, what role does faith play in the life of the believer?
  
7. How does the promise that God gave Israel in Isaiah 43:18-19 inspire you in your spiritual growth?
  
8. What can we learn from the story of Moses leading the people of Israel out of Egypt that can impact our daily living as Christians today?

**Resources:** Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic

Better – 4-day reading plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/23357-better>

Bible and Provision – 5-day reading plan: <https://www.bible.com/en/reading-plans/42245>

## Questions for Discussion:

1. What are you reading in the Word this week?
2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship – prayers, presence, gifts, witness, service?

## Growth Challenge:

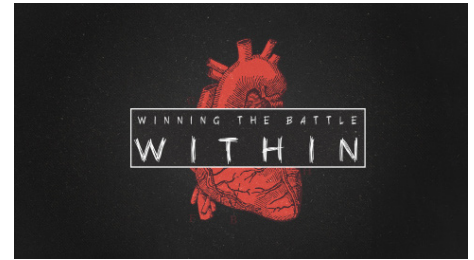
If you haven't already done so, seriously consider "making the hard change" in one aspect of your spiritual life. Share your decision with your growth group or with a Christian friend.

# NOTES

January 14, 2024

## Session 2 | What to Do When I Feel Like Giving Up?

***Before you begin*** this growth Group session, read the summary found inside the cover of your Growth Group materials and watch this video:



If You Feel Like Giving Up, Remember This

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVfN3iWpxB0>

### Background:

*This will help set the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.*

Have you ever complained or grumbled? Silly question, right? We have all been in a place in our lives where we did not like something and complained to anyone who would listen. Maybe we even exaggerated about our situation. In Exodus 16:2-4 the Israelites had just been set free from slavery and were complaining to Moses and Aaron about being hungry. They felt they had been led out to the desert to die. How they wished the Lord had put them to death while in Egypt because they were better off. They were ready to give up and go back to being slaves. God heard their complaints and gave them bread to eat. He said to only gather enough to eat each day. He wanted to test them to see who would follow His directions.



In Romans 5:1-5 we learn that trouble produces endurance, endurance produces character and character produces hope. Do you ever feel like walking away spiritually from God? Hold on (endure), he will build up your character. He will produce a hope in you that others will see. Not only is God glorified through this, but other people feel hope when they see you struggle and overcome with God.

*.. Because we know that trouble produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope.  
Romans 5:3b-4*

**Scripture:** Exodus 16:2-4, Romans 5:1-5

*Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passages aloud.*

### Sermon Reflection:

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?



2. What challenged you about this sermon?
3. What do you think Jesus is trying to teach you through this sermon? How will this affect your daily life?

### Questions from the Bible:

1. What does Romans 5:1-5 tell us that trouble produces?
2. Galatians 6:9-10 tells us not to give up. Why? What would happen if we did?
3. In Exodus 16:4 God says, "*In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions*". Why do you think God wanted to test them?
4. In Paul's letter to the Romans (Romans 5:1-5) he tells them that they have been "*justified through faith*". What does he mean?
5. In Exodus 16:3 the Israelites said, "*If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.*" Who were they blaming for their situation? Recall what you can of the events leading up to this moment.
6. In Romans 5:3, it states in part "*we also glory in our sufferings...*" Why would we want to "glory" in our suffering?

7. Read Ephesians 6:13. What are we instructed to do and why? What does this passage say about “*the day of evil*”?
  
8. James 4:7-8a reads, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.” What are the three commands in this passage?

### Questions for Application:

1. What is something difficult you are going through right now?
  
2. How do you respond to difficulty? Do you respond with anger? Discouragement? Cynicism? Determination?
  
3. Why do you think the people of Israel began grumbling so soon after being freed from slavery? How does their attitude compare to people’s expectations of God in today’s society? How do you think God feels about grumbling? Why do you suppose he feels that way?
  
4. Read James 1:2-3. How does the advice given by James compare to the words of Paul in Romans 5:3-5?
  
5. Ephesians 6:12 reads, “*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*” When a season of life felt overwhelming, did you consider that you were locked in a battle against the spiritual forces of evil? Why or why not?

6. How has God used suffering in your life to build perseverance, character, and hope?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. Recall a time when you complained to someone about something they neither caused nor could resolve. How was this handled?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. Matthew 19:26 says, “*Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’*” What does Jesus say is possible for God? Do you believe this? What role do you think your beliefs play in overcoming adverse situations?

