



GROWING
DISCIPLES

CHRISTIAN CORE
TO THE



INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

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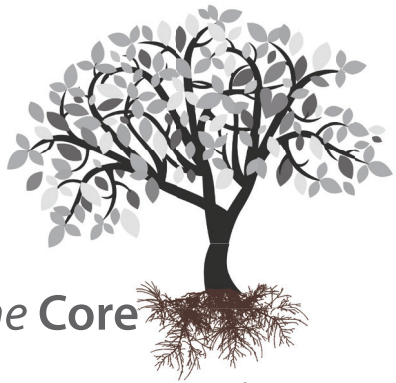
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Christian to the Core

40 Days of Going
Deeper with God



Christian to the Core

40 Days of Going Deeper with God

Introduction

C. S. Lewis once said,

“If Christianity is not true, it is not important. If it is true, it is all-important. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important.”

I submit to you that the great sin of the modern age may be our tendency to try to make Christianity “moderately important.” God desires that you develop deep roots, grow strong, and experience his full power and presence. A God-shaped life is illustrated in the Bible as a flourishing tree planted by God through the work of his hands. Those who trust in God and make him their confidence can be like a tree planted by a stream of water, whose leaves are always green and always bear fruit.

The following devotionals will help you go deeper with God and grow in your love for others. Our prayer is that you discover how to walk more closely with Christ, letting His Spirit guide and empower you on a daily basis. As you grow, may the strength you find help others grow into spiritual maturity as well.

We hope you are blessed, encouraged, and challenged by these words of hope and inspiration. We also hope you grow spiritually as you journey into a deeper walk with Jesus.

The Christian to the Core Team

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Christian to the Core

40-Day Devotional

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Week • One

Day 1 - Intimacy with God

Core Value: God looks for consecrated men and women who live life from an intimate relationship with God.

The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness. — Jeremiah 31:3

As a child, I often remember being told, "you can have as much of God as you want." As I have aged both in years and spiritual maturity, I am convinced behind the truth of that statement. It does not mean a finite human being can ever comprehend God or exhaust the depths of his love, but it does mean we can try.

Jeremiah penned the Scripture above to remind the people of God that we are loved and to declare that in an astounding turn of events, God gives us the ability to love him back. In fact, that is why we were created. Our sole purpose in this world is to love and worship God. We can have as much of God as we want.

St. Augustine said, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." God created us for an intimate relationship with himself; it is why we exist. Life, sadly, has a way of distracting us from this truth like a con-artist distracts with a street performance while their accomplice pickpockets. We leave amused, but ultimately, we have been deceived.

Life will seek to distract you, but dedicating time, energy, and resources to cultivate an intimate relationship with God will set apart those that want to grow from those that are complacent. Men and women who desire to live Christian to the Core will make an intimate relationship with God their first priority; they will have as much of God as they can get.

Week • One

Day 2 - Intimacy with God

Core Value: God looks for consecrated men and women who live life from an intimate relationship with God.

Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. — James 4:8

One of the coolest experiences I have had was four years ago on a mission trip to Mozambique. We had an afternoon where some of the locals took us in boats about a half-mile out into the Indian Ocean where we went snorkeling. We found a small group of whale sharks. They are among the largest animals in the world - enormous, beautiful fish the size of a car, swimming about 20 feet below the surface. They were oblivious to us swimming right above them as they gracefully cut through the water.

One of the funny memories of that experience was a friend with me who had the hardest time locating the sharks. Every time we'd shout "over here!" the sharks would be gone by the time he got there. I really think they were playing a game with him!

There are people who think that's how God is with them. "He must be hiding from me because I don't feel /hear/experience him like others." Let me tell you, it's just not true! God wants to be close to you! But to be close to him you need to do two things: (1) Go to where he is and, (2) go deeper. To go to where he is you need to make sure you find yourself where he said he would be. That is what worship is. God said he would "inhabit the praises of his people." (Psalm 22:3) Second, go deeper. Don't settle for superficial Christianity - Go Deep! Seek him with all your heart, put away impure thoughts and actions, and you'll discover God is as close to you as your skin.

Being Christian to the Core is about discovering the presence of God in a new way, experiencing his closeness and being transformed by his love. Let's begin a season where we commit to being where God is, then going deeper than we have ever been before. Let's be Christians to the Core!

Week • One

Day 3 - Intimacy with God

Core Value: God looks for consecrated men and women who live life from an intimate relationship with God.

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness— in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time. - Titus 1:1-2

We live in the era of instant messages and tweets. We abbreviate almost everything, and express our emotions with symbols. Indeed, it is a brave new world when it comes to communication. Judging by the popularity of text messaging and social networks, hundreds of millions of people find this new world to be efficient and effective.

Were one living and in say, 1912, instead of 2012, one would have communicated in a radically different way, of course. Letter writing was the medium of choice for hundreds (and even thousands) of years, mostly because it was the only medium. That era was marked with expressive, intricate penmanship and eloquent, thoughtful word smiting.

Much of what we know about the Apostle Paul we know because he was a letter-writer. The New Testament is filled with his letters, to churches and to individuals. In this letter to Titus, we learn in the first verse that Paul considers himself to be a servant and an apostle of Jesus. Paul's instructions on how Titus can order his life in a similar fashion make up most of this letter.

A theme that emerges in his letter to Titus, and really in all of Paul's letters, is how close he feels to his master, Jesus Christ. He had an

intimate relationship with Jesus, born of a dramatic conversion experience and nurtured through years of proclamation, witness, and service.

If you were to write full-length letters (instead of 140-character tweets), what themes would emerge in those letters? Would it be obvious – as it is with Paul – that you have an intimate relationship with Jesus? What does your communication with others, whether it is done with a few clicks on a keyboard or a calligraphy pen, say about your spiritual walk?

Day 4 - Intimacy with God

Core Value: God looks for consecrated men and women who live life from an intimate relationship with God.

Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the spirit and in truth. — John 4:23-24

Responding to the Samaritan woman's question about where she had to worship, Jesus explains that, while the Jews had it "technically" right regarding worship, the time had come for a new revelation; a new way to worship God that did not require going to a certain place or obeying a certain ritual. Jesus was introducing an intimate, personal relationship with the God who, up to that time, had only been known from afar.

This was a concept not only foreign to God-fearing Jews, but was also considered blasphemy. Jesus was doing away with ritual and formality and bringing God onto a level that was now accessible to anyone who desired to know Him. No longer would God be far away and someone to be feared, but now he would be seen as a Father, loving and available. That true worship now had less to do with place or style, but about the attitude of their hearts.

God desires sincerity and wants our whole heart, not just pieces of it that we feel like surrendering. He is not concerned about our style of worship. He wants every part of us, good and bad, and has gone to great lengths to be intimate with us.

Having an intimate relationship with God the Father begins with confessing our faith in Christ. Through Christ, our sins are forgiven

and we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through this gift, we have access to a personal relationship with the One who created us and knows everything about us.

We can bring our deep longings, hurts, and fears to Him because He loves us so deeply. As we get to know our heavenly Father and understand who he is, we are drawn to worship Him with our attention and praise. As we spend time with Him, we learn to hear His voice. Not a voice communicated with words, but with communication that transcends words. As this happens, we are changed. We begin to look less like our human selves, full of selfish need and desires, and more like Christ - the goal of our lives.

Day 5 - Intimacy with God

Core Value: God looks for consecrated men and women who live life from an intimate relationship with God.

The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them are righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward. — Psalm 19:7-11

“Majoring in the Minors.” This is something my dad always used to say. When I was young I never really understand what he meant. As a child, these words were uttered when I was whining about something my brother or my sister had done to me. It was his way of saying, “let it go.”

You see, Dad was an only child. There were three of us kids in our house – very close together. We fought ALL the time. As a mom now I can finally see that. My mom, the oldest of four, never said much about the arguing unless one of us drew blood. Dad had a different perspective.

Coming from a continual longing for a brother or a sister, he could not understand how we could be that mean and ugly to each other. He had an idyllic perception of a sibling relationship. He craved the close bond to another person in the same place as he. Because he never had that, he didn’t understand with a close, intimate relationship comes feelings – not just happy ones.

Marrying my mom and having children changed that for him. So did his continuous walk with the Lord. Dad grew to understand that when you really love someone, it is okay to let him or her see all of you. He grew to understand that it was okay to get mad and get over it. When Dad would say, "Don't major in the minors," he was telling me "this too shall pass." Focus on the relationship. My siblings and I are better for it today.

God longs for us to come close to him with our whole self. Even the parts we want to hide. Be real, and see what God can do in you. As you seek to be Christian to the Core, ask yourself...

What is keeping me from coming closer to God?
What can I do to keep the relationship real?

Week • Two

Day 6 - Passion for the Harvest

Core Value: God looks for men and women who share a passion for those without Christ. Jesus came to “seek and to save that which was lost.” God desires that everyone be reached with the life-transforming power of the Gospel.

*But if I say I'll never mention the LORD or speak in his name,
his word burns in my heart like a fire. It's like a fire in my
bones! I am worn out trying to hold it in! I can't do it!*
— Jeremiah 20:9

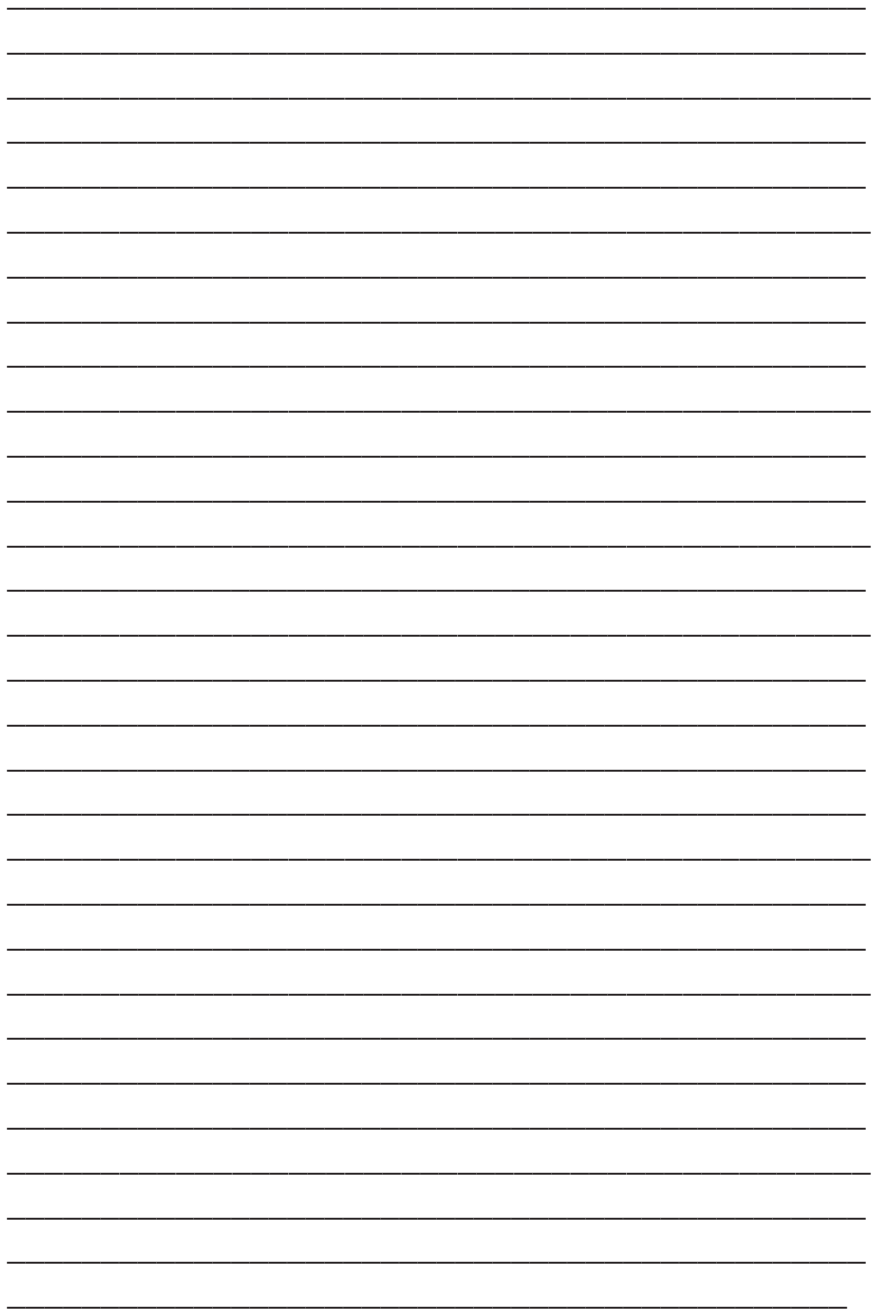
My mom called it the “can’t help its.” When referring to my hyperactivity she would say, “he can’t help it, that’s just the way he is.” I had this inner energy as a kid that allowed me to go forever. What some may have considered a negative character in my personality God has directed and used for his glory. That energy seems to have shaped my adult life, though now the passion is directed toward pleasing God instead of self.

