

Week 2 | DAY 1 - Why Do We Struggle?

Memory Verse:

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. John 15:12

PREPARE: Ask God to help you to put away all distractions and spend some time acknowledging or worshipping the all-powerful, Holy God.

Why do so many people struggle spending time with God?

To answer this question, I want to ask a series of questions that will lead to understand our struggle. Before we get too far, I want to remind us that Jesus has commanded us to Abide in Him, the Vine. We can only abide in Him if we get to know Him by spending time with Him. There is no way that we can love others or be obedient to his commands unless we are Abiding in Him.

Question #1 DOES A CHRISTIAN WANT TO SIN?

I have thought about this and at first answered, "Yes, it is tempting because we want to do the sin." I am even reminded of James 1:14 when he says that we are tempted when we are lured and enticed by our own desire. But then I began to think about how sin makes me feel. I am ashamed and convicted. So, the sin that I thought that I wanted, in the end, led only to disappointment.

ANSWER: NO! A Christian doesn't really want to sin

Question #2 DOES A CHRISTIAN HAVE TO SIN?

Read Romans 6:6-7 We know that our old self was crucified with him **in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing**, so that we would **no longer be enslaved to sin**.⁷ For one who has died has been set free^[b] from sin.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and **he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability**, but with the temptation he will also provide the **way of escape**, that you may be able to endure it.

In 2 Peter 1:3 we are reminded that God has given us (granted) everything needed for Godliness. He has provided a way of escape and has set us free from the power of sin.

ANSWER: NO! A Christian does not have to sin

Question #3 WHY DO WE SIN?

John 14:15 if you love me you will obey my commandments.

I always heard it: if you love me, YOU BETTER obey my commandments. If we read the verse this way, then we will be tempted to see Christianity as just a big list of dos and don'ts. But Jesus said, "If you LOVE me, you will keep my commands."

ANSWER: You sin because YOU DON'T LOVE GOD

It is not that you do not love God at all. You wouldn't be reading this devotional if you didn't at least want to learn some about Him and live for Him. But do you love Him enough to do what He has planned for you?

If you do not LOVE God very much, it is because you do not KNOW him very well. You cannot get to know God and not love everything about Him. If you don't KNOW Him, it is because you do not spend time with Him. If you do not spend time with Him, it is because you do not see the NEED to spend the time.

Week 2 | DAY 1 - Why Do We Struggle? Cont.

1. Has it been a priority in your life to make time to spend with God? Why?

2. Would you agree that you do not love God enough to obey Him completely? How can you grow in this area?

3. What do you think God would like for you to commit to start doing or stop doing?

Write down some thoughts in your journal about what God is showing you.

Week 2 | DAY 2 - I CAN DO IT MYSELF

Memory Verse:

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. John 15:12

PREPARE: Ask God to help you to put away all distractions and spend some time acknowledging or worshipping Him as the all-powerful, Holy God. He is deserving of your worship and attention.

READ: James 4:4-10

If you do not love God very much, it is because you do not KNOW him very well. You cannot get to know God and not love everything about Him. If you don't KNOW Him, it is because you do not spend time with Him. If you do not spend time with Him, it is because you do not see the NEED.

If you do not see a need to spend time with God, it is because you are trusting in yourself. Pride says, "I don't need God". For you and I rush out each day on our own, without spending quality time with God, we are saying, with our actions, "I've got this. I can do this on my own."

God opposes the PROUD but gives GRACE to the HUMBLE

James 4:6

I can remember when our girls were little. I would be ready to leave the house and one of the girls would not have their shoes on. "Get over here and let's get your shoes on" I would insist. "I can do it myself", she would respond independently (pray for me as I deal with these 4 hard-headed females). Sure enough, in the midst of my impatience, I would hear, "Dad I need you." So, I would grab her up into my lap and get her hands in mine and say out loud each step to tie her own shoes, as I tie each shoe.

She would run out to the car so proud and exclaim, "Mom, look I tied my shoes!" I knew full well that I had tied her shoes, but she was so excited to be a part of what had taken place.

In the same way, God is ready for us to say, "DAD, I NEED YOU." Then, surrender to His will, allow Him to empower our lips, hands, thoughts, so that when God moves, we can be so excited that we were a part of what had taken place.

We need the grace of God to live through us moment by moment. We will only see the need to get to know him when we realize that we cannot live this life without His grace and power. It is then that we will see the need to get to know Him better. It is in the getting to know Him that we will begin to love Him enough to live a life of obedience.

1. In what areas do you struggle letting go of control: Pride?

2. Why do you think that God opposes the proud?

Spend some time asking God to show you how you can trust Him more. Ask Him to help you to see the areas that you are prideful. Write these down in your journal.