**Resources:** Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic

In The Shepherd’s Arms -3-day plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/41642-in-the-shepherds-arms>

Trusting God’s plan in the Waiting - 22 day plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/26293-trusting-gods-plan-in-the-waiting-lessons>

Don’t Lose Hope- 5-day plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/25598-dont-lose-hope>

### Questions for Discussion:

1. What are you reading in the Word this week?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship – prayers, presence, gifts, witness, service?

## **Growth Challenge:**

Remember. Do not give up. Do not lose heart. You are not alone, and God is near. He isn't done with you yet. He hears your cry and will rescue you.

# **NOTES**

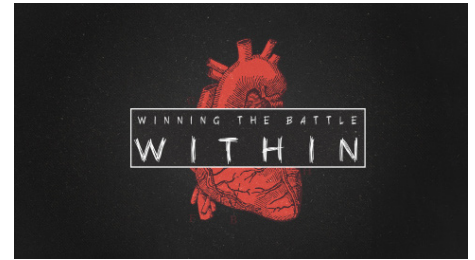
January 21, 2024

## Session 3 | How Do I Fight the Enemy Within?

***Before you begin*** this Growth Group session, read the summary found inside the cover of your Growth Group materials and watch this video.

How to Fight Temptation as a Christian

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ocgVsDH3LU>



### Background:

*This will help set the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.*

The first of today's scripture readings is found at Exodus chapter 32 and centers around Aaron, the Israelites, and an idol in the form of a golden calf. In Exodus 20 God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments. How soon was it before the Israelites broke the first two commandments by asking Aaron, their newly appointed priest, to make an idol for them in the form of a golden calf? (Keep in mind the Israelites had recently experienced God bringing the 10 plagues against the Egyptians and experienced Him parting the Red Sea so they could escape the pursuing Egyptians.) A mere forty days...



How could this happen? How could the Israelites experience these powerful, miraculous acts of God, yet still turn from Him to an idol fashioned out of their melted gold jewelry? (Jewelry God prompted the Egyptians to give to the Israelites as plunder...) And how is it that Aaron—the first official priest appointed by God—was so easily persuaded?!

Before we are tempted to feel superior to the Israelites, let's consider what Paul had to say concerning his sinful nature in Romans 7:15; *"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."* Wrap your mind around the fact that Paul, the author of at least 13 of the 27 Books of the New Testament, struggled with sin. If Paul struggled, how are we supposed to avoid it? We can't. In Romans 3:23 Paul tells us, *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*

This phenomenon is explained by [gotquestions.org](http://gotquestions.org) as follows, "The desires of the believer's spiritual nature pull him in the direction of good while the flesh in which he lives pulls him in the other. He wants to do one thing but has something within him that does the opposite." In other words, the struggle is real. But take heart! We do not fight this spiritual battle alone. Have you accepted God's gift of grace and salvation? If so, you have the Spirit of Christ living on the inside of you, and He is *"Christ in you, the hope of glory."* Colossians 1:27b. Have you asked the Spirit to help you win your battle?

*"I do not understand what I do.  
For what I want to do I do not do,  
but what I hate I do."  
Romans 7:15*

**Scripture:** Exodus 32:1-4, Romans 7:14-25

*Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passages aloud.*

### **Sermon Reflection:**

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?
2. What challenged you about this sermon?
3. What do you think Jesus is trying to teach you through this sermon? How will this affect your daily life?

### **Questions from the Bible:**

1. In Exodus 32:1, the people say to Aaron, *“Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.”* There are multiple failures to defeat “the enemy within” in these statements. Identify those that you see and explain why they are failures.
2. In Exodus 32:1-4 the people were frustrated that they didn’t know where Moses had gone and turned to other gods. What does this reveal about their relationship with God?
3. In Exodus 32:24 Aaron explains the golden calf debacle to Moses by saying, *“So I told them, ‘Whoever has any gold jewelry take it off.’ Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!”* What is Aaron trying to do with this story? He has broken a third commandment with his explanation. Which one?
4. Why do you think Aaron gave in to the Israelites (and so easily)? What does this tell you about Aaron?

5. In this week's passage from Romans, Paul writes about his struggles with "the enemy within" and acknowledges his failures. What does Paul turn to for hope and assurance in the face of failures?
  
