ABIDE

Everyday practices for staying close to Jesus

by slowing down



Book 6

Entering his rest

Soma family, in this last book of the Abide series, we return to what we call the "slow-down practices" of a disciple. In our busy and frenetic world, it can feel especially challenging to slow down and to do so with a holy purpose. We spend more time with our faces illuminated by little rectangular screens than by the glory of God. The diabolical pull of myriad distractions is hard to overcome.

But be encouraged: his Word will not return void, and he who began a good work in you will see it to completion (Isaiah 55:11; Philippians 1:6). As you engage these habits of grace, expect to meet with God, be changed by him, and build some holy patterns into your life.

Remember, we've downplayed the term "spiritual disciplines" in favor of phrases like "habits of grace" or "spiritual practices." Jesus said that the work of God is to believe in the one he has sent (John 6:29). What we discipline ourselves to do, then, is believe in Jesus—that makes repentance and faith the true spiritual disciplines, and that's what we work hard to do. When we start losing our habits of prayer, meditation, Scripture reading, etc., we don't just try harder. What we work at and discipline ourselves to do is repent and believe. You see, we don't need to discipline ourselves to spend time with Jesus. We need to repent of the fact that we don't think we need Jesus, and we need to believe that he is the vine who provides all our spiritual nourishment and that we are dead without him. Then, our spiritual practices are not something we make ourselves do, but the vehicle through which we experience grace and Jesus himself. Then, our spiritual practices are something we long to do and that we enjoy.

That's the heart behind this whole series and its name, Abide. These guides are about the foundational, everyday practices that keep us close to Jesus—prayer, Scripture, and slowing down. They are how branches stay connected to the vine. Whether you are brand new to following Jesus or have walked with him for decades, these practices never expire; we simply grow deeper into them.

During the next four weeks, we'll be looking at two good gifts that God has given us for a life closely connected to him that most of us rarely appropriate. We are even sometimes a little afraid of them. Hopefully, as we look at Scripture together, we'll see them more like God intends, clear up some misconceptions, and begin to experience his love and grace through them. The first is Sabbath, which as we'll see is so much more than rest one day a week. The second is solitude, a practice we see in the gospels that seems critical to Jesus' life and work. May the Father bring deep rest to our souls in the next few weeks and prepare us for a lifetime of regularly entering into his rest.

Save the date

Start planning ahead now to take some time of solitude near the very end of these four weeks. Ideally, it will be a whole day, but it could also be a few hours. That will likely take some coordination and intentionality. Blocking off some time in your calendar now and protecting it will make it more likely to happen. Doing it on Day 7 of Week Four would be perfect if that works for you. By God's grace, that time of solitude will be the culmination of this Abide series—and the beginning of the next season of growth.

How to use this guide

This little booklet is your guide for the next four weeks. Keep it with your Bible, write down what you are learning, and bring what you're hearing into your conversations with the church family.

Three practices, two journeys

The Abide series is six small books—three everyday practices for staying close to Jesus, each visited twice:

	Prayer	**Scripture**	**Slow Down**
First Journey Books 1–3	**Book 1** Meditation & the 3Rs of prayer	**Book 2** The Gospel of John—Observe, Interpret, Apply	**Book 3** Silence & fasting
Second Journey Books 4–6	**Book 4** The Circles & Cycles of prayer	**Book 5** John again—the I-am statements	**Book 6 — *this book*** Sabbath & solitude

Read the books in order and you'll walk through all three practices twice. Want to focus on one practice? Follow its column. If you're new, any book in the First Journey row is a good place to start. And remember, these practices never expire—coming back to any of these books, any time, is simply growing deeper.

Every morning

Plan for at least 10 minutes. Even if you are not a "morning person," there is something significant about putting the Father first in the morning just like we see Jesus often doing in the gospels. You'll probably need to set your alarm a tad earlier. Grab a Bible—a real, physical, paper Bible is ideal. Our phones and computers come with many

distractions that we can avoid by going old-school. Find a quiet spot—especially for these practices, having a space without distraction is important. Have a pen handy. You may also want a journal or notebook if you prefer writing there.

On your own or together

This book works on its own—just you, a Bible, and a few minutes each morning. But discipleship is a community project, so it's even better with others.

Each week ends with conversation starters for a DNA group and for a Missional Community. If you're going through the book with either one, use those pages when you gather. And if you're on your own, don't skip them—let them prompt your journaling, or borrow one for a conversation with a friend who loves Jesus. These practices are personal, but they were never meant to be private.