Week 2 | DAY 3 - God's Role #1 - Takes Away or Lifts Up

Memory Verse:

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. John 15:12

PREPARE: Ask God to help you to put away all distractions and spend some time acknowledging or worshipping Him as the all-powerful, Holy God. He is deserving of your worship and attention.

READ: John 15:1-2; Luke 15

God is the vinedresser and He has a very important role to play in making sure that the vineyard is full of fruit. John 15:2 says that the vinedresser will take the branches that do not bear fruit and takes them away. This could be referring to people like Judas who was among them but had no fruit, so God removed him. God will separate the people in the last days. In Matthew 25, It says that he will separate the sheep (true followers of Christ) from the goats (people who have not followed Christ).

Another way that some translate the "takes away" from verse 2 is to lift them up.

I recently read a story about a man who interviewed an owner of a vineyard.

"New branches have a natural tendency to trail down and grow along the ground," he explained. "But they don't bear fruit down there. When branches grow along the ground the leaves get coated in dust. When it rains, they get muddy and mildewed. The branch becomes sick and useless." "What do you do?" I asked. "Cut it off and throw it away?" "Oh no!" he exclaimed. "The branch is much too valuable for that. We go through the vineyard with a bucket of water looking for those branches. We lift them up and wash them off. Then we wrap them around the trellis or tie them up. Pretty soon they're thriving."

Maybe you are struggling right now in life and you are not bearing fruit. Are you weary? Do you feel like God has given up on you? Have you had a season where there has seemed to be little fruit? The Father is graciously looking for you to clean you off and raise you up so that you can bear fruit.

This is a similar picture to the three parables in Luke 15 of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. I love the thought that we have a Father who would leave the 99 to find the lost sheep, tear through the house looking for the lost coin, and stand waiting to throw a party for the return of the lost son.

Do you know for sure that you have given your life to Christ? If not, Surrender it to Him right now. He loves you and has made a way for you to know Him.

1. Is God showing you that you need to allow Him to do some cleaning up and some lifting so that you can bear fruit?
2. In what areas of your life have you allowed to interfere in your relationship with God?

3. What is something that you can do to make sure that you are thinking about and walking with the Lord throughout the day?

Write in your journal about how you have experienced the Lord lift you up out of the dirt and mud, or how you are seeking His power to lift you right now.

Week 2 | DAY 4– God’s Role #2-Prune/Discipline

Memory Verse:

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. John 15:12

PREPARE: Ask God to help you to put away all distractions and spend some time acknowledging or worshipping Him as the all-powerful, Holy God. Be reminded that He is at work in your life right now.

READ: John 15:1-2; Romans 8:28-29; Hebrews 12:3-11

God’s second role as the vinedresser is to continually remove the things that keep us from bearing more Fruit. Pruning brings a clear picture of cutting away the unwanted or unneeded things from the branch. If the vinedresser sees something that will hinder growth or health of the fruit, He gladly cuts it away.

In the same way, wouldn’t it be the most loving thing that God can do for us, to cut away the things that hinder fruit in our lives. In John 15:11, Jesus tells us about His motive for this lesson. He says, “I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full.” Jesus desires for you and I to experience the joy that can only come from realizing that God has allowed you to be a part of what He is doing in the lives of people all over the world. You get to KNOW God and walk in His power. What could be better?

God seeks to prune the overgrowth of laziness, complacency, negative self-talk, selfishness and impatience. He prunes off fear, doubt, and belief that we are incapable of doing what He asks, by placing us in situations where we are forced to rely on Him. God knows “the plans He has for us, plans to prosper us and not to harm us, plans to give us hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11). Those plans require God to prune us from things, people, and ways of thinking that are blocking us from operating in the purpose He has for our lives. Our job is to allow God to do His work within us so that we can produce fruit for His Kingdom abundantly.

Pruning can hurt. It can be no fun in the moment. We can count on the pruning being for our good and for our joy (Romans 8:28-29). James 1 even challenges us to count it all joy when we face trials because it will develop our faith. In other words, it will drive us to a closer, more intimate walk with the Father. Discipline and pruning are hard but I am so thankful that we have a God who loves us enough to lead us to His joy.

1. How have you wrongly viewed pruning or trials in the past?

2. What do you think that God is seeking to remove in your life so that you can bear more fruit? Do you believe that it is for your good?

3. If God opposes the proud, how have you been letting Him know about your need for Him?

Write in your journal about how the Lord is showing you to surrender to His plan and will.

Week 2 | DAY 5 - Obedience

Memory Verse:

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. John 15:12

PREPARE: Ask God to help you to put away all distractions and spend some time acknowledging or worshipping Him as the all-powerful, Holy God. He knows all things and has chosen to make Himself known to you.

READ: John 15:8-14

John 15:9-10, *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.”*

Too often we miss the heart of God when he calls us to obedience. Jesus illustrates here that he lived his life showing the love he was shown by his Father. He lived his life in obedience to God out of the overflow of His relationship with the Father, not out of obligation. And Jesus simply asks us to do the same. He invites us into the process of receiving and giving love as the foundation of our life that we might abide in the depth of relationship with our heavenly Father as he did.