6. Paul writes in Romans 7:17 "*As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.*" Is he saying that his wrongdoings are not his fault, and he doesn't have responsibility for his sin?
  
7. In Romans 7:18a, Paul says, "*For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.*" Why does Paul state that nothing good dwells in his flesh? Do you ever feel like this?
  
8. What is your understanding of the following, "*Christ in you, the hope of glory*"? (Colossians 1:27b)

### Questions for Application:

1. "*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*". (Romans 8:1) Some might say this verse gives Christians a pass on sin. What do you think?
  
2. Read Philippians 2:12-13. What does "*continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling*" mean? What about "*it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose*"?
  
3. We are all subject to the sinful nature of mankind. What gives you hope and assurance when you find that you have lost the battle with your sinful nature?

4. Why do you think that we, like Paul, continue to struggle against “*the enemy within*” even after having given our lives to Christ Jesus?
  
5. The situation Paul outlines in the Romans verses seems helpless. If even mature believers like Paul cannot escape sin, what hope do we have?
  
6. Have there been times in your life when it seemed as if God wasn't there for you? How did you cope?
  
7. How is the view of self-worth different between a believer and a non-believer?

**Resources:** Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic.

What's the Catch? - 10 day reading plan: <http://bible.com/r/309>

What's Your Golden Calf? Confronting Idolatry - 4 day reading plan: <http://bible.com/r/6Rx>

### **Question for Discussion:**

1. What are you reading in the Word this week?
  
2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship - prayers, presence, gifts, witness, and service?

### **Growth Challenge:**

What is that thing you do, that you do not want to do, yet haven't been able to stop? Every time you are faced with this temptation, ask the Holy Spirit to help you resist. Commit to doing this for several weeks, and then evaluate whether or not the Spirit is helping you overcome your temptation.



# NOTES

January 28, 2024

## Session 4 | What to Do When My Life Falls Apart?

***Before you begin*** this Growth Group session, read the summary found inside the cover of your Growth Group materials and watch this video.

Keep Believing – God is in Control

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPx1c5HWScQ&t=242s>



### Background:

*This will help set the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.*

In today's scripture, we learn that God caused the official in charge of Daniel to show him favor and compassion. This was necessary because Daniel asked the official to risk his life in order for Daniel to follow the Jewish dietary laws.

God watches over you too. No matter what, God is with you.

Knowing this should bring you immeasurable comfort. You are never alone. No matter the struggles you are facing, God is there for you. Isaiah 41:10 tells us:

*So do not fear, for I am with you;  
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you and help you;  
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

*Jesus is our spiritual healer*

In the New Testament we read how the Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside believers. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 3:16:

*Don't you know that you yourselves are  
God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells  
in your midst?*

The psalmist tells us that when we focus on God, we can face all our toughest struggles. We read in Psalm 16:8:

*I keep my eyes always on the LORD.  
With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.*

And we are comforted knowing that God is our spiritual healer. Our life may be falling apart, our spirit may be broken, and we may feel as if there is no one to turn to. Keep the faith! Focus on Jesus! In Psalm 147:3 we find:

*He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.*

*Keep the Faith!*

So humbly ask yourself, have you given your whole self to Jesus? Is your life His, and does His spirit live inside you and guide you?

**Scripture:** Daniel 1:1-15

*Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passage aloud.*

### **Sermon Reflection:**

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?
2. What challenged you about this sermon?
3. What do you think Jesus is trying to teach you through this sermon? How will this affect your daily life?

### **Questions from the Bible:**

1. In the Background that you read earlier in this lesson, there are four Bible passages. What do these passages have in common?
2. We read in Daniel Chapter 1 that Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and ordered some Israelites to be taken back to Babylon. What kind of people were taken and why?
3. In Daniel 1:8 why was Daniel concerned that the food and wine from the king's table would defile him? (Refer to Leviticus 11:4-20 and Proverbs 23:31-35).
4. In Daniel 1:1-15, we read that King Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem, and planned to train Daniel in the ways of the Chaldeans. Daniel was not willing to defile himself by deviating from the Jewish dietary laws. What does this tell you about Daniel's character and his relationship with God?

5. In Daniel 1:12-13, Daniel offered a challenge to their royal guard. What do you think gave Daniel the courage to take a stand during what had to be a very trying time?
  