However you go through it, bring what you're learning when the church family gathers. Stories of God meeting people in these practices encourage the whole body.

DNA groups

DNA stands for Discover, Nurture, Act—it's a very small group of men or women (usually three or four) who discover Jesus together through the Bible, nurture one another with the gospel, and help each other act in ways that line up with Jesus' teaching. If you'd like to join one, talk to your Missional Community leaders or one of the elders.

Missional Communities

Missional Communities are the primary way we follow Jesus' command to make disciples, living out what it means to be a good family of brothers and sisters, to serve like Jesus served, and be missionaries to our neighborhoods. If you're not yet a part of one, ask an elder or whoever you know best in the church to help get you connected.

Planning

At the end of Weeks One and Two, you'll see a page for a Sabbath Plan, and at the very end a Solitude Plan. As you learn about these spiritual practices, use these pages to jot down ideas for how you personally want to engage them.

We hope you use this guide every day.

Week One

As Christians today, we are not required to keep the Sabbath laws given to the nation of Israel exactly (we'll look more at why next week), but the Sabbath is so significant for the people of God we'd be foolish to ignore it. There is gold in the principles of the Sabbath that we get to mine and enjoy this week.

We will read many passages from Exodus, observing and interpreting what they say about the Sabbath. Along the way, you'll work out how to apply these to a personal time of Sabbath on Day 7—for many, that's a Saturday, but of course you may need to choose a different day.

You won't see a list of do's and don'ts for the Sabbath. This is an exercise where you get to put the skills you've learned into practice. But you're not alone—you'll see some Sabbath guidance here, and your MC and DNA group are there to help you apply the Scripture to everyday life—that's what discipleship is all about.

Day 1

We begin looking at the Sabbath not in Genesis but in Exodus, where the word Sabbath is used for the first time in the Bible. We'll follow the timeline of how the average Israelite might have experienced the Sabbath.

Read Exodus 16

The people say that in Egypt they "sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full." Leisure, pots of meat, and full bellies? Really? That doesn't sound like the life of a slave. In Egypt, they were crying out to God to save them. Now, only one month after a spectacular and supernatural rescue from Egypt, they grumble and accuse God of planning genocide.

But God shows mercy, and knowing their needs he graciously gives them more than what they ask for: he gave them not only manna, but also he gave them Sabbath rest.

How is the Sabbath a good gift to the people of Israel in addition to miraculous food?

Why do you think Sabbath is introduced alongside manna? What's the connection?

Day 2

In Egypt, the Israelites were slaves. Their worth was probably measured in how many bricks they could produce. Not enough, and they were punished. Brick after brick, these people had it instilled in them that their worth came from their output. As slaves they probably didn't get many days off. It's just a month from when they were making bricks. Read with that in mind.

Read Exodus 16:22–31

How might it have felt for the people of God to get a day without work? Contrast God as king with Pharaoh. What do we learn about God's character from this story?

Spend some time meditating on these things. Let it warm your heart...

Planning for Sabbath

Begin thinking about how you can take some Sabbath time this week—ideally a whole day. Decide what day it will be, and look ahead at the "Planning for Sabbath" sections. You may need to do some things now to free up the time to rest with God that day. If you live with others, begin a conversation with them about the impact of a Sabbath.

There's a page at the end of the week for you to write down ideas for your Sabbath.

Day 3

After about a month of truly practicing this seventh-day rest along with the miraculous manna, Israel gets to Mount Sinai. Picture this: The Lord descended onto the mountaintop in fire. The mountain is blanketed in a thick cloud of smoke. The ground is shaking and the air is filled with bright flashes of light, thunderclaps, and mysterious trumpet sounds blasting through the smoke. And then… God speaks to them all.

Read Exodus 20:1–21 (verses 8–11 are about the Sabbath)

Put yourself in the shoes of one of these Israelites. How might your experience of the Sabbath so far affect hearing the command to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy?

Planning for Sabbath

Generally, avoiding digital devices on a Sabbath is a wise move. Challenge yourself in this. If the thought of not being connected for a day is troubling, that may be a sign you really do need to unplug.

However, there is one highly recommended option that is digital: The Bible Project has a great podcast series about the Sabbath. Making the time and listening to one or more of these could be a great way to find solemn rest and reinforce what you're learning. To do this, consider downloading the podcasts ahead of time, putting your phone in Do-Not-Disturb mode, and turning off wifi as you listen. https://bibleproject.com/podcast/series/7th-day-rest-sabbath

Day 4

As part of the instructions for the tabernacle, the Lord speaks to Moses again about the Sabbath.