There are so many people that are hurting, lacking joy, and have no purpose in life because they don’t know Jesus. God wants to give you the “can’t help its.” He wants you filled with his love that nothing stops you from sharing Jesus with others.

People may laugh at you, mock you, or even hate you for your Jesus stance but let me encourage you to not be silent. Let the passion for the harvest burn within you.

As you seek to be Christian to the Core, ask God to direct you toward individuals that need to hear his Good News.

Thank God for the fire that burns within you.



Day 7 - Passion for the Harvest

Core Value: God looks for men and women who share a passion for those without Christ. Jesus came to “seek and to save that which was lost.” God desires that everyone be reached with the life-transforming power of the Gospel.

Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. — Romans 10:1-4

Valentine's is a day of passion. Let the numbers speak for themselves...*(Source: www.theromantic.com/valentinesday/trivia.htm)*

- 110 million roses, the majority red, will be sold and delivered within a three-day time period of Valentine's Day.
- About one billion Valentine's cards are exchanged each year, the largest seasonal card-sending occasion of the year, next to Christmas. 70% of those celebrating the holiday give a card.
- Teachers receive the most Valentine's cards, followed by children, mothers, wives, and sweethearts. Children, ages six to ten, exchange more than 650 million Valentine's cards.
- Valentine's Day is big business. Consumers will spend an average of \$77.43 on Valentine's Day gifts this year. E-commerce retailers expect to rack up about \$650 million in sales of food, candy, flowers, and other Valentine's Day gifts.

Now that is passion... all in the name of love.

In Romans 10, Paul was passionate about the Jewish people coming to know salvation through Christ. The Jews were passionate people for God by living right and doing good, but one thing was missing – Christ. So many can be passionate about many things, even good things like Valentine’s Day, but miss the true passion that will bring fulfillment, a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

How do we show our passionate love for Christ? Do the numbers speak for themselves by how we invest our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness? As a church, we have an amazing history, but remember, today, we are the church. Is that passion for the harvest alive in our hearts and lives? Are we fulfilling the mission of the church printed on our worship bulletins?

I pray that on Valentine’s Day, we celebrate love with passion. Love for God, our spouses, our family, our friends, and co-workers, but particularly those who don’t know Christ as their Lord and Savior. As you seek to be Christian to the Core, may you be a person with a passion for the harvest.

Day 8 - Passion for the Harvest

Core Value: God looks for men and women who share a passion for those without Christ. Jesus came to “seek and to save that which was lost.” God desires that everyone be reached with the life-transforming power of the Gospel.

But how are they to 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!’ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. — Romans 10:14-17 (ESV)

I’m sure you’ve heard the parables of the lost things found in Luke 15: lost coins, lost sheep, and even lost sons. Are you familiar with the story of Zacchaeus? He was the little tax collector perched up in the tree. Jesus called him down and had dinner with him. He was lost, since he did not yet know Jesus. Throughout the gospels Jesus shows a passion for the lost, the outcasts, and those who have lost hope. In the story of Zacchaeus, Jesus tells his listeners what his mission is: “to seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:10, ESV) As Christians, our goal should be to emulate or “copy” Jesus. He had a passion for the lost, for those who did not know him.

So once we see the lost people, what should we do next? A “passion for those without Christ” is not enough. We must put actions to our passion. We must follow Jesus’ example of reaching out to the lost.

How does God reach the lost? Of course, God can use stones to tell about Him (Luke 19:40), but that rarely happens. God depends on his people to tell others about him. So what is our job? We are to preach, whether through words or through our actions.

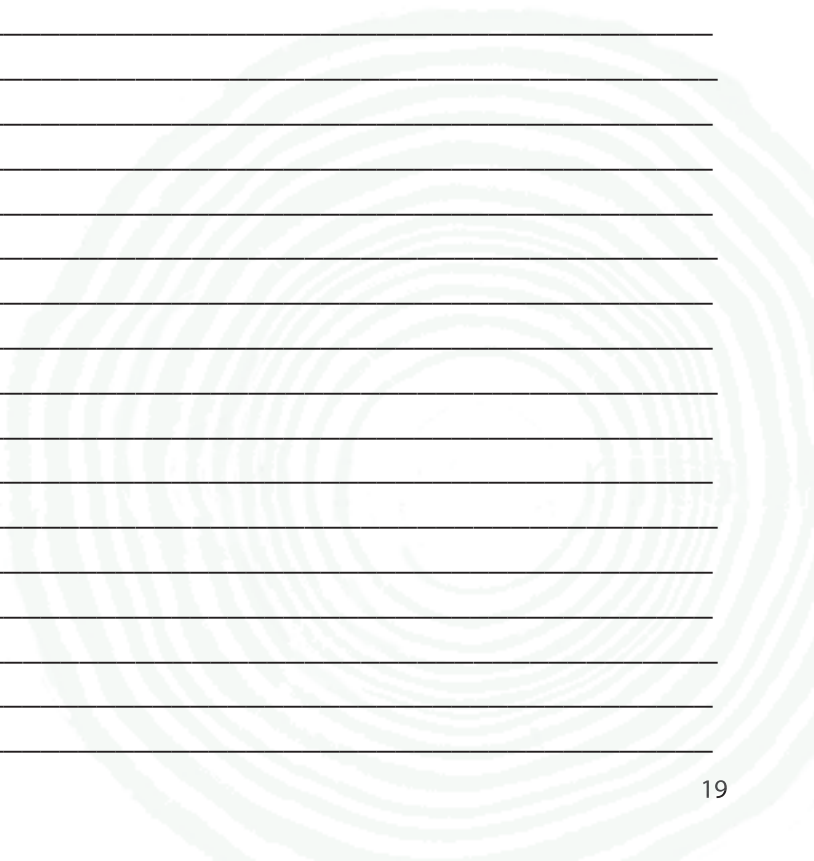
It's hard to preach when we are silent about our faith in God. What we do and speak says a lot about who we are and whom we follow. Think about how you preach in your lifestyle. Do your leisure activities speak to your faith in God? If a person saw you at one of your favorite hot spots, would they recognize you as a Christian? Do you do the things that Jesus did? Do you make time for Bible reading and prayer? Remember the old saying, "Actions speak louder than words?" Although actions speak loudly, I find that actions and words go hand in hand.

As you seek to be Christian to the Core, here are some questions to consider about your words:

- What topics surround the water cooler at work?
- Do you spend more time talking about your favorite sports teams or what God is doing in your life?
- Do you have difficulty uttering the words "church," "Jesus," or "Christian"?

I hope your "passion for those without Christ" is great. As a result of your passion, I hope that you preach to the lost. If you have done a good job preaching, then keep it up. If you've not done a great job at preaching, forgive yourself and move on. I pray that today you will begin to preach to others through your actions and your words. In this way you help to expand the Kingdom of God.

A series of horizontal lines for writing, consisting of 23 evenly spaced lines.



Week • Two

Day 9 - Passion for the Harvest

Core Value: God looks for men and women who share a passion for those without Christ. Jesus came to “seek and to save that which was lost.” God desires that everyone be reached with the life-transforming power of the Gospel.

Jesus said to him, today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. — Luke 19:9-10

When you think of the lost, hurting and lonely, what do you see? Maybe the rugged man you passed on the median or the commercial of a bloated child with flies on her face. They seem so distant from our lifestyles; they seem untouchable. We hear the horrible circumstances some people have to live with on a daily basis and react, “That doesn’t happen here,” or, “Well, that’s the consequences of their choices.” Like Zacchaeus in Luke 19, these people have been shunned and abandoned by society.

Let us not be so quick to fling judgment and forget our own justification in Jesus.

Before you were intimate with God and allowed Christ to cleanse you of your sins, you were as good as dead—a sinner, an empty shell—lonely, without purpose—lost, without hope—hurting. We don’t remember our blemished past with any intention of returning. However, its only by remembering what Jesus saved us from that we can have compassion on those who are not yet saved. Its then that we can detach from our busy lives and throw out arms out to embrace the lost so that they might know that same love Jesus had for them when His arms were open on the cross.

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life (John 8:12). When I think of Jesus as the Light, I like to imagine Him as a roaring fire. How powerful to believe in that light and warmth and power burning inside you! Just as fire does, Jesus purifies us. It is not a fast, easy or painless process, and he does not throw himself onto us. This is a kind of intimacy that gets you out of your comfort zone. But when you come out on the other end, you will shine golden bright like the Son.

As you seek to be Christian to the Core, remember that is what we need to share with people. How special that we get the opportunity to participate with God in shining his glory into a world lost in darkness. There are people all around you who need Him as much as you did and do: on the street, in your school or office, even in your own home. Who's day will you brighten today?

Day 10 - Passion for the Harvest

Core Value: God looks for men and women who share a passion for those without Christ. Jesus came to “seek and to save that which was lost.” God desires that everyone be reached with the life-transforming power of the Gospel.

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.
— 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

What does “not living for themselves” look like, practically speaking? Consider this story:

A little boy was told by his doctor that he could actually save his sister's life by giving her some blood. The six-year-old girl was near death, a victim of disease from which the boy had made a marvelous recovery two years earlier. Her only chance for restoration was a blood transfusion from someone who had previously conquered the illness. Since the two children had the same rare blood type, the boy was the ideal donor.

“Johnny, would you like to give your blood for Mary?” the doctor asked. The boy hesitated. His lower lip started to tremble. Then he smiled and said, “Sure, Doc. I'll give my blood for my sister.” Soon the two children were wheeled into the operating room—Mary, pale and thin, and Johnny, robust and the picture of health. Neither spoke, but when their eyes met, Johnny grinned.

As his blood siphoned into Mary's veins, one could almost see new life come into her tired body. The ordeal was almost over when Johnny's brave voice broke the silence, “Say, Doc, when do I die?”

It was only then that the doctor realized what the moment of hesitation, the trembling of the lip, had meant earlier. Little Johnny actually thought that in giving his blood to his sister he was giving up his life! In that brief moment, he had made his great decision!

Certainly that is an example of living for others that can inspire us. So, too, can Jesus' decision to pay the price for our sins and take our place on the cross. As you seek to be Christian to the Core, remember living for others can mean something dramatic and inspiring, but it can also mean to simply put others' needs, hopes, and desires before your own. The more we do, the more passionate we become for a lost and broken world.

Week • Three

Day 11 - A Visionary Life

Core Value: God looks for men and women who discover God's vision for their lives, set goals, mobilize people and overcome obstacles in order to see God's purposes achieved.

When Esther's servant girls and her other servants told her what Mordecai was doing, she became very upset and sent Mordecai some clothes to wear in place of the sackcloth. But he refused to take them. Esther had a servant named Hathach, who had been given to her by the king. So she called him in and said, "Find out what's wrong with Mordecai and why he's acting this way." Hathach went to Mordecai in the city square in front of the palace gate, and Mordecai told him everything that had happened. He also told him how much money Haman had promised to add to the king's treasury, if all the Jews were killed.

Mordecai gave Hathach a copy of the orders for the murder of the Jews and told him that these had been read in Susa. He said, "Show this to Esther and explain what it means. Ask her to go to the king and beg him to have pity on her people, the Jews!" Hathach went back to Esther and told her what Mordecai had said. She answered, "Tell Mordecai there is a law about going in to see the king, and all his officials and his people know about this law. Anyone who goes in to see the king without being invited by him will be put to death. The only way that anyone can be saved is for the king to hold out the gold scepter to that person. And it's been thirty days since he has asked for me." Esther 4:4-11 (CEV).

