

Begin with Silence and Prayer (5 Minutes)

Gather together as a community group in a comfortable setting; around a table, on a couch, a living room floor, etc. Have someone lead a quick prayer inviting the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Then spend a moment in silence together. Instruct your group,

“As you sit in silence, invite the Holy Spirit to quiet your heart and mind from distractions. Ask God if there is anything he would like to share with you during this time.”

Why silence? In our overcrowded, busy world, silence (even if for only a few minutes) cuts through the noise and allows space to calm your mind and your heart before God. Close this group time of silence with a moment of gratitude, thanking God for the opportunity to be together.

Review Last Week’s Practice (10 Minutes)

After spending a few minutes catching up on life events over the past week or two, talk through the following debrief questions focusing on the practice that was given last week.

How did it go?

What was the best part? What was the hardest part?

What did this particular practice show you about your relationship with God?

Re-emphasize that this is not something you can succeed or fail at, all you can do is show up. Be patient and give yourself grace. Resist the urge to be critical of yourself. Don’t rush to judgment, but rather resolve to simply take one small step forward. This may be different for many of us and that is okay.

Debrief the Teaching (10 minutes)

If you have a large group, it may be best to divide into small groups of three to four people. Spend a moment catching up on life and then talk through the following questions:

Did you listen to this week’s sermon? What did you think?

Name three different significant influences that have shaped your worldview.

Discuss this Overview (10-15 Minutes)

We all live with a narrative or worldview, and it is through this worldview that we make sense of the world around us. All of us, whether we are conscious or unconscious of it, have a worldview from which we operate our lives. Therefore, it is imperative for the follower of Jesus, to have their worldview shaped by the biblical narrative.

If you would have been alive during the first century, one of the first categories you would have placed Jesus in is that of a Rabbi or teacher. As a rabbi, Jesus’ ministry was filled with teaching, primarily on what he called the “Kingdom of God.” This teaching is central to understanding what it means to live the way of Jesus in our modern world. It is aimed at our minds and imaginations to refurbish our internal thinking around the availability of living into the Kingdom of God here and now.

This teaching offers a contrasting worldview to our world’s understanding of what is truth and what it means to be human. Therefore our task is to intentionally come under the direction and teaching of Jesus to “renew our minds,” in the words of the Apostle Paul. This renewing offers a new understanding of our present life and begins us on the path of spiritual formation.

Open the Bible Together (10-15 Minutes)

Have someone read Romans 12:1-2 out loud for the group.

In this text, Jesus uses the metaphor of branches attached to a vine, and it is through this connection to the vine that the branches are able to produce fruit. The metaphor has two particular moments; the gardener pruning the branches (15.1) and the branches and the vine remaining and abiding in one another. Let's look at each moment in turn.

These short verses offer a brief but comprehensive understanding of the transformation process. It is easy to read these words and think of them as merely great advice, but few read these words and implement them in our lives. Paul's words were meant to be taken seriously.

The opening verse speaks to the enormity of the calling in our discipleship; it requires every part of us through the offering of our bodies as a "living sacrifice." But it is in offering all of who we are as a living sacrifice that we can truly and properly worship.

What does this type of sacrifice look like?

Have you ever "offered your body as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God?" Explain your answer.

Verse two offers a contrast between the work of the world in forming who we are and the intentional process of transformation by the renewing of our minds. We are constantly bombarded with messages, stories, and visions of life that our world is propagating as the ultimate truth. To counter the influence of this imposing worldview,

What is the difference mentioned in verse two between being conformed and being transformed?

The path to transformation, Paul argues, is the renewal of our minds. Our minds are filled with feelings, images, stories, ideas, habits, memories, and all sorts of ways of making sense of our world. All of us have these embedded into our minds, and not all of them are positive, many can be harmful and enslaving to ways less than what God has for us.

Describe a time in your life when you broke free from destructive and enslaving thoughts through the renewing of your mind.

What is one practical step you can take in renewing your mind this week?

This could be memorizing Scripture to counter negative thought patterns, or it could mean committing to pray with and for another member of your community group this week. Maybe it is fasting from social media or Netflix for a week.

Something to Practice Individually this Week - Habit Audit (5-10 Minutes)

Below is a practice that everyone in your group can try out this coming week. Spend a few minutes reading this out loud with the group and discuss any questions that may arise.

One of the central ways in which we counter false worldviews in our world is through immersing ourselves in the biblical narrative. The practice this week has been used for centuries and is a method of saturating our minds in Scripture. Lectio Divina (literally divine reading) is a practice of becoming prayerfully immersed in the Scriptures. The practice was first introduced by St. Gregory of Nyssa in the 4th century. In Lectio Divina, a text of the reader's choosing is read prayerfully four different times, providing an opportunity to think deeply and thoughtfully through the text. The goal is to meet God in the text. Below are detailed instructions as to how to do this practice. The goal is not perfection in form, but rather these steps function as a way of guiding one into a time of communion with God.

Step #1 - Scripture

Any passage of Scripture can be utilized for the practice of Lectio Divina. Ideally, the text is of manageable length (5-10 verses), but it can be longer. Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

- Psalm 23
- Psalm 100
- John 15:1-17
- Romans 2

Step #2 - Prepare in Prayer

Turn your phone off and leave it in another room. Situate yourself in a comfortable and quiet place. Spend a few minutes in silence, allowing the quiet to still your heart and your mind. Settle into the time and spend a moment in gratitude for God's presence and the opportunity to be with him. Lastly, invite God to guide your time with him over the next few minutes.

Step #3 - Read

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

Step #4 - Reflect

After completing the passage, return to the beginning and read it again. On your second journey through the text, allow the text to connect with you personally. Which words or phrases assume a particular resonance with your heart, your season of life, or your current experience at this moment in time. Pose the following questions to yourself: Ask God why these particular words or phrases stood out during your readings of the text?

Spend a few moments connecting these words or phrases to your current moment of life, asking God for guidance.

Step #5 - Respond

Read the entire text again. Remember to read slowly and methodically, allowing God to highlight particular phrases or words. Spend a few minutes talking with God about these words or phrases. Use the following questions to aid your reflection.

What do I need to know, or be, or do in light of the text? What does this mean for my life today?

Dialogue with God about your experience of reading this passage.

Step #6 - Rest

Read the text slowly and prayerfully one more time. Pause to sit in God's presence before fleeing from the moment. You might express wonder, awe, gratitude, or praise through words, or you might allow yourself to feel and experience these things quietly before God.

Close in Prayer (5 Minutes)

Have someone close out your time in prayer. Thank God for the time together, and pray for each other's upcoming week.