

PILLAR BASICS: *Grow Your Faith* (4 Session Excerpt)
Establishing the Rhythms of a Growing Christian

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Rhythm 1: STUDYING

Summary: The Scriptures remind us that we are *required* to study God's word and *rewarded* when we do so with sincere hearts. Part of growing as a Christian entails growing intellectually in our understanding of the Bible. Without this sort of study we will lack clarity about how God's truth shapes the rest of our lives. But we do not want to just study the Bible as an intellectual exercise. We want the truths to change our hearts continually as we return time and time again to passages we thought we had fully grasped, only to discover there are new treasures we had missed.

Mark 12:29-30. [29] Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. [30] And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and *with all your mind* and with all your strength.' (ESV)

2 Timothy 3:14-17. [14] But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it [15] and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. [16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and *profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness*, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (ESV)

Acts 2:42. [42] And they *devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching* and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (ESV)

Psalms 119:9-16. [9] How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. [10] With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! [11] I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. [12] Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes! [13] With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. [14] In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. [15] I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. [16] I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word. (ESV)

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

1. Intellectual growth is necessary for us to love God fully. In the first passage above, Jesus includes the idea that we are to love God with our minds. The mind is where we think about ideas and discover new concepts. Study is required for us to wrestle with our understanding of Scripture and integrate the truth we discover into our daily lives.

2. Christians devote themselves to studying Scripture to become thoroughly equipped. The early church immediately committed themselves to learning from the teaching of the Apostles. What was the "apostles' teaching"? It was two things: 1. the explanation of how Jesus had fulfilled the patterns and promises of the Old Testament and 2. how we should now live in light of what He's accomplished. The New Testament preserves the record of the "apostles' teaching" for us to study ourselves. The result is that we can read the Old Testament with the explanation of the New Testament and be thoroughly equipped to live godly lives as we study and apply it.

3. Studying Scripture leads us beyond just thinking about God to knowing His ways experientially. The point is not to pass a written exam about the Bible, but to have our lives purified. The Psalmist speaks with language of experience that is built on a deep knowledge of God's word. Knowing God's ways, remembering His word, and being taught His statutes lead to a pure heart, a delight in God, and new vision for life.

Q. What are three ways you can observe the importance of diligent study emphasized in the passages above? *Write a sentence about each one below.*

BASIC PRACTICES

1. Read the Bible like a book. That may sound strange, but many people read the Bible like taking a dose of vitamins. We are tempted to look for a few verses that may be inspiring or challenging, but never read it for what it is: a library of writings. Make it a regular habit to read large sections in one sitting. Many of the New Testament letters are intended to be read as a whole and it will help you grasp the larger themes if you do not get lost in the trees.

Q. What parts of the Bible do you feel like you understand the best?

Q. What do you find most difficult about studying the Bible?

2. Read the Bible with a notebook. When you read the Bible it can be helpful to write down questions that come up as you read. After you're done, return and try to come up with a reasonable answer to the questions. Then move to using study tools that can help shed light on your questions.

Q. What are some times during the day that you could repurpose/redeem for the sake of studying Scripture?

3. Take advantage of technology to listen to Expository Teaching and Preaching. There is an abundance of solid resources that will allow you to benefit from the study of others and gain a solid grasp on the Bible for yourself.

BEING PURPOSEFUL

1. Pay attention when God's word is being taught. Whether it is during worship on a Sunday morning or in another Bible Study setting, it's important to exercise mental discipline to get the most out of the time.

Q. What helps you pay attention when you're learning? *Write down two focus techniques for use when listening to preaching and teaching.*

2. Study the book that is being preached. Rather than just listening to the sermons on Sundays, read and study the book that is the focus of the current sermon series. Plan to read it several times during the course of the series and share the questions you have with those who are preparing to preach. You can also do the same with past sermon series by listening to sermons provided at www.pillardumfries.com/resources/sermons.

3. Ask a mature Christian what practices have helped them grow in understanding the Bible. Take some time to listen to how others have gained an ability to read and understand the Bible well. Make a plan to sit down with a couple of people that you respect and get ideas that can help you.

Rhythm 2: PRAYING

Summary: Jesus taught his disciples the importance of prayer and provided a model for praying that can help us develop a rich prayer life for ourselves. Many people get caught up in answering the theological questions about how prayer works *and neglect the practice of actually praying*. But Jesus teaches that **it's in the practice of prayer** that we learn and discover its value.