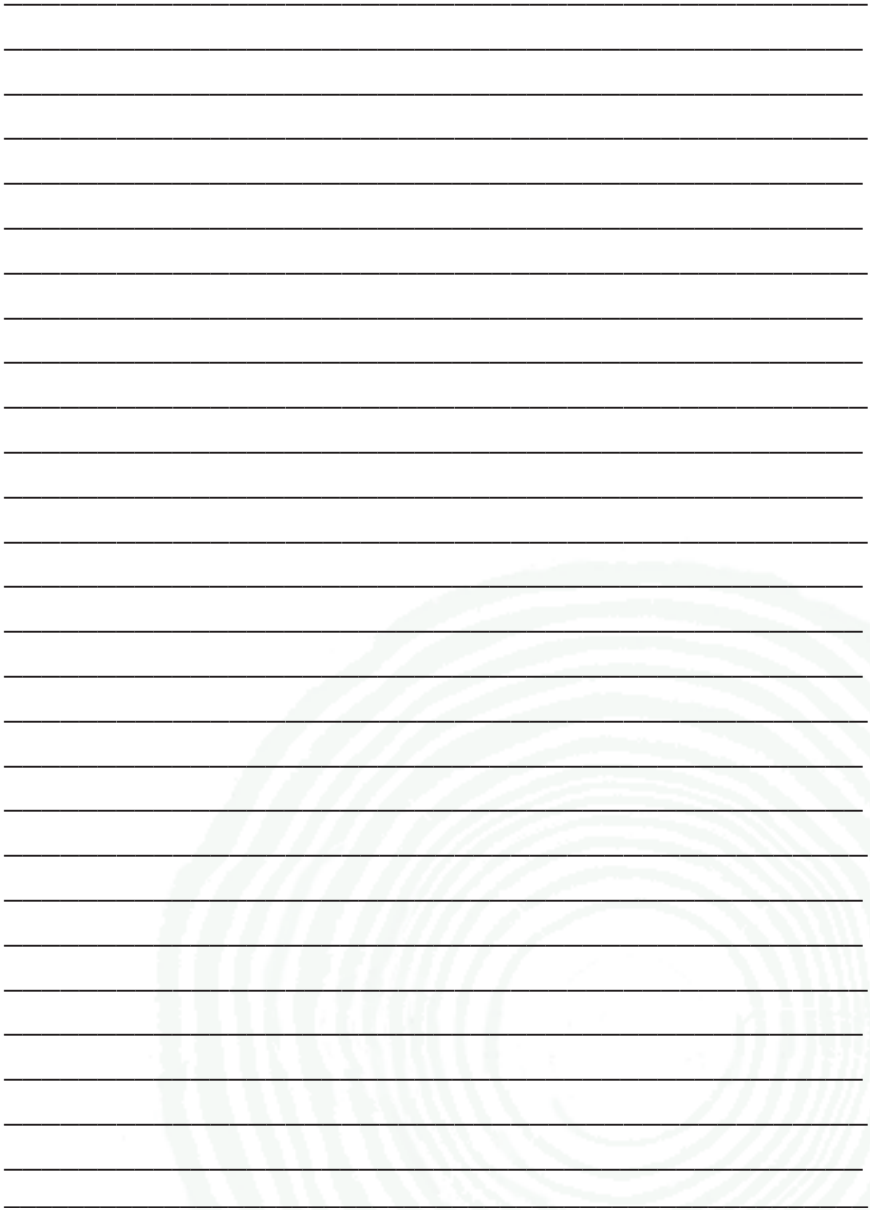
I love this story of Esther, a Jewish woman who was selected by the Persian King Ahasuerus to be his wife. He had banished his former wife and chose Esther through a contest. However, the king did not know she was a Jew. There was a law created that allowed the Jews to be murdered. When Esther's uncle, Mordecai,

learned of the new law, he spoke with Esther about asking the king to reconsider. The king loved her, but she did not have the authority to enter into the king's chambers and talk with him at any time she pleased. Mordecai told her that God had allowed her to become the queen to help protect her people.

Though conflicted with the thought of perishing by the hand of the king or by the new law in place, she decided to let the king know she was a Jew and that his new law would require that she be killed. Long story short, Queen Esther saved her people.

Esther ended up being a heroine. Initially she shrugged off her duty to save the Jews by saying she could not approach the King, her husband, without an invitation because she could be killed. After much thought, prayer, and planning, she eventually did get her message across to the King and all was saved.

As you seek to be Christian to the Core, have you ever felt like you couldn't have that all-important conversation with someone? Have you ever felt like there was no way you could share God's Word with someone because it was "churchy" or even embarrassing? Do you have goals and dreams that mean the world to you but just haven't taken the time to achieve them? I submit that with prayer, planning, and lots of courage, you can get it done. You can sit down and confidently have a conversation with that someone you have been meaning to have. And you can share God's Word with that person who needs Jesus more than you will ever know. Finally, go achieve the dreams that God has put on your mind and in your heart. Just like Esther, you can do it.



Week • Three

Day 12 - A Visionary Life

Core Value: God looks for men and women who discover God's vision for their lives, set goals, mobilize people and overcome obstacles in order to see God's purposes achieved.

Then the LORD told me: "I will give you my message in the form of a vision. Write it clearly enough to be read at a glance." — Habakkuk 2:2 (CEV)

God speaks. He speaks in many forms, including visions and those things we call "coincidences."

If you have spent time in Bible study, you probably realize there are no such things as "coincidences." God weaves events, people, and His plans together to make his visions happen. Go with it. Sometimes inexplicable things happen in our life and we wonder what in the world is happening through and in our lives. I know because I have been there. I have been the one crying "Why me, Lord?" and wondering how the next few years of my life will unfold. However, I continued going to church. I continued to actively listen to sermons and execute each premise. I also started to study and internalize the Bible. I started to become Christian to the Core. Guess what? I stepped out of my challenges, victorious and full of fervor for Jesus. Do you know what else? My life didn't unfold the way I planned—it unfolded the way Jesus planned, and that is all right with me!

As you seek to be Christian to the Core, continue to study God's Word, pray, and worship with other believers. You will begin to receive the Lord's message more clearly. Believe!

Week • Three

Day 13 - A Visionary Life

Core Value: God looks for men and women who discover God's vision for their lives, set goals, mobilize people and overcome obstacles in order to see God's purposes achieved.

During Jehoiachin's reign, the officers of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came up against Jerusalem and besieged it. Nebuchadnezzar himself arrived at the city during the siege. Then King Jehoiachin, along with the queen mother, his advisers, his commanders, and his officials, surrendered to the Babylonians.

In the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, he took Jehoiachin prisoner. As the LORD had said beforehand, Nebuchadnezzar carried away all the treasures from the LORD's Temple and the royal palace. He stripped away all the gold objects that King Solomon of Israel had placed in the Temple. King Nebuchadnezzar took all of Jerusalem captive, including all the commanders and the best of the soldiers, craftsmen, and artisans—10,000 in all. Only the poorest people were left in the land.

Nebuchadnezzar led King Jehoiachin away as a captive to Babylon, along with the queen mother, his wives and officials, and all Jerusalem's elite. He also exiled 7,000 of the best troops and 1,000 craftsmen and artisans, all of whom were strong and fit for war. — 2 Kings 24:10-16

We all experience situations that make us so mad we can't see straight. We all experience situations that upset us so much we cry until the tears come no more. We all experience situations that just aren't fair. Finally, we all experience situations that make us want to drop our Jesus like a hot potato. But you better not drop Jesus because if you are not careful, He may have to teach you and show you that only HE is your beginning and your end.

Week • Three

Day 14 - A Visionary Life

Core Value: God looks for men and women who discover God's vision for their lives, set goals, mobilize people and overcome obstacles in order to see God's purposes achieved.

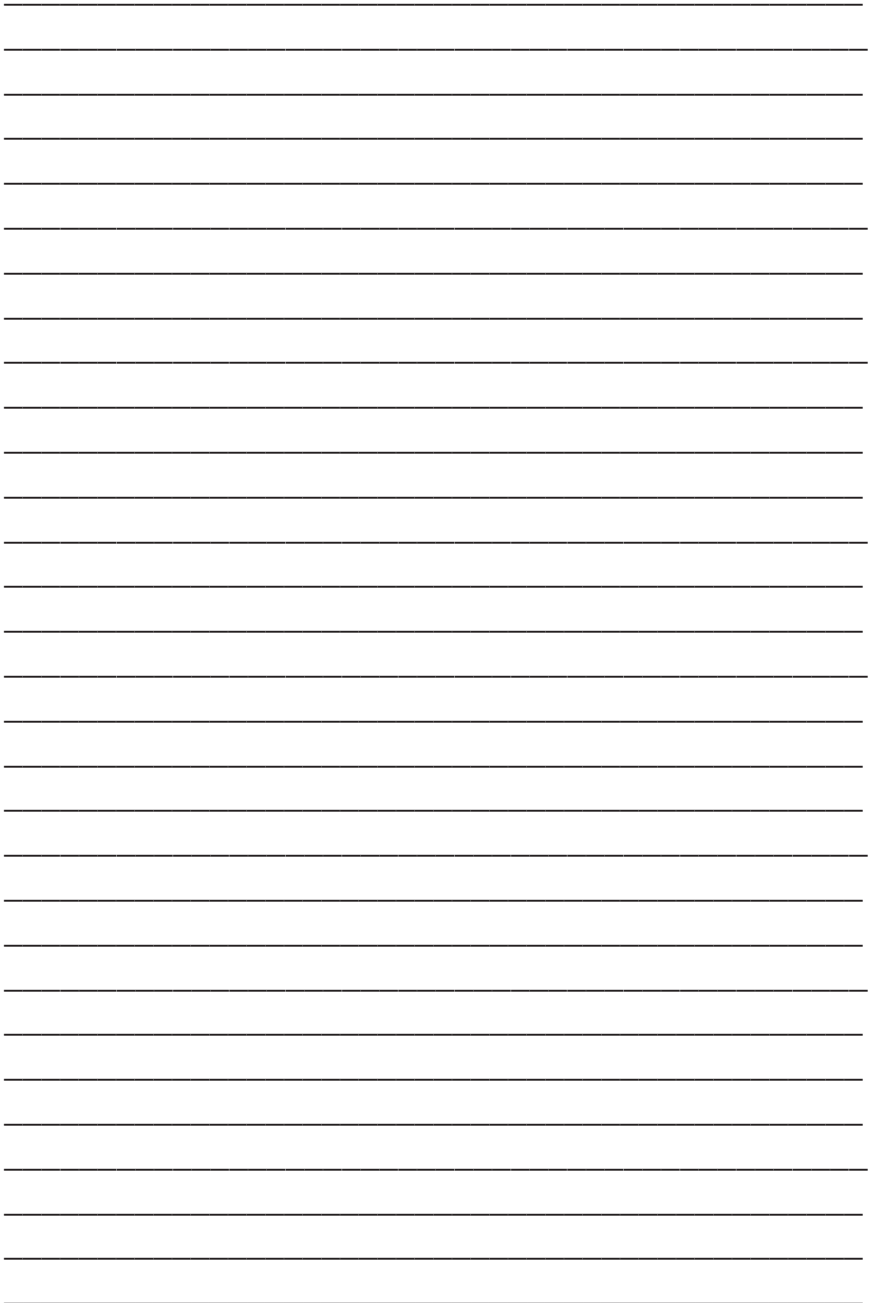
For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.

—Isaiah 43:19 (NLT)

I deeply respect pioneers and trailblazers. As a matter of fact, one of my personal life goals is to read carefully selected biographies and autobiographies of people I admire. I love learning about individuals who overcome real and/or perceived adversities and plow through their trials and tribulations—there is no stopping them. I am also a firm believer that we can all be that person who jumps over obstacles and triumphs.

It is always exciting when we start a new project or begin a new journey. We all want to “create rivers in the dry wasteland,” and we can. But we must pray. Through prayer we will discover God's vision for our lives, which in turn will enable us to set goals, mobilize our circle of family and friends, and overcome obstacles.

This is not easy. However, with intense faith and the will to overcome, we can be who God wants us to be. We can be the servants God expects us to be and passionately pass on the Good News. Age, past circumstances, and financial capacity are not the criteria to begin your journey of spiritual growth. As you grow in God's Word, he will take care of you and fulfill your needs. As you seek to be Christian to the Core, remember this quote: “He may not come when you want him, but he'll be there right on time.”



Week • Three

Day 15 - A Visionary Life

Core Value: God looks for men and women who discover God's vision for their lives, set goals, mobilize people and overcome obstacles in order to see God's purposes achieved.

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. — Joel 2:28 (TNIV)

The day Jesus comes back to us is surely going to be joyful day! Just imagine, all who are weak will be strong and all those who cannot walk will jump up and walk towards him. Those who cannot speak will talk joyfully about Jesus, and those who are hearing-impaired will listen to our Savior's voice and rejoice.

Simply put, God has given us structure and vision for our lives. He has made it no secret that our job is to go out and spread God's Word and harvest in the mission fields. Our job is to go out and connect hearts to Christ.

In return for executing his vision, Jesus promises that life as we know it will cease, and a new and amazing life will begin! Joel 2:28 tells us that he will pour out his Spirit on all people—we just have to walk out in faith and follow him.

Even when times get rough, tough, and overwhelming, we must hold on to our faith, pray, and marinate in God's Word everyday. Not every now and then, but everyday. Continue to seek to be Christian to the Core.

A blank sheet of lined paper with horizontal ruling lines.

Week • Four

Day 16 - Relevant Evangelism

Core Value: God looks for men and women who live and share the Good News of Jesus Christ with cultural relevance, sensitivity, and power so that the eternal truth of the Gospel will be understood and received in every culture of the world.

Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go 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 obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. — Matthew 28:18-20

Where I live, running trails abound. I often see runners with the Nike emblem on their hats or athletic clothing. Just for fun I "googled" the slogan "Just Do It" to see what it means. Jolie Solomon, in a Newsweek article dated March 30, 1998, said, "According to Nike company lore, one of the most famous and easily recognized slogans in advertising history was coined at a 1998 meeting of Nike's ad agency Wieden and Kennedy and a group of Nike employees. Dan Weiden, speaking admiringly of Nike's can-do attitude said, 'You Nike guys, you just do it.' The rest, as they say is (advertising) history."

