

WEEK 2: EXERCISE #1

Jesus lived a prophetic life. He revealed God in His character, behavior, and teaching. In Jesus, we understand God's nature is to love, His salvation is based on grace, and His heart is for the whole world.

A prophet reveals where God is working to reconcile the world to Himself. They show us truths about God and ourselves we may not have seen on our own. Woven throughout the Old Testament are words, statements, and stories that point toward where God is at work and where He is headed. One such line is embedded in the book of Esther.

Read Esther 4.

In this prophetic word, Mordecai tells Esther she may well have been created for "just such a time as this." She is making her choice about how to respond to a dangerous situation, and God calls her (through Mordecai's word) to join Him where He is already at work. There is an overtone of trust in Mordecai's statement. Deliverance will come. God will redeem His people, if not now then eventually. Her response will determine her place in God's plan.

Mordecai offers sage wisdom. If Esther tries to save her own life, he warns, she'll lose it. If she does not take up the call, God will find someone else. In an act of unusual courage, Esther steps into obedience on the strength of Mordecai's word. She calls for the people to pray and fast, and then to watch for God's time.

Mordecai's word to Esther is an echo of Christ's own words. "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it" (Matt. 16:25). This is a Kingdom principle. Esther risked her life for the assurance of God's favor, and her story inspires us to watch for where God is at work so we can join Him.

Are you prepared to go where you're called?

To whom do you turn for wisdom when you have tough choices to make?

What would you give up in order to follow Jesus?

What would you have a hard time letting go of?

Encounter

Have you experienced a specific call from God on your life? Maybe you heard it early on in your life but never got around to answering it. Maybe you've answered it and are living it out now. Or maybe you are still wrestling with how to respond to God's call.

For you, what does it mean to "go with God"? What do you see as the next step in your faith journey? Spend time journaling this question.

The lyrics of the contemporary song "Hear Us from Heaven" (Jared Anderson) read like a psalm. The words recall the cry of holy people who throughout the ages have called to God on behalf of the world. Find this song online and meditate on the lyrics or, better yet, listen. What does this song inspire in you?

WEEK 2: EXERCISE #2

When a computer is told to save a file, it stores the pages randomly wherever there's space. Every time it is asked to go get that file, it finds all the pages and delivers them to you as one complete file. Over time, through thousands of saved files and deletions, those files become more and more fragmented and the computer becomes slower and slower.

That's why we "defrag" our computers every once in a while. Defragmenting gives the operating system the opportunity to regroup, to put things in order again. And what our computers need, our busy lives need. With countless things vying for our attention daily, our chaotic lives need regular defragging to be effective.

Read Ephesians 4:1–6; Psalm 16:5–11; Philippians 3:10–14.

These Scriptures remind us of the importance of keeping the main thing the main thing. Now that you've read these three passages, read them again, this time underlining words and phrases that focus you on what is most important.

Paul tells the Philippians, "I want to know Christ." Have you ever heard yourself say that? Is knowing Christ a priority in your life? How do you express that desire?

In order for you to focus on knowing Christ, what do you need to set aside?

One way Paul has learned to live that passion is by "forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead." One way to "defrag" is making

peace with past mistakes and memories, so we can confidently go with God. Have you moved past your past yet?

Now reread these three passages one more time, then with these ideas in mind, write out a prayer in your journal that reflects your desire to focus more on Christ.

Encounter

This is an exercise in honesty. Get out your bank statement or checkbook and your calendar. Look back over the last thirty days and ask yourself what these two pieces of your life say about you. What does your spending say about your priorities? What does your calendar say about your priorities? Journal what you see.

In your journal, make two headings at the top of a page: “temporary” and “eternal.” Now, under each heading list of all the things on which you’ve spent money or time that fit into either category. Power bills are necessary but temporary. Giving to a charitable organization or church has an eternal impact. Playing computer games is temporary. Building a healthy relationship with someone has more lasting consequences.

Where in your life could you use a little “defragging,” or regrouping? Where are you encountering Jesus? Journal your experiences.

WEEK 2: EXERCISE #3

Philip was a believer who left Jerusalem to go preach the gospel to the Samaritans. He was successful in Samaria, but God called him away from something that was going well so He could send him down a deserted road to save the soul of one man. Philip found himself on the side of a road just as this Ethiopian man passed by in his chariot.