Luke 11:1-13. [1] Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." [2] And he said to them, "When you pray, say:

"Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. [3] Give us each day our daily bread, [4] and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation."

[5] And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, [6] for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; [7] and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? [8] I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. [9] And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. [10] For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. [11] What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; [12] or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? [13] If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (ESV)

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

1. Prayer is based on a sincere invitation to communion with God. Jesus taught his disciples to address God as Father. By doing so, he reminds us about the nurturing heart of God that invites His children to spend time in communication with Him. The heart of prayer is found in opening our inner life in verbal expression to God. Through prayer we worship Him, process experiences and express our dependence on Him through requests. We do all of this from our position of children in His family through the gospel of Jesus.

Q. What are some of the categories we are instructed to consider as we pray? *List the categories found in verses 2-4 above.*

2. Prayer is learned through experience rather than intellectual study. The story in verses 5-10 may seem a little confusing at first. It essentially says the neighbor may not give you what you need because you are his friend, but will do so because of your

willingness to ask with urgency and persistence. Should we conclude that God gives us the things that we beg for? That we can force His hand?

No, that's not the point. Jesus is illustrating how his disciples will learn to pray. They will learn to pray by *persistently pursuing God in prayer about the things that matter*. In doing so, they will see the connection between their prayers and God's provision and learn the Fatherly heart of God.

The one who doesn't ask **won't see** that they have received something from God. The one who doesn't seek **won't have** the experience of finding God's answer. But those who do ask and seek **will experience the connection** and discover the loving heart of the Father.

3. We should pray even if we don't understand how prayer works. Because prayer puts us in communication with God who is far wiser, more powerful, and of greater depth than we are, it can be difficult sometimes to understand the logistics of prayer. That's what we should expect! Think of it this way: most people don't understand how their cell phone can put them in instantaneous contact with people on the other side of the world, but they can still use it. We don't have to understand our phones to make good use of them, and we don't have to understand how prayer works to experience its power.

Q. What's your biggest question about prayer?

BASIC PRACTICES

1. Practice prayer as a discipline. If you find it difficult to make time to pray, don't accept a prayerless life. Like many other important experiences in life, we can simultaneously desire a rich prayer life and lack discipline in growing in it. It's important that we don't fall into the trap of hoping our desires will someday magically change and it will be effortless. Set aside time to devote to prayer until you grow to value it.

Q. What do you believe are your barriers to a prayerful life?

2. Participate in prayer with focus. There may be a number of times that you have opportunity to pray but instead you participate passively. Mealtime or even bedtime prayers don't have to be a ritual you perform just so you can move on to eating or sleeping. Times of prayer in a church service don't have to be polite bookends to our meetings where we feel obliged to acknowledge God. Engage times of prayer with a focused, sincere heart even if you aren't the person vocalizing the prayer.

3. Pray specifically enough to recognize when God has answered. Since prayer is an opportunity to learn God's fatherly heart for us, we should pray for specific things that we can write down and remember over time. Whether you write specific requests down in a journal or use a different method, learn to pray about things with enough clarity *that you can see the ways that God answers over time.*

Q. What are some specific things you want to pray for during this season of your life?

BEING PURPOSEFUL

1. Participate in our corporate prayer times. Each month Pillar Church meets twice to focus on corporate prayer. We meet on the 1st and 3rd Monday of the month at 6:30pm. Experiencing prayer together helps shape the ways that we pray individually. You will find yourself challenged by the sincerity and passion of others whose experience of prayer may be richer and more developed than your own.

Q. Who have you learned the most from in the area of prayer? What is it about their prayer life that has influenced you?

2. Consider taking responsibility for organizing prayer requests for your Life Group. Each Life Group would benefit from someone who advocates for prayer in their group. You can collect important prayer requests, remind the group during the week to pray, and celebrate the ways that God answers.

3. Read a helpful book that can give you ideas for keeping you prayer life fresh. Below are two books we recommend on the subject of prayer.