In these verses, Jesus is clearly giving us a command to go and make disciples. Jesus also lets us know that he will be with us when we go out and talk to people about Christ. We will never be alone! We probably won't make advertising history, but we can help change the history of the world with each person we lead to Christ. So...let's just do it!

As you seek to be Christian to the Core, will you take a chance and "just do it?"

Lined writing area consisting of multiple horizontal lines for text entry.

Week • Four

Day 17 - Relevant Evangelism

Core Value: God looks for men and women who live and share the Good News of Jesus Christ with cultural relevance, sensitivity, and power so that the eternal truth of the Gospel will be understood and received in every culture of the world.

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. — 1 Peter 3:15

For a short period of time in what seems like a former life, I worked as a barista at Starbucks. I became rather adept at making a grande nonfat with whip peppermint mocha, but learning how to mix espresso, milk, and flavors together was not the reason I wore the green apron. I did it because it gave me the opportunity to interact with people—generally young people—who might not enter the door of a church.

After I got to know them and established a bit of trust, I would eventually look for a good time and place to ask them this simple question: “How can I pray for you?” I sincerely wanted to know the joys and challenges that might—in their estimation—be worthy of prayer. But I believe that question served another purpose: it gave me an opportunity to offer the hope I have in a non-threatening way. I found that many people were more than willing to discuss matters of faith once they knew I respected them and was genuinely interested in what made them tick.

As you seek to be Christian to the Core, ask yourself ...

- **How intentional am I with sharing my faith with people who might not enter the door of a church?**
- **Are you prepared to give the reason for the hope you have?**

Week • Four

Day 18 - Relevant Evangelism

Core Value: God looks for men and women who live and share the Good News of Jesus Christ with cultural relevance, sensitivity, and power so that the eternal truth of the Gospel will be understood and received in every culture of the world.

Read Acts Chapter 26

When Paul was brought before King Agrippa, he boldly told the story of how he met the risen Jesus on the Damascus road and how the event changed his life. However, part of that story included a much darker side of Paul's life: the times he "put many of the saints in prison." (Read v. 9-11) We all have a story to tell about our lives before Jesus, and then our lives since Jesus took up residence in our hearts! I am certainly no exception. I was raised in a Christian home and my dad made sure the whole family attended church and Sunday School every week! When I went to college, I stopped going to church and decided to live my life the way I wanted.

I know I temporarily broke my dad's heart, and it took me a while to come to my senses. After I married and my first child was born, I decided then that I wanted my precious son to know Jesus and be raised in church. Soon after I went back, I asked for forgiveness and once again placed Jesus as the center of my life. As much as I regret my rebellious days, God used that time to help me become a credible witness as I share my personal testimony with others. If I tell people that I have always been a perfect Christian and never did anything wrong, they wouldn't believe me. Acts 26 is an excellent example of how to share your personal story. Paul told everyone listening about the bad and the good in his life.

On February 12, 2012, a man named Al VomSteege said to me, "Ann, teach them to tell their stories!" As you seek to be Christian

Week • Four

Day 19 - Relevant Evangelism

Core Value: God looks for men and women who live and share the Good News of Jesus Christ with cultural relevance, sensitivity, and power so that the eternal truth of the Gospel will be understood and received in every culture of the world.

On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to take it out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets."

And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.

And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

— Luke 5:1-11

For those of us who have grown up in church, we've heard this story countless times. When I was younger, my Sunday school teachers would read this story and talk about trusting Jesus. At the time, I thought they were only talking about the fish. I understood the demonstration, but not the metaphor.

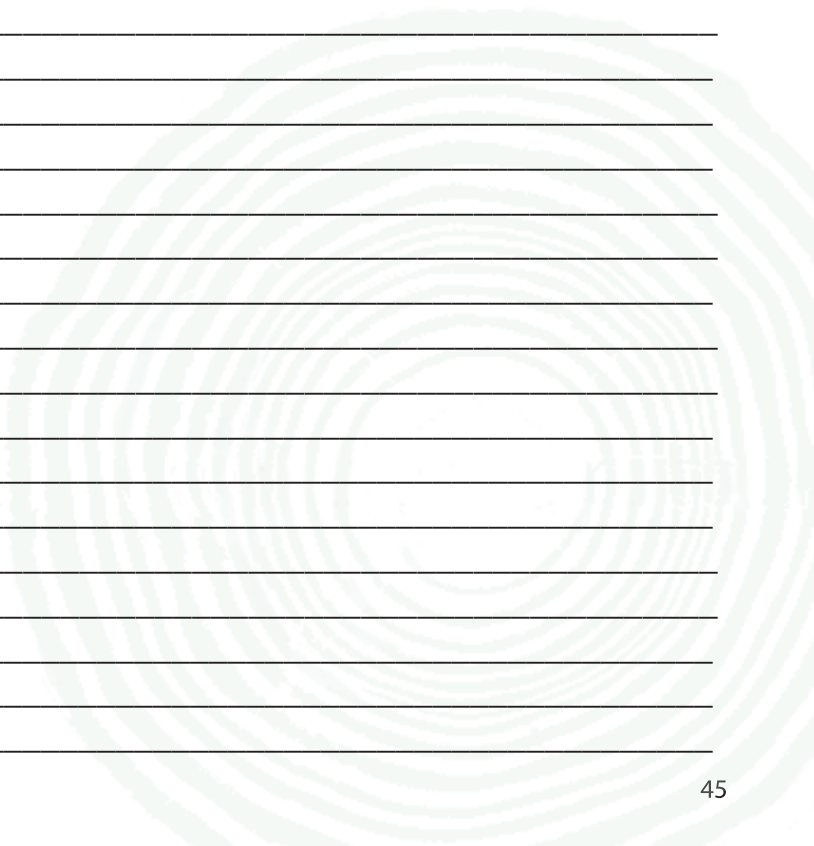
When I read this story now, the last phrase jumps out at me: they left everything and followed Him. There was no debate. They didn't say, "Hmm...that sounds interesting, let me think about it." They dropped everything—their career, the only life they knew—and followed Him. If you think about it, they probably didn't fully understand what Christ meant when he said "you will be catching men," but they trusted him. They trusted that whatever they were getting themselves into, Christ had a reason. They trusted that whatever they would need to "catch men" he would equip them.

I think sometimes, in this caffeine-injected, mile-a-minute world we live in, we get so caught up in our own busy lives that we aren't always listening intently to the call of the Lord. We may occasionally feel the tug toward local evangelism or mission work, but we use excuses like "I just don't have time for that," or "That's not me, that's not my calling." As you seek to be Christian to the Core, ask yourself...

Am I focusing on what God has planned for me?

If he is calling me to take a leap of faith - whether it is ministering to a friend or co-worker, or serving with a local or international mission, will I trust him and put my plans and priorities on hold to follow him?

Lined writing area consisting of 20 horizontal lines.



Week • Four

Day 20 - Relevant Evangelism

Core Value: God looks for men and women who live and share the Good News of Jesus Christ with cultural relevance, sensitivity, and power so that the eternal truth of the Gospel will be understood and received in every culture of the world.

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, singing, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

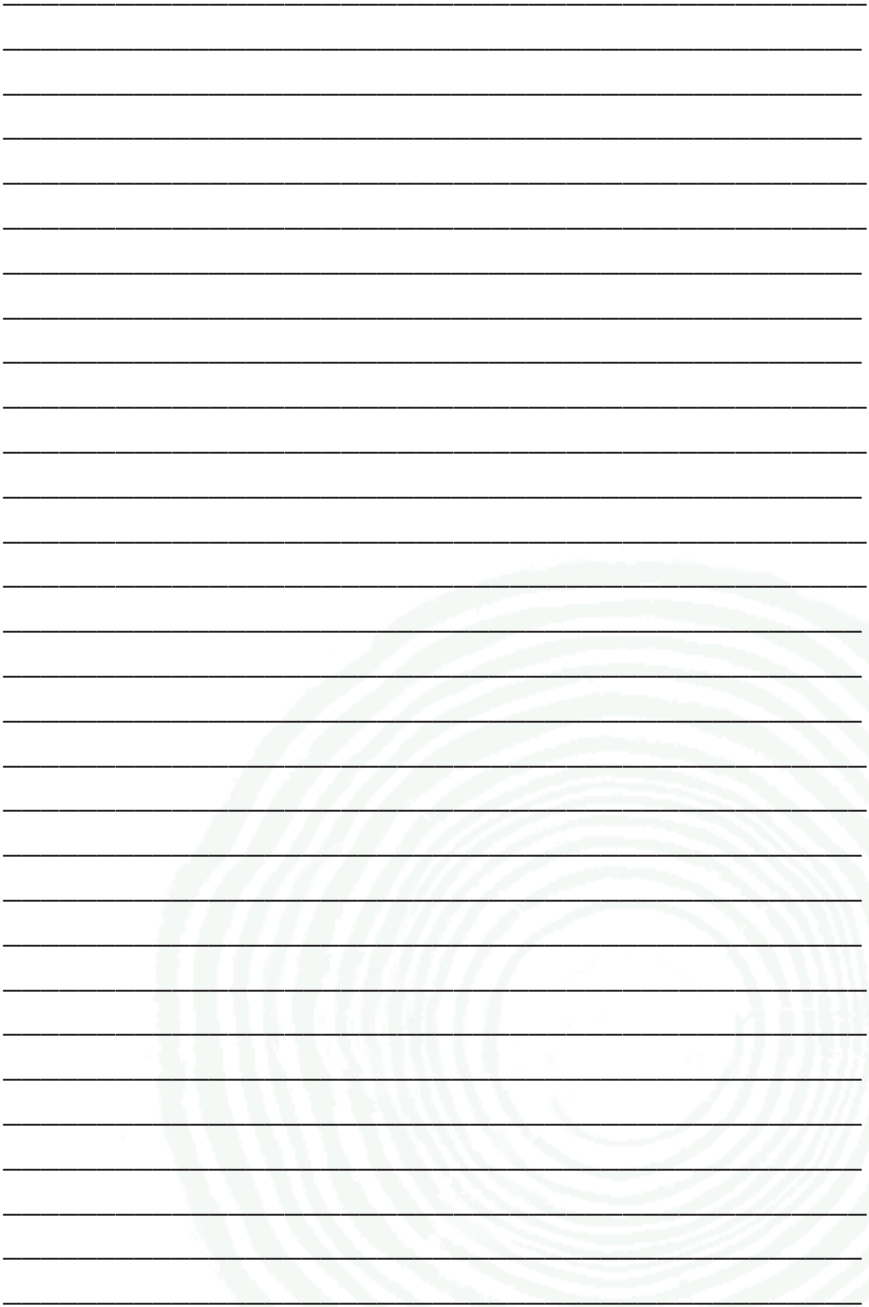
Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship Him day and night within his temple, and the One who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." — Revelation 7:9-14

When you think of heaven, what is your vision? Too often I think many of us visualize it in individual terms. We think of heaven as meeting with Christ, with family and friends we have known and loved, but not much more. The early Christians knew better. They talked of the multitudes of people, known and unknown to us on earth, who will be there with us: people of every tribe and nation and language drawn together by the salvation of Jesus Christ, the "Lamb" sacrificed for us. And when they thought of the Kingdom, they celebrated the multitudes that would be there.

I lift that up to you today, because it occurs to me that carrying that vision of heaven in their hearts may be one reason they were so effective in reaching out across lines of race and class and background. At some deep level, they always remembered that, for all our differences, we are all the same at the foot of the cross: sinners in need of the grace only our Savior can provide. And remembering that, they never tired of seeking to share his grace with everyone.

As you seek to be Christian to the Core, let me ask:

- **When you think of heaven, what do you visualize?**
- **When you think of God's grace, is there any person who does not need it?**
- **When you think of those who need it, is there any person with whom you should not try to share it?**



Week • Five

Day 21 - Multiplication of Disciples

Core Value: God looks for men and women who disciple, coach, and mentor others, who in turn He effective disciple-makers.

Above all, show sincere love to each other, because love brings about the forgiveness of many sins. Open your homes to each other without complaining. And serve each other according to the gift each person has received, as good managers of God's diverse gifts. Whoever speaks should do so as those who speak God's word. Whoever serves should do so from the strength that God furnishes. Do this so that in everything God may be honored through Jesus Christ. To him be honor and power forever and always. Amen. — 1 Peter 4:8-11

When I was growing up, my mom used to say to me—quite frequently, I might add—“Don’t be such a smarty-pants!” As a young adult transitioning from one ministry to another, my mom came for my final Sunday at the church and visited with my Senior Pastor. He was being very kind, telling her how much they appreciated me and my abilities to lead a variety of groups of people (mostly students at that time) and help the lay ministry teams do great things. Mom said, “Oh, that’s nice. We think she can be a little bossy.”