Read Exodus 31:12–18

List all the reasons or purposes for the Sabbath that you've seen so far in the book of Exodus. What does the Sabbath teach us about God?

Planning for Sabbath

The word Sabbath means stop or cease. What would it look like for you to stop work and rest? For some people, a task like washing the dishes or exercise can be meditative, but for others it feels like work. Be sure to not fill your day with distractions—it should be a day colored by rest and time with God. How you spend the beginning might be key...

Day 5

We've seen the connection of Sabbath to the seventh day of creation where God rested. But it's not a rest because he was tired. It's the rest that comes after finishing the work. The rest where God inhabits the place he has made in a close relationship with his people. In this long passage of Exodus for today, the Lord gives instructions for the tabernacle, and we see the implementation of those instructions. We'll skip the tragic interruption of the golden calf incident in chapters 32–34. This entire section has a Sabbatical "shape" to it. See if you pick up on it as you skim.

Skim Exodus 25–31 & 35–40

All of God's instructions to Moses about how to build the tabernacle are broken up into seven sections which all begin with, "The Lord said to Moses..." And surprise, the seventh one is about the Sabbath—we read it yesterday in chapter 31. And in chapter 35, when Moses gets everyone together and says, "These are the things that the LORD has commanded you to do," the very first part is about the Sabbath, picking up right where the text left off. The rest is about building the tabernacle. Once God is done with the work, through Moses and the craftsmen (the first people said to be filled with the Spirit of God), the glory of the Lord comes and fills the tabernacle. God is living closely with his people on the Sabbath once again, just like in the garden.

Pray asking the Lord how he wants you to find rest in him this week.

Planning for Sabbath

Jot down what comes to mind as you pray.

Consider how you might start and end your Sabbath time, and what you might do at intervals to remind yourself that it's not only a day off, but a day of rest with the Father. For instance, maybe you bookend your time reading and meditating on Psalm 92 (a song for the Sabbath), listen to a Bible Project podcast in the middle, and set a couple reminders to pray in between.

Day 6

Today, think about all you've learned or been reminded of this week about the Sabbath and pray with the 3Rs pattern.

In prayer, Rejoice, Repent, and Request.

You might...

Rejoice in the character of God revealed through the Sabbath. Repent of how you've looked elsewhere for the rest your soul needs. Request the Father show you how to take some special time to rest with him this week.

Planning for Sabbath

Finalize the plan for your Sabbath. What will you do? What will you not do? How will it be a solemn rest before the Lord?

And if you haven't already, talk with others about how you plan to apply what you've been learning. Let them affirm and challenge your interpretation and application. God has put us in a community where others also have the Holy Spirit so that we build each other up in love.

Day 7

Take time today to Sabbath, to stop from regular work and take solemn rest with the Father who loves you far more than anyone can comprehend. Enjoy it.

Maybe you've planned to read some Scripture, have a long relaxed meal with family, play a game, turn off your phone, pray, take an afternoon nap... Maybe it's the whole day or just the evening.

Your Sabbath time is also a great opportunity to go back and read, meditate, and pray through any days you may have missed this week.

Read Psalm 92 if you need a relevant passage for today.

It has been sung or read on the Sabbath for thousands of years.

Sabbath Plan

Start time: _____ Date: _____ End time: _____

Jot down some of your key thoughts from this week about how you want to spend your Sabbath. Maybe list the things you will do and not do. When will it start and end? How will this day be a day of solemn rest to the Lord?

These blank lines look so sad and empty. Fill them with your plan.

For your DNA group

Going through this book with your DNA group? When you gather, don't wait—within the first five minutes, get talking about your experience learning about the Sabbath.

Discuss how you plan to apply what you are learning about the Sabbath this week. Go over your plans with one another, challenge and help each other to find rest in the Lord.

For your Missional Community

If your MC is in this book together, bring these to your gathering:

Watch the Bible Project video about the Sabbath together. https://bibleproject.com/videos/sabbath-video

What stands out to you from this video?

Why might we want to engage in this ancient practice today?

Week Two

Last week we focused on the Sabbath in the book of Exodus. This week we'll trace the theme of the Sabbath from the first page of the Bible to the last. The concept of Sabbath is profound and woven into the fabric of the biblical narrative in rich ways that culminate in Jesus.