Praying the Bible, Donald Whitney.
A Praying Life, Paul Miller

Rhythm 6: CONFESSING

Summary: Sin has great power in secrecy. Many people work to overcome their struggles with sin by themselves mainly because they're too ashamed or embarrassed to speak to someone else about them. But *sin thrives in secrecy*. In the body of Christ we are encouraged to confess our sins to one another for prayer and support, knowing that ultimately Christ has removed the shame and guilt. Confession leads to freedom, support, and prayer that will assist anyone who engages in it.

1 John 1:5-2:2. [5] This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. [6] If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. [7] But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. [8] If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. [9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. [10] If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. [2:1] My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. [2] He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (ESV)

James 5:16. [16] Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (ESV)

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

1. Confessing sin to one another removes the false impression that we are alone in our struggle with sin. When we look at the passages above, it's clear that sinful struggles are the reality of *every* Christian. Most of the time we're unaware of this truth because we're looking at one another's lives on the surface. In verse 7, confession is described as walking in the light. This leads to fellowship with one another where we realize we share a common experience in our struggle against sin.

Q. Are there areas of life where you are particularly struggling with sin? What would keep you from confessing them to someone?

2. Confessing sin to one another roots our identity in the gospel. We often want to present ourselves as *spiritually successful* rather than *saved sinners*. When we walk in the light together, it reminds us that our significance is not in our success spiritually but in Christ's cleansing mercy. We are objects of Christ's mercy and affection. He claims us as His own despite our failures. The true story is that our sin is great, but His grace is greater. He is most glorified in us when this is clear. Confession forces us to face our **false image** that we prefer to display and replace it with humility and compassion for others who struggle.

Q. What are some of the good motivations for confession that come from the passages above? *Reflect on them and write down three motivations for confessing sin to one another.*

3. Confessing sin to one another leads us to experience the cleansing power of the gospel. According to the above passage, confession is one of the ways our hearts are practically cleansed by the gospel's power. Confession helps us to apply the medicine, so to speak, to our real weaknesses and wounds of the soul. It leads to more specific prayers for victory and allows other godly people to pray for us fervently.

BASIC PRACTICES

1. Establish relationships with other Christians where confession can take place.

Confessing sin to one another is best done in a relationship of mutual commitment to growth in Christ. We want to find people who trust in the gospel's power and learn to live honest lives together without hiding our sin. We don't need to broadcast our struggles to everyone, but we do have a responsibility to build a circle of people who know us and can challenge us.

Q. Who do you have in your life currently that fits the description above? Are they present in your life or easily kept at a distance?

2. Establish a pattern of transparency with other Christians. It's easy to fall into a pattern of fake relationships. Resist the temptation to put on an act around other Christians. It doesn't benefit anyone when we all pretend to be doing "just fine," *while secretly discouraged in battling temptation*. If we will just be transparent, others will eventually feel that freedom too. They will benefit from walking in the light in the body of Christ. The key is that we regularly pray for one another, guard one another, and keep our hearts free from self-righteousness by dwelling on the gospel for ourselves.

3. Tell your church leaders where you need specific grow. Church leaders are committed to helping people grow in areas of need. They are also best positioned to know the resources to help with specific problems.

BEING PURPOSEFUL

1. Involve yourself in a Life Group or some other setting where you can establish relationships of trust. Staying on the fringe will *not* lead to real relationships. At Pillar, there are multiple environments where you can find people to grow with where confession of sin is normal.

Q. Are you involved in any groups where transparent relationships can form?

2. Make confession a structured part of meeting with other Christians rather than an exception. For example, as you go through this study, make confession a regular part of your time together. Ask the hard questions. “Is there any sin in your life that needs confession? How can I pray for you and your temptations?” When we don’t plan to make space for these conversations, it actually makes it more difficult to shift gears and bring it up.

Q. What are some questions you could ask one another regularly for a spiritual checkup?

Rhythm 8: EVANGELIZING

Summary: We cannot keep the gospel of Jesus to ourselves. No matter what challenges may exist in sharing it, the gospel is the power of God for our Salvation and the Salvation of others. Jesus has commissioned us to share it and without it people cannot call on the Lord for Salvation. We who have received this gift from God are now commissioned to carry it to others and called to go to great lengths to do so.