Now before you think I am picking on my mom, she also recounted these two stories many times before her death in 2004. At that same reception many years ago, I learned she spoke to almost everyone there and was visibly proud to say she was my mom. I discovered that outside of my presence, she was quite lavish with her praise and quick to tell anyone who listened what a great person, daughter and mom she thought I was.

When I was cleaning her room after she died, I found the King James Bible that belonged to my grandmother. I knew this was a special heirloom for my mom. Grandma had written a personal note to her—the oldest daughter—on the inside cover. I sat down to read those words again. When I opened the Bible, I found that my mom had recently added a note to me—her oldest daughter. I don't recall all of the words she wrote, but I do remember the scripture she wrote in her own shaky handwriting; Above all else, love one another deeply, for love covers a multitude of sins. I Peter 4:8

Mom was passing on to me a gift of faith she had received from her mom. I know the intent is for me to pass it to my oldest daughter one day. Every once in awhile I think about what I want my children to say about me when I am gone. I pray they will be kind. I pray their faith will make them strong. I pray that they personally know Jesus. Therefore I am telling them about Jesus every chance I get.

I don't always know what to say. But I do know I need to say something which points to my Lord and Savior. Not just to my children, but also to other people I know and meet. It is important. It is required. I HAVE to do something. And so do you. I know, that sounds a little bossy.

It's judgment time for God's own family. We're first in line. If it starts with us, think what it's going to be like for those who refuse God's Message! If good people barely make it, what's in store for the bad? So if you find life difficult because you're doing what God said, take it in stride. Trust him. He knows what he's doing, and he'll keep on doing it. I Peter 4:17-19 (The Message)

As you seek to be Christian to the Core, ask yourself:

- **What does ministry mean to you?**
- **Have you multiplied any disciples recently? Have you**

Day 22 - Multiplication of Disciples

Core Value: God looks for men and women who disciple, coach, and mentor others, who in turn become effective disciple-makers.

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.

The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.

He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. — Acts 11:19-26

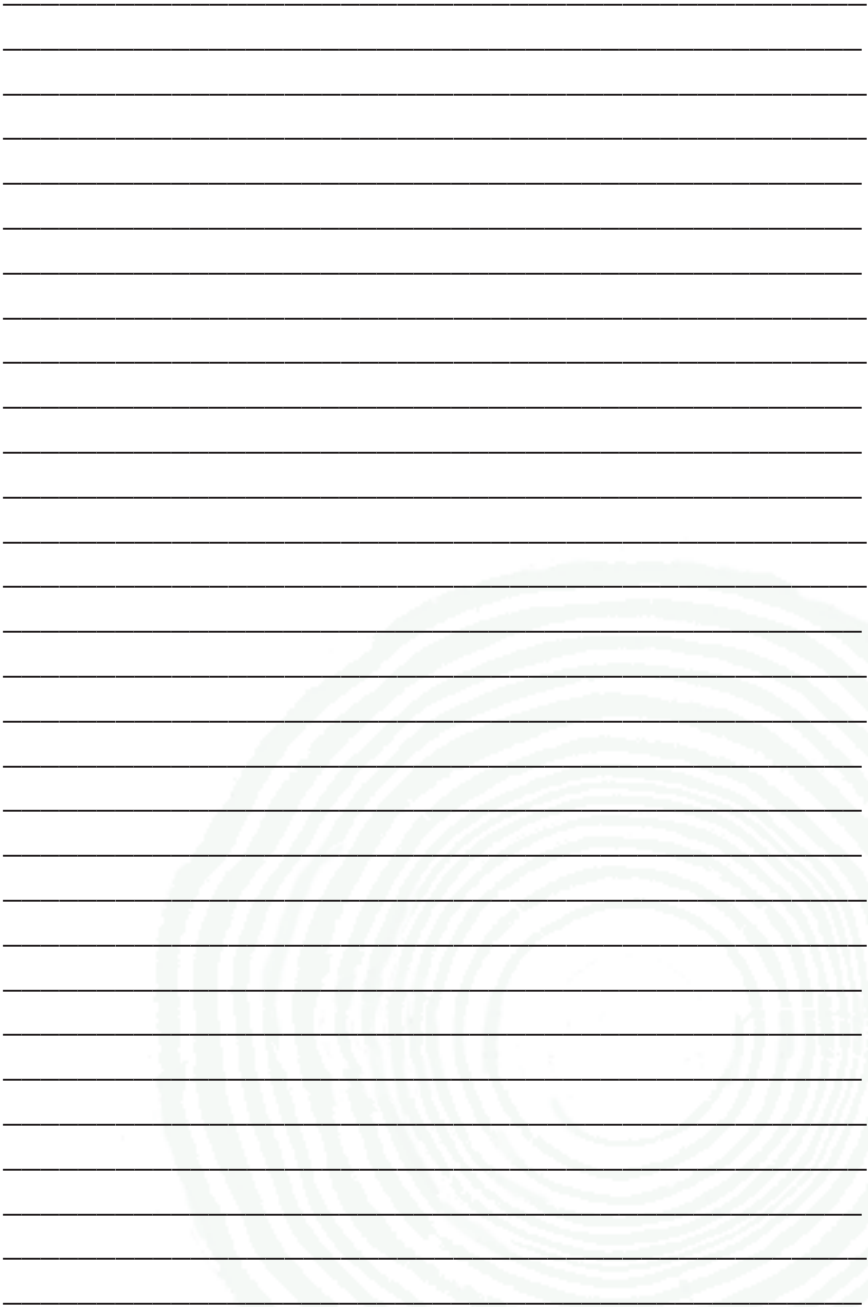
I think the members of the early worldwide church launched in Antioch must have been brave. They had many odds against them as a new church, especially going worldwide. They worked hard, faced persecution, and did everything they could to spread the good news about the Lord Jesus, even sacrificing their own lives. But what if they weren't brave?

I mean, what if the early church had “chickened out”?

Remember the Alamo. March 6, 1836, was the hard-fought battle of the Alamo. It took General Santa Anna less than two hours to overrun the 200 defenders. While the Alamo was a tragic loss, it was the brave souls who gave their lives to defend it that became the battle cry of Texas, and made Texas the great state we reside in today. But what if they had “chickened out”? We would probably be a whole different country today.

At the Houston Rodeo our family always enjoys putting on our boots and going to watch the event “Mutton Bustin.” My daughter, Rachel, will have her first experience with this event by riding a sheep in the huge Reliant Stadium arena. She’s a little nervous about it because there will probably be a lot of people there and she could even get hurt. But as I write this, I wonder... will she “chicken out”? Or will she be brave?

As you seek to be Christian to the Core, how will you be brave today? You probably won’t have to defend the Alamo or ride a sheep in front of thousands of people, but you could do something brave by multiplying disciples for Jesus Christ. Will you be brave? Or will you... “chicken out”?



Day 23 - Multiplication of Disciples

Core Value: God looks for men and women who disciple, coach, and mentor others, who in turn become effective disciple-makers.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. — Galatians 5:22-23

Years ago I was a newspaper reporter writing about other people and their ideas. More recently, I manage our church bookstore, selling other people's books. What in the world could I say about this scripture that has not already been said? And then it hit me! People who exemplify these attributes surround me every week in the bookstore:

Love - the customer who regularly brings in surprise gifts for another member who cannot afford them (she never leaves her name).

Joy - the attitude every Sunday morning of visitors who receive a warm greeting from our volunteer staff, and a welcome cup of coffee and tour of our store. They leave with a feeling that they are welcomed and appreciated.

Peace - the feeling that together, we (me and the volunteers) have provided help for our customers, directing them to books that may answer their questions, soothe their spirits or give them hope for the future.

Goodness – the recognition that all of our volunteers go to great extremes (totally unnecessary and uncalled for) to meet the needs of our customers.

Faithfulness - despite rain, sleet, hail or a 100-degree heat wave, our volunteers are always there, knowing that they are needed and that they are make a difference in the life of our church.

Gentleness - handling a cranky, demanding person's request in a calm and loving way (even when the natural reaction would be to scream).

Self-control - see above!

I am honored to be witness to so many examples of the fruit of the Spirit. As you seek to be Christian to the Core, where have you seen evidence of the fruit of the Spirit?

Day 24 - Multiplication of Disciples

Core Value: God looks for men and women who disciple, coach, and mentor others, who in turn become effective disciple-makers

You have declared this day that the LORD is your God and that you will walk in obedience to him, that you will keep his decrees, commands and laws—that you will listen to him. And the LORD has declared this day that you are his people, his treasured possession as he promised, and that you are to keep all his commands. He has declared that he will set you in praise, fame and honor high above all the nations he has made and that you will be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised. — Deuteronomy 26:17-19

How is your life, your love and your pursuit of Godliness? My friend Laura loves to ask these questions. And though she is interested in the first two, she really, really wants to know how the last one is going.

One of the things I love about Laura is that she is not afraid to challenge me. She is kind and gracious and compassionate, but she also loves me enough to encourage me to live a Godly life. Not a perfect life, but a fruitful one—one where I and others can see God's promises of joy, peace and grace at work in my life the way I admire them in hers. She prays for me, sends me encouraging scriptures, and tells me of books she has read that have helped her through struggles along the way. God is faithful and has been faithful to Laura, and she loves Him so much and cares for me so much that she desires His faithfulness be real to me. So she asks these questions and listens for how she can encourage me in my pursuit.

Laura has this beautiful heart not just for me, but for all people also. I know Laura asks other friends this question, and she shares with us so that we can share with others.

As you seek to be Christian to the Core, how is your life, your love, and your pursuit of Godliness?

Day 25- Multiplication of Disciples

Core Value: God looks for men and women who disciple, coach, and mentor others, who in turn become effective disciple-makers

Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scripture. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. — Acts: 18: 24-28

When my mother was in The Hubbard Hospice House in Charleston, West Virginia, she was attended by a loving nurse's aide who befriended both my mother and me. She saw I was studying my Bible and other seminary textbooks, and she asked me lots of questions about my life and my goals. I explained I was in seminary in Texas to become a pastor, and that I was being obedient to Jesus' call upon my life.

One morning as she was caring for mother, she said, "I have always wanted to have Jesus in my life." I realized that this confession called for action, and I got up and went over to the bed and said, "Would you like to invite him in your life right now?" She said yes! We prayed together and she accepted Christ right there standing over my dying mother's bed.

Although she promised she would find a church home, I worried that she may not have the resources to help her in her journey. I wanted her to be able to read about God's amazing love and to know that great story of salvation found in the Bible. The next day

my brother stayed with mom so I could go and purchase a Bible for her. I bought The Life Application Bible, which explains the text and then applies it to our daily living. When I gave it to her, she got tears in her eyes. Although I couldn't invite her into my home and explain the way of God more adequately, I was able to give her exactly what she needed to begin her new life as a follower of Jesus Christ.

As you seek to be Christian to the Core, think about these questions:

- **Am I learning and growing in my faith so I can help others learn too?**
- **Am I willing to take time to help others learn more about Jesus no matter who they are or what the circumstances may be?**

Day 26 - Family Priority

Core Value: God looks for men and women who are convinced that the family is God's building block for society and give their family priority in their lives.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. — Deuteronomy 6:4-9

As a children's minister, I have found that many parents depend on the church to educate their children about God and Christian principles. They seem to think it is enough to simply bring their children to church on Sundays, but this passage charges parents to teach their children. I believe that many parents don't teach their children about God because they don't know where to start.

Is it enough for parents to pray with their children only at bedtime? What if they add in prayer before meals? It is great to pray with your children but this passage requires much more. It says to teach your children about the Ten Commandments at home, when you are walking (or driving, or biking...) somewhere, when you go to bed, and when you wake up. That requires more than bedtime and mealtime prayers.

As a parent, where do you start? Here are some ways you can begin teaching your children about God, the Ten Commandments, and how Christians should act:

- Read Bible stories with your children.
- Let your children see you read your Bible, pray, and act like a Christian.
- Memorize Bible verses together. Post them on your mirror, refrigerator, and even in your car.
- Use discipline to teach your children about what God expects of us. Encourage your child to pray and ask God for forgiveness after making a bad choice.
- Use everyday moments (God's provision, worry, preparations for the future, family changes, etc.) to teach your children about God and his ways.
- Begin to teach your children about God. Make him part of your conversations. By doing so, your obedience will be evident and your children will reap the benefits.

As you seek to be Christian to the Core, remember that teaching children about God begins at home (with the church as a support system and equipping partner). Make your family a priority, and begin showing your family that your first priority is to the one who created family.