Day 1

When God creates the Garden of Eden and rests there on the seventh day, there is both the act of resting and a resting place. This is not a rest as if God needed a nap after all that hard work. This is the rest of delight and triumph, a king sitting on his throne enjoying his kingdom. This is a rest of intimacy and connection with his creation. Pay special attention to the phrase, "And there was evening and there was morning..." It appears in this passage and also concludes all the preceding days of creation.

Read Genesis 1:26–2:3

First, consider that the biblical concept of a day begins with evening, not with morning like the way we typically think about it. What significance do you think that might have?

Second, consider that on Day Six, humans were created as the culmination of creation—the point at which it is "very good" and God's work is complete. What do they do on their first full day of life beginning with that evening?

Third, notice that every day ends with the line about evening and morning except the seventh day. It's as if it has no end. Why do you think that is?

Day 2

In case you missed yesterday's reading and meditation, go back and take a look at that first.

The book of Genesis has traditionally been ascribed to Moses as author, and there's good evidence to believe that's probable. That means Moses would have written it during the 40 years Israel spent in the wilderness before his death. Some may have known the Genesis story through oral tradition, but the first time all the people of Israel heard these Scriptures read aloud about the creation of the world would have been after their experience of manna from heaven, after practicing the Sabbath and receiving the command to keep it.

Read Genesis 2–3

It seems like seventh-day rest was supposed to be the permanent state—God and humans together sharing in everlasting joy. But Adam and Eve violated that intention and lost their direct access to God and his rest. Meditate on how the original hearers of this story might have understood this.

Some may have concluded God was now restoring the Sabbath rest that was lost so long ago. They were now experiencing seventh-day Sabbath rest in the wilderness. They were on the way to a promised land that hinted of that first garden—a land of rest, a sabbatical land. God was their king and so unlike Pharaoh. God was now resting among his people again, filling the tabernacle.

However, they were in the wilderness. Their experience is a modern-day metaphor for hard times. Having no permanent home, traveling for decades through barren land would have been a tremendous trial. Surely, they could relate to Adam and Eve's east-of-Eden experience.

Though they longed for a lasting Sabbath rest and intimacy with God, it may have seemed out of reach. They must have been tempted to manufacture counterfeit rest.

How do you relate to these possible views of Sabbath rest?

Planning for Sabbath

Start thinking about how you can take some Sabbath time this week again. Consider how it went last week, and what changes you might want to make and what you want to keep.

There's another Sabbath Plan page at the end of this week, but of course, you can use last week's if that's easier.

Day 3

We're beginning to see that the Sabbath is much more than seventh-day rest. For the nation of Israel, the Sabbath also shaped their laws and socio-economics. And in turn, the Sabbath shaped them as a nation and as individuals.

> **Deuteronomy 15:1–2, 12–13**
>
> *"At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release. And this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor. He shall not exact it of his neighbor, his brother, because the LORD's release has been proclaimed…*
>
> *"If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. And when you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty-handed."*

Read Leviticus 25:1–22

For Israel, the Sabbath created a rhythm that was a strong motif in the soundtrack of their lives. This weekly rhythm of rest on the seventh day builds into the larger rhythm of rest for the land in the seventh year and crescendos in the year of jubilee after seven cycles of seven years.

Notice how the Sabbath is deeply connected to care for the needy, justice, and restoration. Sabbath laws provided for the release of debts, freedom for slaves, and the reuniting of families. It created protection from economic oppression and exploitation.

And it was a regular reminder of God's provision for his people and their dependence on him. He promised in the sixth year that they would harvest enough food to finish that year, eat during the Sabbath year, and last through

the planting and growing seasons of the eighth year. Sounds a lot like the double portion of manna in the wilderness, right?

Meditate on what it might have been like to be a part of Israel when they were obedient to God and saw the Sabbatical system working as God intended. What if you were in debt? Or a slave? Or set someone free? Or were restored to your family?

Planning for Sabbath

In light of the "evening and morning" rhythm we see in Genesis, often disciples choose to begin a time of Sabbath in the evening. Going to sleep near the beginning of a Sabbath can be an expression of faith, entrusting ourselves to the one who never sleeps. Consider if that's something you want to try.

Day 4

When Isaiah writes of the "year of the Lord's favor," he alludes to the year of jubilee we read about yesterday, and he casts that as the future year in which the Messiah will come and inaugurate the seventh-day rest God intended at the beginning.