Matthew 28:18-20. [18] And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (ESV)

Romans 10:10-17. [10] For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. [11] For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” [12] For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. [13] For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” [14] How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? [15] 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!” [16] But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” [17] So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (ESV)

1 Corinthians 9:19-23. [19] For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. [20] To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. [21] To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. [22] To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. [23] I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. (ESV)

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

1. We have been given the task to carry the gospel to those who have not yet believed. The first passage above is commonly known as the Great Commission. In it Jesus instructs His people to go and make disciples of those who have not yet heard and believed. It is a task that calls for *effort on our part* to join God in the mission. This mission is reconciling lost people to God by announcing the good news that Jesus has brought us peace with God. Evangelizing means “announcing this good news” and helping others know and follow Christ by faith.

Q. What do you find most difficult about sharing the gospel with people? Have you ever shared your faith with someone?

2. We must be active in sharing the gospel if people are going to hear it and be saved.

In Romans 10:13 (above) we hear the good news that anyone who calls on the name of the Lord can be saved from their sin and brought into the riches of God's grace through faith in Jesus.

Next, the passage reminds us that to call on the Lord, one must hear and understand the good news of Jesus. In order for one to hear this good news, *we must preach it* (not just formally but in informal conversation). If we're going to preach it, we're going to have to go where they are. People hearing the gospel and calling on the name of the Lord will not happen by *accident* and we are the people assigned to actively pursue others with this message.

Q. Do you believe that many of the people in your community have a clear understanding of the gospel? What misconceptions do you think non-Christians have about Christianity?

3. We're instructed to adjust our lives to meet people where they're at in sharing the gospel. In case we've missed how important the task of evangelizing others is, the Apostle Paul describes his effort in 1 Corinthians 9. He tells us that he's made huge adjustments to his life to fit in many different settings to offer a meaningful witness to the work of Christ.

The heart of his instruction is summed up when he exclaims, "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some." Paul strips himself of his own preferences and enters into the lives of others in meaningful ways for the advancement of the gospel. That is the example we are to follow!

Q. What would it look like for you to become "all things to all people"? What are some of the adjustments you would need to make to enter into more meaningful conversation with non-Christians?

BASIC PRACTICES

1. Pray specifically for God to use you in evangelism. We need to pray specifically for *opportunities to share the gospel* and for the *boldness* to step out and have the conversation. We also need to pray specifically for the people God has placed in our lives; they are the best starting point for evangelism. Don't forget that the power and authority of the message come from Christ. We're not alone in our efforts to share the gospel; we're accompanied by the power and work of the Holy Spirit.

Q: Have you ever prayed specifically, "God use me to bring (insert name) to you?"

2. Prepare yourself with gospel knowledge and conversation tactics. Many people have a weak grasp of the gospel. They can recognize it when someone else is explaining it, but they cannot explain it themselves. Others have a good grasp on the gospel, but are easily shut down in conversation from lack of confidence and experience in conversing with others about challenging topics. Learning to explain the gospel effectively is critical. Also, learning good conversation tactics will help you maneuver in conversations and put others at ease when you dialogue.

Q. What are common ways people shut down conversations about faith and make it difficult to share the gospel effectively?

3. Position yourself for gospel sharing by being involved in the lives of non-Christians. Over time, many Christians surround themselves more and more with other Christians. *Eventually they are not positioned to interact with people who don't know Christ* and so have very few opportunities to share their faith. If that is you, it will be important to think about how you can make adjustments to your life and reposition it for the sake of the gospel.

Q: What are the names of three people you interact with regularly that you can begin to pray for and share the gospel with?

BEING PURPOSEFUL

1. Participate in church outreach events and purposefully connect with non-Christians. Our church does multiple outreach events throughout the year that serve the community in meaningful ways. For the events to be fruitful we need to go beyond having logistical volunteers. We need more people who will come to the events and *use the opportunity to connect with the people there and share the gospel.*

2. Make a strategy in your Life Group to reach out to people in the neighborhood where you meet. Sometimes the mission feels so large, we feel paralyzed. As a Life Group, it can be a community effort to learn how to meet people in the neighborhood and figure out how to share the gospel with them. Learn together and use regular time in your gatherings to strategize together.

3. Learn the names of as many of your neighbors as possible and begin to pray for their Salvation. Keep a journal or chart of your block and write names down. Commit to praying for them and building into their lives. Ask God regularly to open opportunities to share the gospel with them.

Q. What are the names of some of your neighbors?

4. Watch *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* by Greg Koukl on RightNow Media.