Day 27 - Family Priority

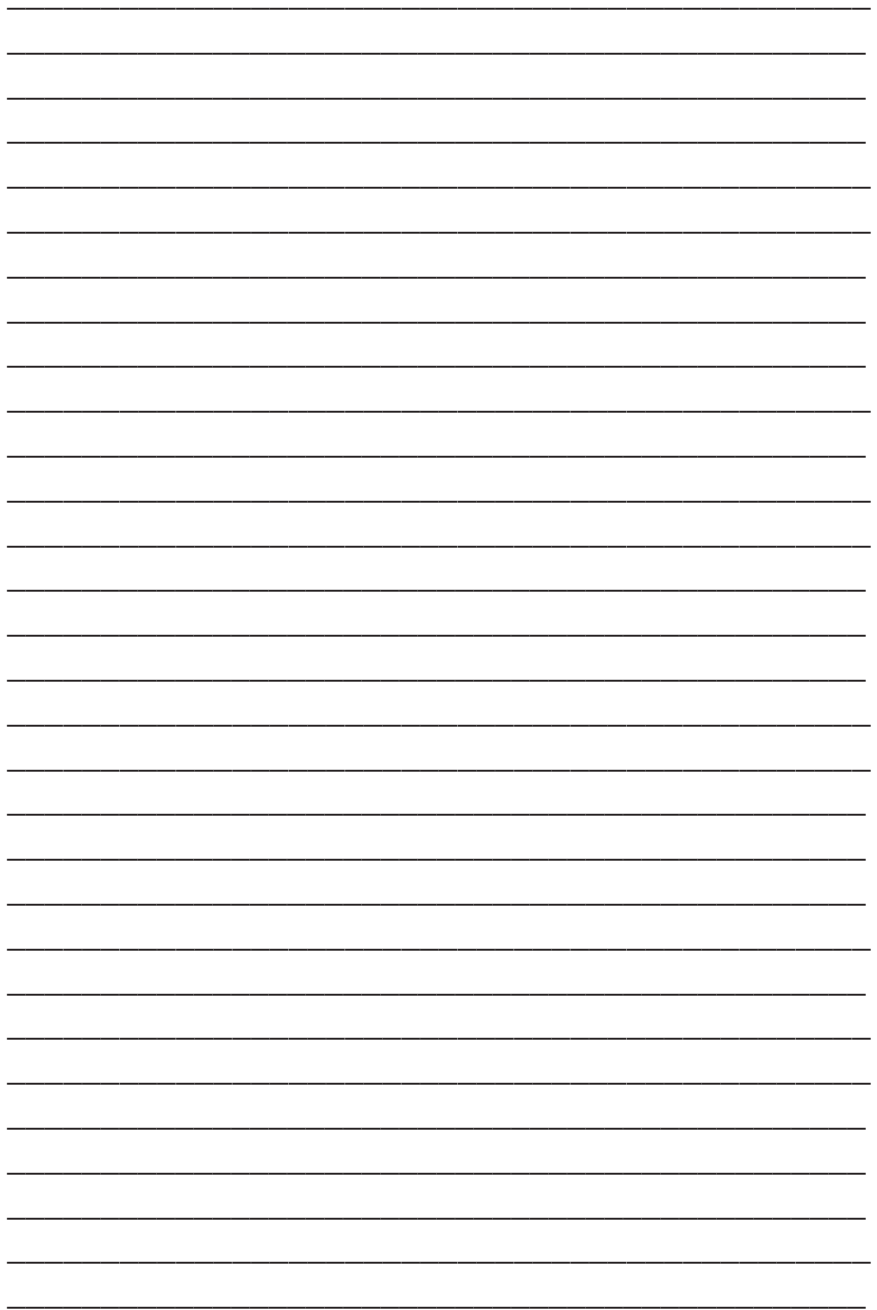
Core Value: God looks for men and women who are convinced that the family is God's building block for society and give their family priority in their lives

How good and pleasant it is when brothers live in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if dew of Harmon were falling on Mount Zion. For the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forever. — Psalm 133

Being involved in athletics either as a player, coach or an official, I learned early on that the only way you were going to accomplish anything on the playing field or in the gym was as a unified team. Have you ever been a part of something like that? Perhaps it was a missions activity you participated in with others at church. You worked hard and got sweaty, thirsty and tired. But you were unified by a single purpose, doing something for someone else in the name of God.

Psalm 133:1 says, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity." In sports or in church, there's nothing quite like the feeling you get working hand in hand with others on a project toward a goal. And that unity can happen only when you put your own interests and preferences aside and practice the harmony of brotherhood.

As you seek to be Christian to the Core, remember, there's nothing quite like that kind of teamwork.



Day 28 - Family Priority

Core Value: God looks for men and women who are convinced that the family is God's building block for society and give their family priority in their lives

*Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."
— Matthew 22:36-40*

In this passage we see a Pharisee posing a much recognized and debated question among the religious leaders. It was much debated because the Jewish law was generally thought to be made up of 613 commandments specified in the Torah. Of these commandments, 365 were "do not's" and 248 were "do's".

As you can imagine, throughout time many opinions were formed as to which commandments were more important than others. It was a question much tossed around by religious scholars. In divine fashion Jesus summed up all 613 commandments into two simple statements. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." And "Love your neighbor as yourself." What happens next (as recorded in Mark) I have always found entertaining!

Mark 12:32 says, "Then the scribe said to him, 'you are right, Teacher, you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself, - this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.'" When Jesus saw he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not

far from the kingdom of God.” In other words, “You are on the brink of understanding! The Spirit of God is hovering over your heart! You are so close to recognizing your Lord and Savior!” What an exciting event! It reminds me of another story I read of a Jewish scholar and a Christian debating a passage in Daniel. After much discussion the rabbi ended the debate with these words: “Let us shut up our books, for if we go on examining the prophecy we shall all become Christians.”

As you seek to be Christian to the Core answer these questions...

- **Does your family examine the scriptures and study the Word of God with such vigor?**
- **Do your children hear and understand the scriptures?**
- **Do you give them a chance to ask questions?**

When our children are young we pour the milk of favorite Bible stories down to their little tummies. As they grow older, I would encourage you to let them cut their teeth on the meat of God’s Word. Challenge them to study and discuss the scriptures with you. Embark upon a family Bible study. Empower them with the tools to study the Bible and meet regularly to discuss what they have learned. It is in these moments of study and prayer that we form our relationship with Christ!

Lined writing area with horizontal lines.

Day 29 - Family Priority

Core Value: God looks for men and women who are convinced that the family is God's building block for society and give their family priority in their lives

Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves. Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their opponents in court. — Psalm 127

Have you ever labored in vain for something? Maybe a project at work or an idea that you just knew would bear fruit. You worked tirelessly and sacrificed time only to find that it never came to completion. Many of us have had this experience at least once in life, but what most of us don't know is that we may be living it out each day. You may be laboring in vain this very moment and not even realizing it! See if this sounds familiar...

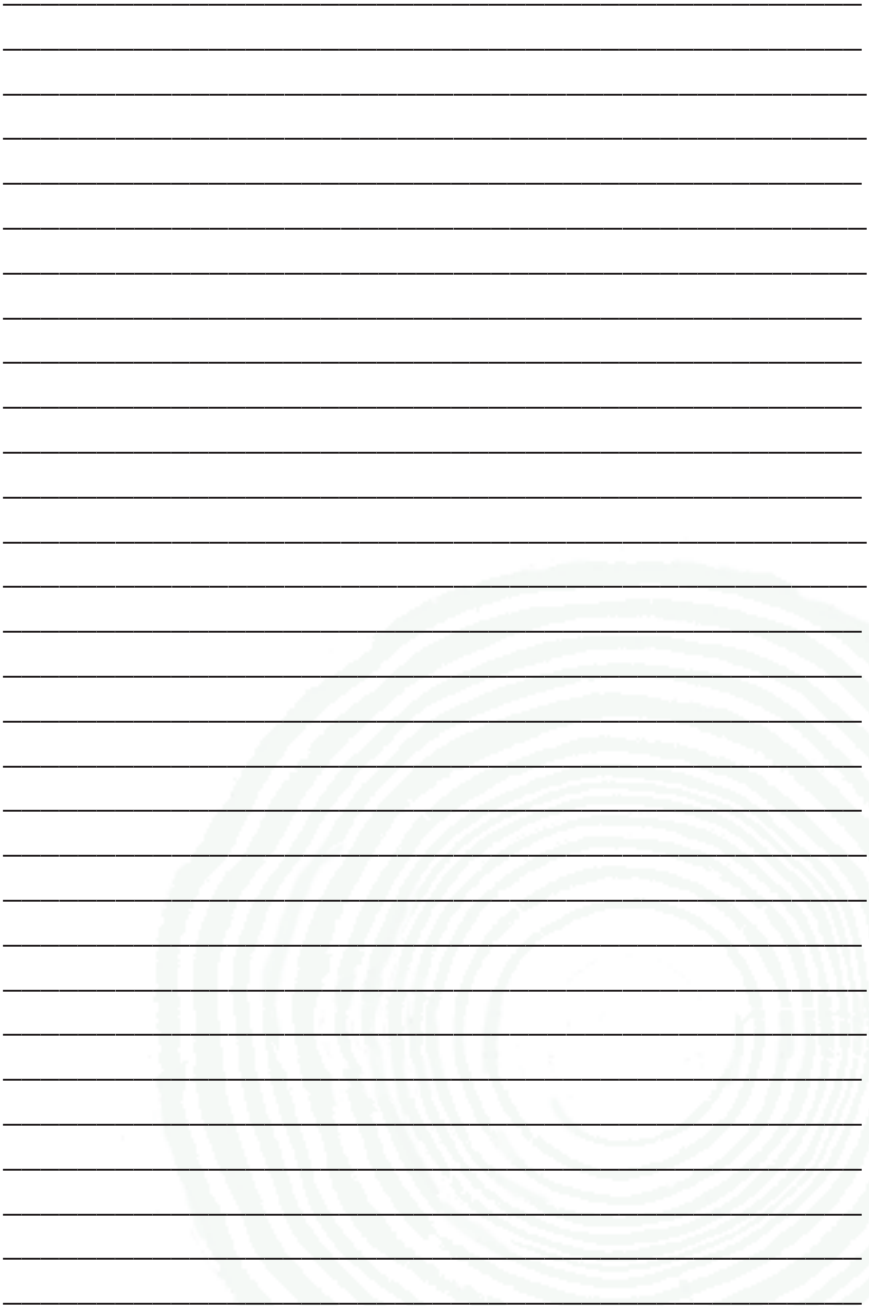
After a busy day of meetings and projects, Becky raced to pick up her two kids. She had a momentary pang of guilt when she pulled up and saw that the normal line of cars was no longer present. The sun was setting and the parking lot seemed less crowded. She checked her watch and thought to herself she should not have answered those last e-mails. Tomorrow, she vowed, she would leave earlier. She smiled as her two little ones were loaded into her car both happily telling her about their day. She laughed and listened to their chatter on the short drive home.

As they pulled into the garage she began giving them their instructions: put up your backpacks (don't leave them on the floor), make sure their homework is finished and put any papers she needs to sign on the kitchen table, take a quick bath and get dressed for bed while she began making dinner.

She kicked off her heels and started dinner smiling as she listened to her son playing in the tub upstairs. She wondered whether or not her husband would be late tonight, or would he be on time for dinner? As dinner began to take shape she heard her son calling her name. "Mom, can you play a game with me tonight?" Without a thought the words came out, "Baby, Mommy doesn't have time tonight...maybe tomorrow."

Sound familiar? It does to me...it was my evening last night. We labor in vain when we do not realize our purpose as parents. We labor in vain when we give our children all the comforts and advantages this world has to offer, but we fail to give them what they really need: our time, our beliefs, and our love.

If you will excuse me, I have a game to play...



Day 30 - Family Priority

Core Value: God looks for men and women who are convinced that the family is God's building block for society and give their family priority in their lives

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many ... Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. — I Corinthians 12:12-14; 27

Anyone who knows me knows how important family is to me. Not just my own family, but also my Christian family and my friend's family. Without these people in my life I have no clue how I could have survived the past two years without them. My faith in Jesus Christ has always been strong and I knew that if he took me to it, he would definitely bring me through it. With encouragement, love, many tears and prayers, I was able to stay strong because of my extended family. I thank our Lord everyday for putting me in a place to receive the love and kindness of such wonderful people.

As you seek to be Christian to the Core, I hope God opens your eyes and your heart to someone that might need the love from an extended family person, especially if they don't suspect that they need it.

Week Seven

Day 31 - Faithful Stewardship

Core Value: God looks for men and women who are faithful stewards of finances, time, and spiritual gifts in their personal lives and in their service to God and others.

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name. Bring an offering and come before him; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness. — I Chronicles 16:29

God is the creator of the universe. He created the stars and the planets, as well as all things microscopic. He is righteous and holy at all times—no situational ethics—where there is a choice of right or wrong. He always chooses right: ...God is light and in him is no darkness at all (1 John 5). God is due honor for his creation and for who he is. He is due our worship and a part of that worship is to return a tithe and an offering to him in recognition of all he has done for us and provided for us.

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it" (Malachi 3:10). We are to worship God because he is holy and worthy. There is no other who is omniscient (all-knowing) and omnipotent (all powerful). There is nothing he does not know or cannot do.