6. When Daniel asked his captor to allow him to eat a diet of vegetables and water, his captor denied his request. Why? How was Daniel able to persuade his captor?
  
7. In James 4:2b-3 we read:  
*You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*  
What is your understanding of this passage?

### Questions for Application:

1. Daniel's decision and request in Daniel Chapter 1 sheds light on God's longing for us to live in obedience to him and strive to be holy. Why is obedience and holiness such a big deal to God?
  
2. What lessons can we learn from the account of Daniel being groomed to serve in the king's court? If you were in Daniel's situation, and were taken captive and told to do things that went against your Christian faith, how would you find the strength to stand up to your captors?
  
3. Has there been a time in your life when someone tried to pressure you into doing something you knew was wrong? Did you stand up for what you believed in? What did you learn from the situation?

4. Proverbs 3:5-6 reads:

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight.*

We are cautioned in this passage not to lean on our own understanding. When life is challenging for you, on whose understanding do you lean? Does your response correspond to the Proverbs' instructions?

5. How can a believer receive understanding from God? How have you received understanding from God?

6. What assurance do you receive when reading 1 Corinthians 3:16? How has this assurance impacted your struggles with "the enemy within"?

**Resources:** Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic

Standing Firm in Your Faith against Deception - 7 day devotional: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/23975-stand-firm-standing-firm-in-your-faith-against>

Choosing Each Day: God or Self? - 3 day reading plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/10791-choosing-each-day-god-or-self>

### Questions for Discussion:

1. What are you reading in the Word this week?

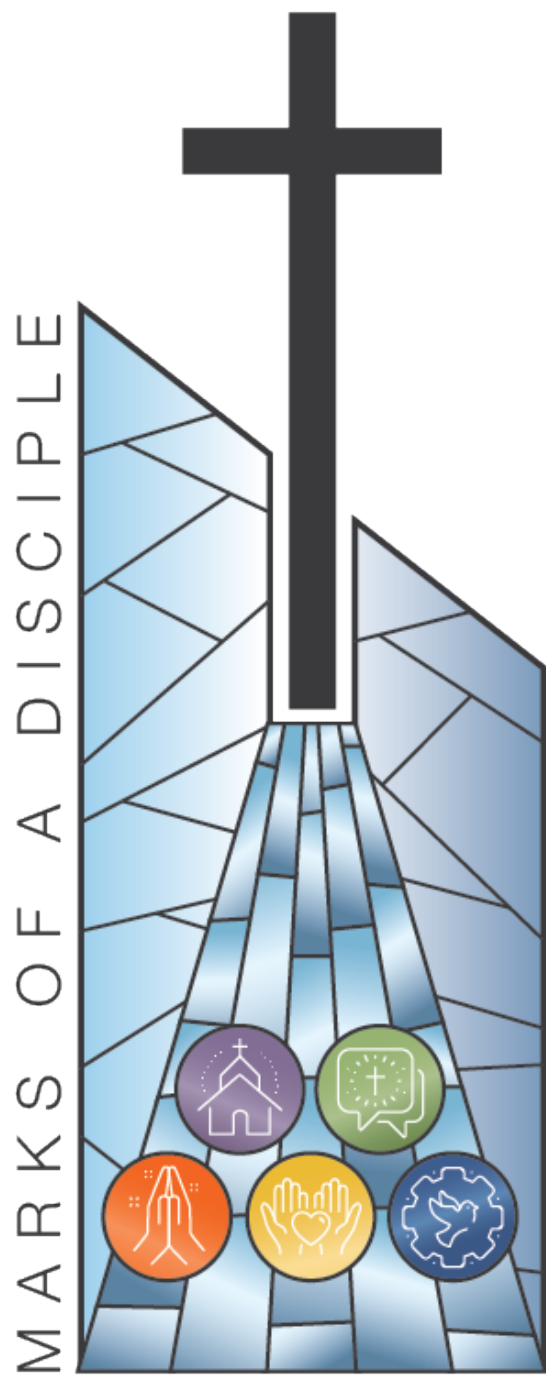
2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship - prayers, presence, gifts, witness, service?

## **Growth Challenge:**

Each day, we all ask ourselves “What am I going to do today?” For one week, ask yourself each morning “What am I going to do for God today?” and act upon it.

# **NOTES**





MARKS OF A DISCIPLE



[www.MarionMethodist.org](http://www.MarionMethodist.org)