In Luke 10:27, Jesus states the greatest commandments, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.”*

How incredible is the heart of our God that he doesn’t call us to a lifestyle of obligation or undesired sacrifice, but a lifestyle in which we show the vast love we’ve been shown in Christ to all the earth. God doesn’t merely set rules before you but the relationship as the goal. He’s after your heart totally and completely.

In a world wrapped up in a self-seeking, self-satisfying agenda, God sets us free to step outside of the burden of ourselves and frees us to allow Him to love through us. In a world wrought with the weight of pride, God pours out his unceasing, selfless love which has the power to transform us into children who abide in our heavenly Father. If we will choose to abide with Jesus, He will seek to obey the commandments and love wholeheartedly through us. We will experience the abundant life only those who abide in God can obtain.

So, abide in God’s commandments today. Choose to live a lifestyle of wholehearted love of God and others. Choose to live in obedience to God in response to his amazing love. And discover the power, purpose, and freedom that comes from ministering to others with the very love you’ve been shown in Christ.

1. In what areas of your life are you being disobedient to the command to love others and make disciples?

2. As you get to know God your faith will grow. How can you continue to get to know Him?

3. How can you abide throughout the day today?

In your journal, write down how God is asking you to be obedient.

Week 2 | DAY 6– To Love God Is To Love People

Memory Verse:

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. John 15:12

PREPARE: Ask God to help you to put away all distractions and spend some time in His presence. Praise Him for His love and forgiveness. Thank Him for allowing you to be in His presence. The veil is torn.

READ: John 15:12-17; Matthew 5:21-24

I want you to see something. Starting in John 13:1 Jesus begins a conversation with His disciples that would stretch over several hours. He would wash their feet, try to teach and prepare them for what would happen in the days to come, institute the Lord's Supper, and teach them about the Holy Spirit that would come when He leaves. Then He takes them to the Garden of Gethsemane where we come to the vine and the branch teaching.

Let's look to see a common thread of teaching. Grab your Bible

- John 13:14-15 Jesus washes their feet and instructs them to do the same for each other.
- John 13:20 Jesus tells them that when they receive someone sent by Him, they receive Jesus.
- John 13:34-35 A new commandment- LOVE ONE ANOTHER- By this the world will know you are my Disciples.
- John 14:15 If you love me you will keep my Commands
- John 14:21 Keep my commands and I will manifest myself
- John 14:23 If he keeps my commands I will make my home with him.
- John 15:10 Keep my commands you will abide in my love
- John 15:12 THIS IS MY COMMANDMENT THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER.
- John 15:14 You are my friend if you do what I command
- John 15:17 these things I command you so that you will love one another.

When we gave our lives to Christ, He said that we are a new creation. Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born again (John 3). You have been reborn into a new family. We are the family of God.

Lindsey and I got married on June 7, 2003. We just celebrated 18 years. No one warned me that when you marry someone, you also get their family. Her crazy uncle Don became my crazy uncle. Her family dynamics cross contaminated with my family. (I am totally kidding! God has seriously blessed me. Lindsey's family is awesome! Even Don. She is the one who got the crazies.)

I point this out only to say that your FAITH FAMILY here at FBC SKIATOOK, is diverse and a little crazy at times, but we are family. Jesus has encouraged His disciples to love one another. They were diverse and crazy as well. They probably were very cautious about letting Peter carry a sword after the garden experience (It was quite an ear-y event).

Jesus told them that their love for one another would be proof to the world that they were of Him. He said in John 15:12, "This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you." The "as I have loved you" really frightens me. How can I love you to the measure that Jesus did? You will be hard to love to that measure. That is why I will need to abide in the Vine. To love in the same way that Jesus does, I will need His grace and power to love through me.

Week 2 | DAY 6– To Love God Is To Love People cont.

Now think about your faith family (church). Do you have someone that you are having a hard time loving or forgiving. I believe that you cannot have an intimate relationship with God and at the same time have a problem with a brother or sister. This will require faith, but you need to go to them in love. This is what Jesus modeled and commanded.

Jesus said that when we come to church and offer our praises and prayers to God and remember that we have a brother or sister that we have a problem with, we must leave and go be reconciled to them (Matthew 5:21-24).

1. Ask God to give you the courage and love for Him to obey His command to go and be reconciled to your brother or sister.

2. Who are you having a hard time loving? How can you show love to them?

3. Spend some time thanking God for the family that he has given you. If God lays someone on your heart, shoot them an encouragement and let them know that you are thankful for them. (RIGHT NOW! Send them a text or give them a call)

Write down some people who have greatly impacted your life. Ask the Lord to show you someone that you can be an encouragement to.