A part of that worship is to return a portion of the blessings with which he has blessed us. As you seek to be Christian to the Core, focus on being a person who worships God. What offering can you bring as a tribute for all he has done for you?

Week • Seven

Day 32 - Faithful Stewardship

Core Value: God looks for men and women who are faithful stewards of finances, time, and spiritual gifts in their personal lives and in their service to God and others.

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. Luke 6:38

“He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.” - Missionary Jim Elliot

Anthony Rossi came to the US from Italy in the 1920's as a young teenager, with nothing but the clothes on his back. A Christian couple befriended him and through their love he came to know Christ as his Savior and Lord. One Sunday in church he asked God to give him an idea for a business, promising to always remember to return a portion back to the Lord. The rest is history: Anthony Rossi founded the Tropicana Company and remained faithful to God: He gave back not 10 percent, but 50 percent of his income for the rest of his life!

One of the toughest things for me to remember is that EVERYTHING belongs to God. He provides for us on this earth, often above and beyond what we need. He promises to remain faithful to us, so why is it so hard sometimes to remain faithful in giving back to Him?

As you seek to be Christian to the Core, ask yourself ...

Do I trust God will provide for me, even when things seem tight?
Am I willing to show God that I trust him by being faithful in giving back to him?

Week • Seven

Day 33 - Faithful Stewardship

Core Value: God looks for men and women who are faithful stewards of finances, time, and spiritual gifts in their personal lives and in their service to God and others.

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: "They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever."

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! — 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Many years ago when I was in the homebuilding industry, I was blessed to work for a widely known homebuilder owned by the Norman Norwood family. When I joined them, Norman had already relinquished the day-to-day operations to his two sons, but he dropped by the office every so often. As I learned more about the company, it became clear that Norman was unique among many area homebuilders—not only in the way he lived his life and raised his family, but also in the business model he established for Monarch Homes.

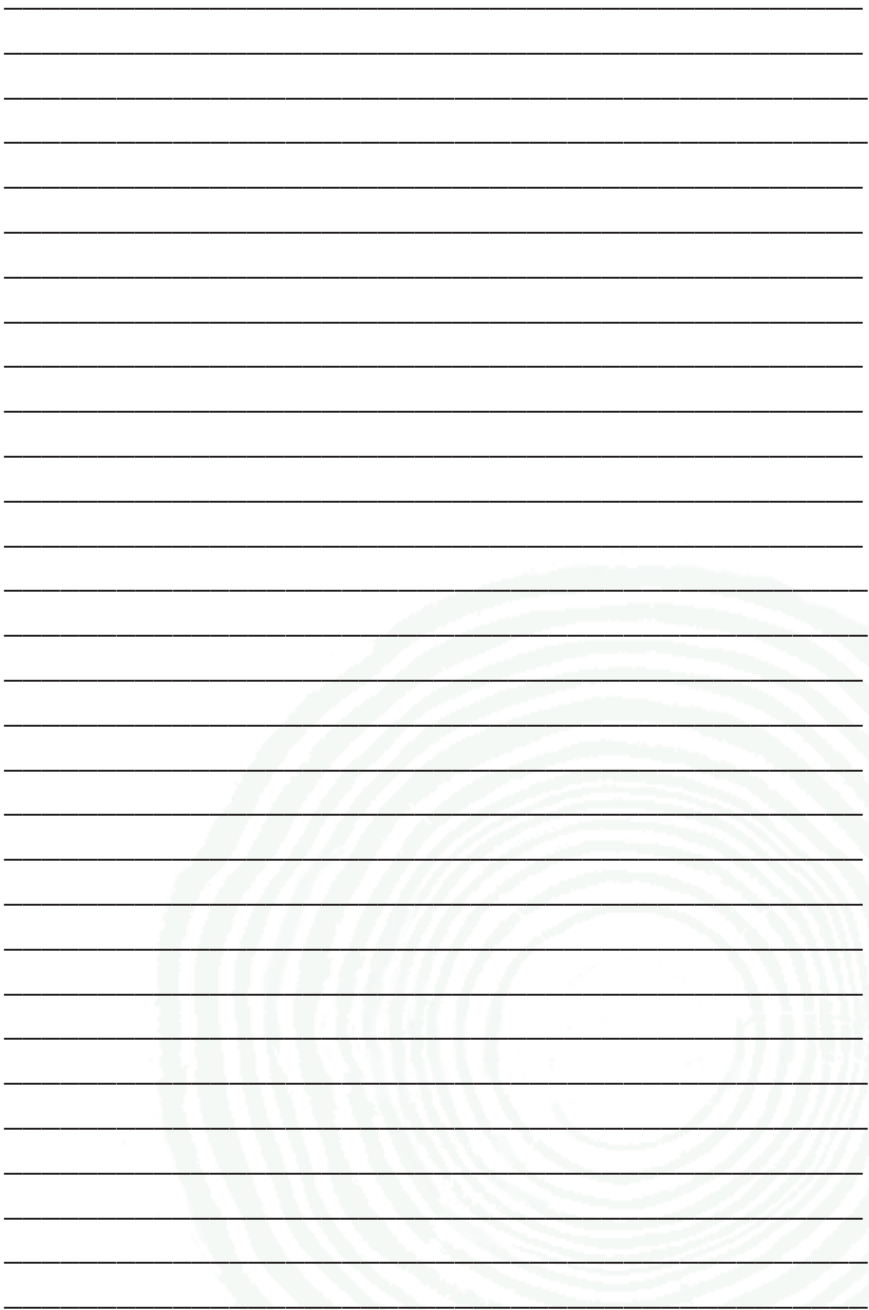
I also learned that Norman and his family were strong Christians who attended church regularly, and that his semi-retirement provided the opportunity for him to travel the world representing the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship. However, most surprisingly, I was also informed that the company tithed 10% of the profits. To say that I was impressed was an understatement.

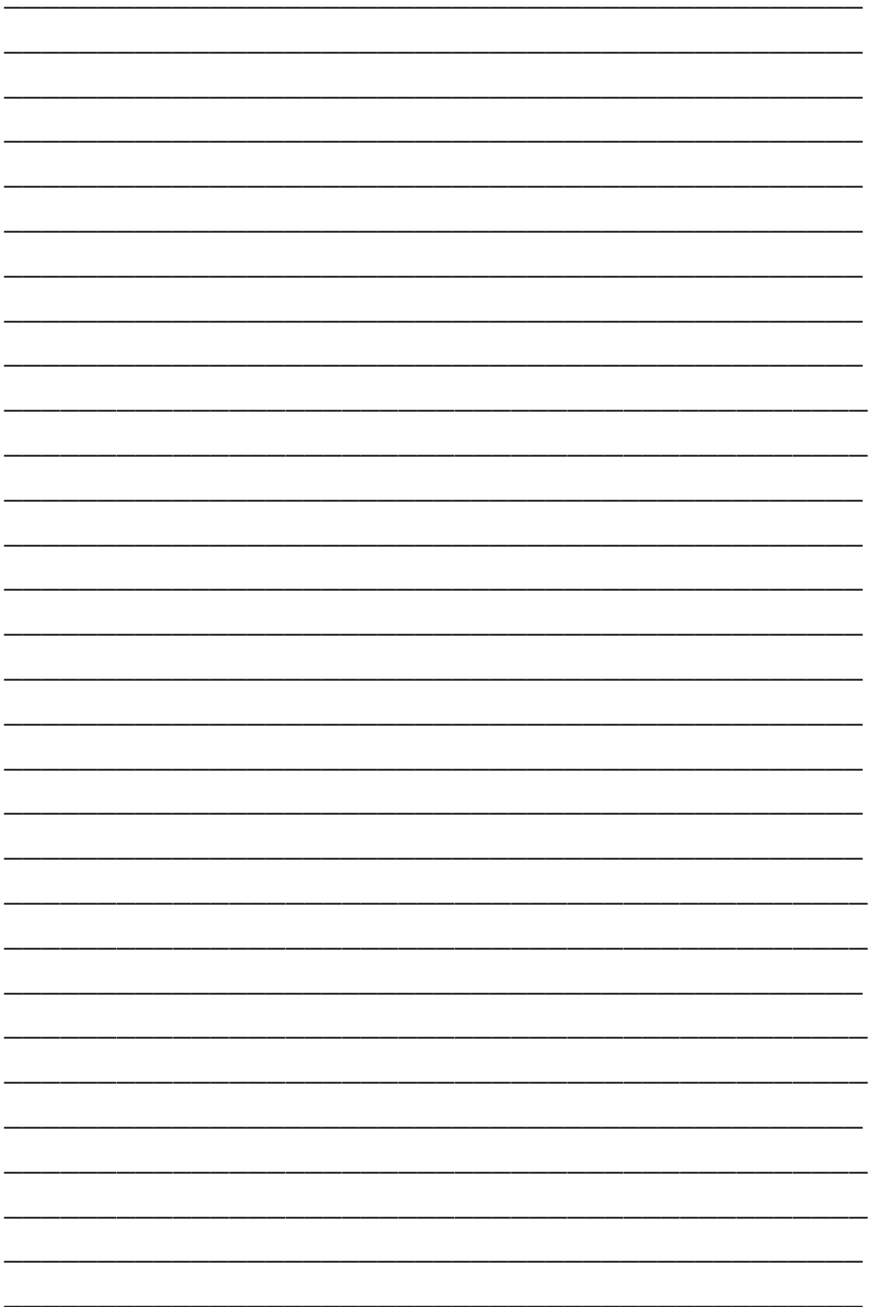
Although it didn't register with me at the time, I later realized that many blessings were bestowed on the company in the form of reputation, success, and growth throughout the area that was clearly the result of their faithful giving.

When I read these verses, they seem to leap off the page as I recall those impressions from many years ago. Speaking personally, I have made a commitment to tithe—and to do it in a way that I think the Bible instructs us. As a result, I also find that I have been blessed in countless and unexpected ways.

As you seek to be Christian to the Core, I would like to challenge you to ask yourself:

- **Am I a faithful giver with the willingness to work toward tithing?**
- **Am I willing to let God bestow bountiful blessings on my family and me?**
- **If you are ready, God is ready.**





Week • Seven

Day 34 - Faithful Stewardship

Core Value: God looks for men and women who are faithful stewards of finances, time, and spiritual gifts in their personal lives and in their service to God and others.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.
— *Philippians 4:4-9*

While moderation and temperance in all things is both commendable and beneficial, sometimes abstinence and indulgence can help us better understand, deal with, and enjoy the complexities of life

Lent is a season of abstinence where as we deny ourselves of certain pleasures, pick up our crosses, and follow Christ. But it is also a time of indulgence where we give out of our love for what Jesus did for us in some way or another.

Abstinence and indulgence... I remember one of my wife's best friends' wedding ceremony. Her friend was so happy on her

wedding day because she had saved herself for the right man and shown abstinence countless times, even in simply dating or being friends with other men. As a bride, she was so cheerful that she was finally ready to indulge.

It also seemed like everyone who knew the couple was so happy for them. The bride and groom had both sacrificed for each other and were finally able to be together in marriage! People brought presents, showered them with a money tree, purchased dresses, booked flights and hotel rooms, rented tuxes, and gave parties and showers to celebrate their love for each other. Everyone was indulging in a spirit of love...

However, her father was not so cheerful. He complained about how much everything cost. While he had plenty of savings, had been planning for this day for decades, and made sure everything was relatively affordable for such a special occasion, he was still bitter about how much he had to spend. Everyone was full of joy and giving generously, except for the father of the bride!

He reminded me of Proverbs 23:7 'Eat and drink!' he says to you; but his heart is not with you. Outwardly he is telling everyone to celebrate, but secretly he is thinking about how much everything costs. He missed indulging in one of the biggest days of his only daughter's life, all because he didn't give out of joy or love. One who should have been the most cheerful missed out because he wasn't generously giving from his heart.

We often abstain and indulge, but when we are called to either, may we be fully present and be cheerful givers, giving not only in word but also joyfully from the heart. That is one of the best gifts we can give and receive.

A sheet of white paper with horizontal black lines for writing. The lines are evenly spaced and cover most of the page. In the bottom right corner, there is a large, faint, light green circular pattern that resembles a tree trunk or a spiral.

Week • Seven

Day 35 - Faithful Stewardship

Core Value: God looks for men and women who are faithful stewards of finances, time, and spiritual gifts in their personal lives and in their service to God and others.

Lord our Lord, your name is the most wonderful name in all the earth! It brings you praise in heaven above. You have taught children and babies to sing praises to you. — Psalm 8:1-2a

Since they first started coming with us to church, my wife Nicole has taught our children what it means to worship God. Throughout infant—and toddlerhood, she whispered prayers in the ear, explained what was happening during communion, invited them to sing out during the songs, and listen quietly during the sermon. She taught them the Doxology, the Apostle's Creed, and the Lord's Prayer so they could participate early and often. Every Sunday she makes sure they are engaged in every aspect of worship.