Read Acts 8:26–40.

The man was a high-ranking official in the Ethiopian government, in charge of the entire treasury. And he was a eunuch (one who has been altered physically in order to give himself completely to whatever work he'd been set apart for). People did not choose to become eunuchs. It was chosen for them. To add insult to injury, eunuchs were not allowed into the Jewish world.

Even though he'd never be allowed into the temple as a eunuch, this man in our story was interested in the Jewish faith. He'd been to Jerusalem and was on his way home when Philip found him. Philip heard him reading the Scripture and asked him if he knew what he was reading. The man looked at the scroll in his lap, then looked at Philip. "How can I understand this, unless someone teaches me?"

Make a list of all the circumstances that seem to have lined up in order for God to reach the heart of this Ethiopian man.

Can you think of a story like this one, of someone who seems to have been led directly into the path of God?

Looking back on your own life, do you see ways that God moved and directed people and circumstances in order to draw you in?

What do you learn about God from this story?

Read Romans 10:14–15.

In your journal, write the following four statements:

1. Preach the gospel where you are.
2. The gospel is both word and deed.
3. Every person deserves a fair account of the gospel. Every person.
4. Search yourself. Make sure nothing stands in the way of someone's salvation.

Now, take a few minutes to meditate on each statement, asking the Spirit of God to speak into your life.

Encounter

Do you have a soft spot for an area of the world, or a people group that's on your heart? Two online resources, Operation World (www.operationworld.org) and Joshua Project (www.joshuaproject.net), can teach you more about areas of the world God might be calling you to learn more about.

Choose one of these sites and go online to look up more about an area of the world or a people group you have an interest in. Learn something about them, then take time today to pray for those who do not yet know Jesus.

WEEK 2: EXERCISE #4

The disciples were intensely curious about the end of time. “Tell us when will this happen and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matt. 24:3). They were always asking for details. When? Where? How? Jesus was constantly redirecting their curiosity to better questions.

Read Matthew 24:36–42.

Verse 36 states a very clear promise: no one knows the day or time except the Father. Spending inordinate time and energy calculating the time of the end is a futile pursuit. Matthew 6:25–27 reminds us to not even worry about our life.

What things are you concerned about that are not in your control?

What exactly has worry accomplished in your life?

Where has doubt kept you from taking steps of faith?

Read Matthew 24:43–44; 2 Timothy 4:2.

Jesus will come at an unexpected time. That is a given. What does it mean to be prepared for His coming?

What does it mean to “be ready in season and out of season”?

Read Matthew 24:45–51.

It was a common practice in Jesus’ day for the master of a house to leave his servant in charge of the home and other servants. In spiritual terms, who is this passage talking about?

Who is being left in charge of the “house”?

Who is asked to be faithful and wise?

In what ways are we able to influence the future?

Encounter

Do you have a five-year plan for your personal life? Professionals often make short- and long-term goals to guide them toward a more successful career. But it doesn't often occur to us to take the same care with our spiritual lives. Do you have a plan for growth in your spiritual life? Where would you like to be—spiritually speaking—six months from now? A year from now? Five years from now? What, if anything, is standing in the way of your reaching that goal? What steps do you need to take in order to get where you want to go?

Journal on these questions, then take time to talk with Jesus about your spiritual goals.

WEEK 2: EXERCISE #5

In the video teaching, we were given these points for reflection:

1. Jesus wants us to learn how to love the Father.
2. Jesus wants us to hold on to faith, so that no one can take our crown.
3. Jesus wants us to spend our time looking for Him *now*, not in the clouds but in every face, in every person, in every circumstance.
Do you have a devotional practice of spending time simply loving the Father?

Read Psalms 96, 98, and 146.

The Psalms teach us how to pray. They show us what an honest hunger for God looks like. They teach us how to respond to spiritual warfare, and they show us how to worship God. Many of the Psalms are outpourings of praise and thanksgiving to God, revealing a deep love for the Father.

If it's true that prayers probably say more about our relationship to God than anything else, then what do your prayers say about your relationship to God?

Encounter

Review the week's exercises. What common themes are emerging? Where did you encounter Jesus this week in the Scriptures? In your devotional moments? Where is God calling you to be faithful? Where is God asking you to take authority? Where is Jesus at work and waiting for you to join Him? Journal these questions.