It is a joy to see the fruits of her labors, because let me tell you, our daughters are serious worshippers. Anyone who worships with our family will quickly see that our daughter Cailyn loves to worship so much she can't sit still. During many songs, she dances. If it's upbeat, there's some running and twirling involved. If the tempo is a bit slower, she mixes in some ballet moves. Through it all, she is dancing before the Lord of the dance.

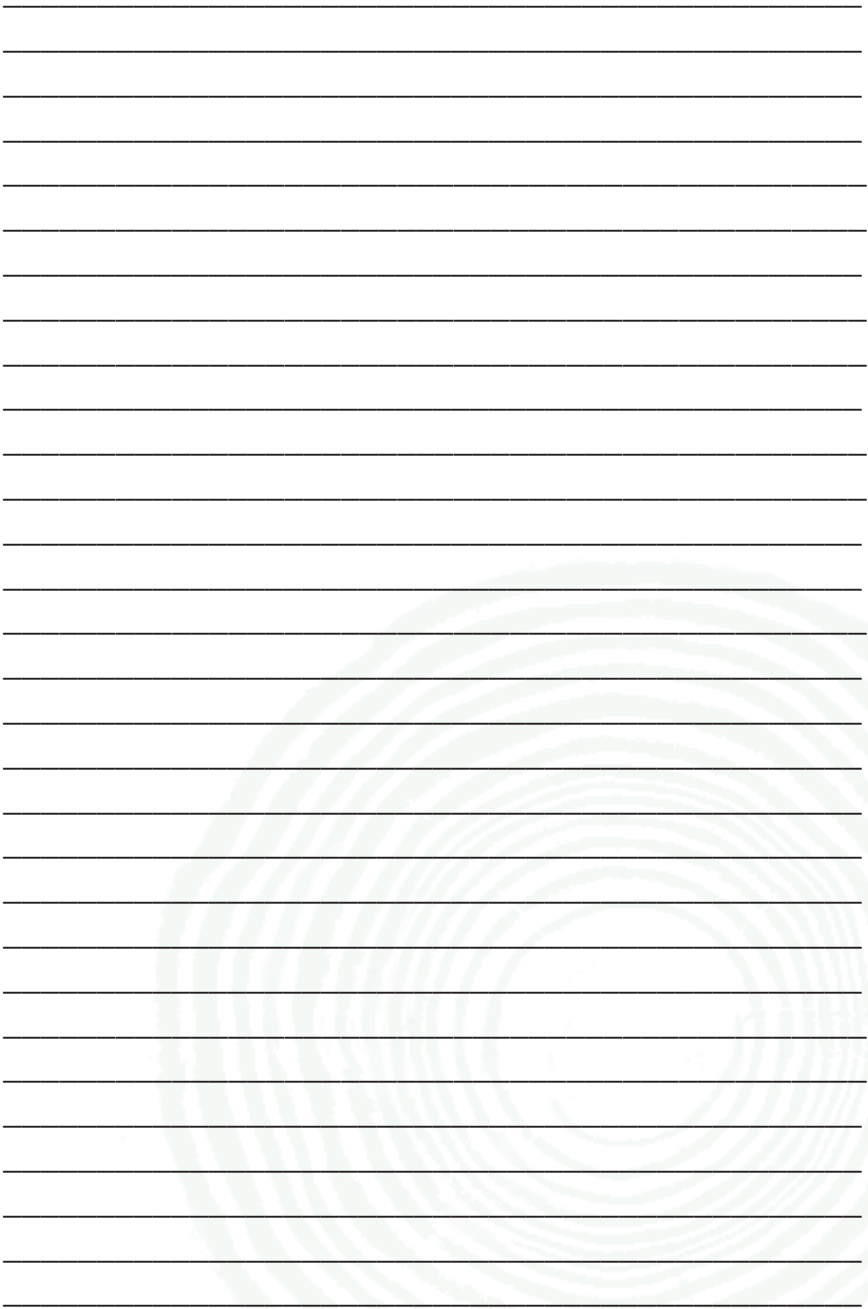
Our other daughter Kiley has had the opportunity to lead in worship through serving communion and singing in children's choir or children's programs. One Sunday she gave the offering prayer, and she did it with much eloquence and grace (says the dad). More importantly, she loved doing it.

In addition to praying, singing, listening and dancing, Nicole has also taught the girls that giving is a part of worship. Every week they take an offering envelope, write their names on it, and put the quarters and dollars they have brought from home (out of their own money) in that envelope. There is much anticipation and much joy out of just getting to put that envelope in the plate and pass it down the pew.

I'm impressed by what our daughters know, and I'm impressed by their actions and words. But mostly I am overwhelmed by their hearts. They simply get it. Every week, they worship the Lord with gladness, reverence, and awe. On the Sundays when I'm distracted or tired or just not "feeling it," they remind me that worship is not about me.

It's about God.

Ready to dance?



Week • Eight

Day 36 - Integrity

Core Value: God looks for men and women of integrity who live holy lives that are accountable to God and to the Body of Christ. Integrity glorifies God, protects us from stumbling, and encourages growth.

Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god. — Psalm 24:3-4

When you are in the presence of God, how do you feel? Does your flesh cry out? Do you feel unworthy, unholy, unclean, or unable to see God's face because of your imperfection and sin?

Dear friends, the Lord wants to draw you in! He is a jealous God and wants to be first in your life. (Exodus 34:14) He has such a desire for an intimate relationship with you and to be removed from all distractions, as if you were on top of a mountain. Sin separated us, but God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8) Being human and therefore imperfect is not an excuse. (Matthew 5:48) Christ has paid the price. The blood of the Lamb redeems us, praise God! (1 Peter 1:18-19) We are not worthy, but we are loved. The Spirit fills us with that same love and impels us to live obedient for the One who is worthy.

It starts with the heart, your attitude, and your true intentions; he sees it all. The Hillsong worship song From the Inside Out describes it well: My heart and my soul/I give you control, consume me from the inside out, Lord. Ask Him to change your heart and you will notice a change in your thoughts, your words, and your actions.

You are not alone on top of the mountain. The Spirit will guide you if you pay attention. Also, surround yourself with Christian friends to keep you accountable. Live a life of freedom from sin that is covered in grace and reflecting his holy face. As you seek to be Christian to the Core, may this be your prayer:

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. — Psalm 51:10

Week • Eight

Day 37 - Integrity

Core Value: God looks for men and women of integrity who live holy lives that are accountable to God and to the Body of Christ. Integrity glorifies God, protects us from stumbling, and encourages growth.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. — Romans 12:1-2

The embodiments of integrity and “living sacrifices” have been so plentiful in my life that I struggle to narrow the examples to a few. I think of my mom, Sue, who has faced countless crises and losses in her life, but never misses the opportunity to worship God when her family of faith gathers. Even in her 70's, she is the hands and feet of Christ as she comforts in the nursery, teaches Sunday school, leads VBS, sings in a gospel quartet, and coordinates senior adult activities. And that was just last year, when she was also battling cancer.

I think of a sweet young couple my husband and I knew through a mission service many years ago. Richard and Debra were very well educated and could have chosen almost any lifestyle, yet they lived in a small house and opened their home to anyone in need. They helped those struggling financially, transitioning missionaries, and those abandoned by family and friends. Their only requirements of guests were to honor the disciplines of their home, in reverence to God and in ministry to others.

I think of Larry, a wonderful pastor and friend, who we nearly lost

on a long stretch of highway during the peak of his career. I served on staff at his church for 13 years, which began with the oddest and shortest job interview of my life. After introductions and a few “niceties” he said, “There are only three things you need to know in order to be successful in this job. If you remember these, you can have this job forever. The first is ‘do your job’. The second is, ‘if you make a mistake, admit it’, and the third is ‘check with me if you’re unsure.”

Larry lived out these principles every day of his life. He did his job, even with excruciating pain from the injuries he sustained in the accident. He was the first to say, “I was wrong,” when he knew he was, and he always checked with his Heavenly Father before guiding his congregation and staff.

The Sue-Richard-Debra-Larry version of Romans 12:1-2 is offer up every part of your life to God, be humble and teachable, and trust Him with all your heart, mind and will. My prayer is that the newfound or long-forgotten fervor stirred up through your studies will shake this town to its foundations, as you seek to be Christian to the Core.

Week • Eight

Day 38 - Integrity

Core Value: God looks for men and women of integrity who live holy lives that are accountable to God and to the Body of Christ. Integrity glorifies God, protects us from stumbling, and encourages growth.

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.
— Proverbs 27:17

As I was cooking dinner last week, I was trimming the fat from a few steaks before putting them on the grill. The knife was so dull I don't think it would have cut butter! I was so frustrated! But as I sharpened the knife, it made the preparations much more fun because then I could slice the meat on the first try.

In the same way, we often feel that dull. We keep trying to do the same thing over and over again with the same worn out tools. We don't seem to get anywhere, and it gets frustrating!

We weren't made to live a dull life. In John 10:10, Jesus said, "I have come that you may have life to the full." God desires us to have a full life, but sometimes it takes a little sharpening in order to give life its cutting edge.

Proverbs 27:17 gives insight into how to have a sharper life: "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." Many times, we get so busy with work, responsibilities, and life in general that we eventually isolate ourselves. It is in this isolation that we feel lonely, life becomes boring, and we end up dull. Being around other people that can sharpen, encourage, uplift, share, and help us on our journey can give us the cutting edge we need to live life to the fullest.

Week • Eight

Day 39 - Integrity

Core Value: God looks for men and women of integrity who live holy lives that are accountable to God and to the Body of Christ. Integrity glorifies God, protects us from stumbling, and encourages growth.

Fix this picture firmly in your mind: Jesus, descended from the line of David, raised from the dead. It's what you've heard from me all along. It's what I'm sitting in jail for right now—but God's Word isn't in jail! That's why I stick it out here—so that everyone God calls will get in on the salvation of Christ in all its glory. This is a sure thing:

If we die with him, we'll live with him; If we stick it out with him, we'll rule with him; If we turn our backs on him, he'll turn his back on us; If we give up on him, he does not give up— for there's no way he can be false to himself.

*Repeat these basic essentials over and over to God's people.
— 2 Timothy 2:8-13*

When I begin thinking about integrity, the word character also comes to the mind. Many times these words are used together or in place of one another. The definition for integrity is first this, “adherence to moral and ethical principles; soundness of moral character; honesty.” It comes from the root word, integer – which means whole.

The dictionary defines character as “the combination of qualities that distinguishes one person, group or thing from another.” It is moral or ethical strength, integrity, fortitude, and excellence. Character comes from a Greek word meaning “to engrave, mark or brand.”

I have heard it said that character is how a person acts when no one else is looking. Since we are in the Internet age, I went online to find out who actually said those words. I found that this quote (for lack of a better term) is actually an explanation of a quote from American evangelist and publisher, D.L. Moody. The original quote is this:

“Character is what you are in the dark.”

So if character is what you are in the dark, then integrity will take place when we hold steadfast to that character—even when the world is watching. We do it with our whole heart.

In the marketplace, companies make and spend millions of dollars to make and protect their brands. They want everyone to see them, watch them, and wear them. They fiercely protect that which they have created – for the integrity of the brand. The companies want to make sure the brand is properly treated and shared. They want to know that the first person to buy their creation, and the millionth person, has the same product. It is precious and worthy to the creator.

If we have the character necessary to follow Christ, we wear his brand. How people see us is how they see the brand—Jesus. We need to be fierce about how we share the gospel—not timid. As Christians, we have the brand, not a knock-off that will fall apart in a few weeks. Our God ever loves, is ever gracious, ever forgiving, and ever present in the light and the dark. Our challenge is to live this model of integrity with our whole hearts.

As you seek to be Christian to the Core, ask yourself:

- **What do you find to be the greatest challenges to maintaining integrity?**
- **Who in your life is most impacted by your integrity? How?**

Week • Eight

Day 40 - Integrity

Core Value: God looks for men and women of integrity who live whole lives that are accountable to God and to the Body of Christ. Integrity glorifies God, protects us from stumbling, and encourages growth.

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. — 1 Peter 2:11

As a teenager, I became impressed with my dad in ways that I had never noticed before. One of those “I am impressed” moments came as we drove down the roads near our family farm. My brother and I pointed to houses randomly and my dad told us all about the farmer who lived there, how that farmer knew my dad and grandpa, and what construction job my dad had done for them.

Of the hundreds of houses near my home, my dad had a story for each. Even more, every person we met within a 20-mile radius of my home, knew and loved my dad. He has lived a life of hard work and integrity and has a good name because of it.

Proverbs 22:1 says “a good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.” My father passed down that good name to his children because he went over and beyond the calling to serve the people of our community. He lives a life of integrity that I am thankful to say still has a profound impact on my life today.

Sometimes integrity does not translate well in our society that values the bottom line and quick production. It may even require you to stand-alone. Yet, God takes notice when we live with