Read Isaiah 61 & Luke 4:16–21

After Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness, they came into the resting place God provided for them, the land of Sabbath, an imperfect picture of the intended seventh day of creation without end. After Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness, he began his ministry with powerful Sabbath symbolism and claimed he, himself, was the perfect picture of true Sabbath rest and intimacy with God. Jesus said he fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy, as if the entire Sabbatical system pointed to him.

What connections and similarities do you see between Jesus and the Sabbath?

Planning for Sabbath

Outline how you plan to spend your Sabbath this week. If it was less than a full day last week, challenge yourself to increase the time this week.

Day 5

In addition to the biblical laws, the religious leaders in Jesus' time used another set of rules governing what people could and could not do on the Sabbath. Their oral tradition defined 39 categories of forbidden work (melakha) on top of the biblical commands. The Pharisees quibbled endlessly about what constituted "work"—was it a sin on the Sabbath for a tailor to go out with a needle in his robe, or for a woman to wear a heavy brooch, or to lift up your child? They thought this legalism was the very essence of faith.

Read Matthew 11:28–12:14

Jesus called out the teachers of the law on missing the point of the Sabbath and burdening people with petty, additional laws. He draws the connection from the Sabbath to mercy and doing good, which we saw is central to the whole Sabbatical system God laid out for his people.

Not only did Jesus break the Pharisees' extra-biblical laws, he claimed to be Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus is the one with the authority to rightly interpret the Sabbath—on his authority, the disciples were guiltless when plucking a few grains to eat on the Sabbath. And Jesus is the embodiment of the Sabbath itself—he says, "Come to me... and I will give you rest."

Meditate on what it means that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath.

Planning for Sabbath

Is there anything you need to take care of in the next couple days to free up time to rest during your Sabbath? Can you spend time with your household doing something fun together that everyone enjoys? Any prep needed?

Day 6

After the 40 years in the wilderness, Moses died and it was Joshua who led the Israelites into the promised land. That land was not a full restoration of people being established in God's presence like when God rested with Adam and Eve on the seventh day of creation. But that promised land pointed to a future Sabbath rest.

Read Colossians 2:13–17 & Hebrews 4:8–10

"There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God." Entering into God's rest through the Lord of the Sabbath means we stop (remember, Sabbath means "stop" or "cease") striving to gain approval, acceptance, satisfaction, joy, comfort, love, and life, but we rest in Jesus, just like God rested on the seventh day because the work is finished.

In the gospel, Jesus achieves rest for the restless.

The Lord of the Sabbath cries out in a loud voice on the cross, "It is finished!" He completes the work we could never complete so that we get Sabbath rest.

The Lord of the Sabbath cancels the debts of his people at the price of his own blood.

The Lord of the Sabbath liberates the captives by being arrested and executed for their crimes.

The Lord of the Sabbath, who created the world and first ushered in seventh-day rest, gave his life to restore seventh-day rest to his people in all its true glory.

The Sabbath is an already/not-yet reality. Jesus finished the work on the cross, so we get to live every day in a spiritual Sabbath rest, meaning we do not have to work to earn God's favor. But our Father's good rule and reign is not yet

fully here in every detail. There's a future day coming when Jesus will say, "Behold, I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5) and we will enter into a final and perfect Sabbath rest, established in a magnificent place of rest—the new Jerusalem—and sharing never-ending joy in God's presence where there will be no more pain or tears and all will be as it should be. (See Revelation 21 for more.)

Meditate on one of these pictures of Jesus and his work as the Lord of the Sabbath.

Planning for Sabbath

Finalize your plan for your Sabbath. There's a great talk by Mary Willson on the Sabbath, given at a Gospel Coalition conference, that you may find an inspiring boost to your rest. Her thoughts influenced what we've done during the last two weeks, and though it's an hour, listening to this talk is a great way to wrap up.
https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/conference_media/the-sabbath

Day 7

The Sabbath laws in the Old Testament pointed to Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath who fulfilled them. We are no longer required to observe the Sabbath because we've entered into the deeper rest in Jesus that the Sabbath laws pointed to. However, the Sabbath is a good gift to us. It's tied to creation itself and God's intent for humanity, so we'd be remiss to ignore this fundamental theme woven throughout Scripture. You are joining with millennia of God's people in this practice.

Take time today to Sabbath, to stop from regular work and take solemn rest with the Lord of the Sabbath who gave everything so you could have lasting spiritual rest. Your physical rest is a signpost to that eternal rest.

Maybe you've planned to read some Scripture, take a hike, have a family get-together, turn off your phone, pray, take an afternoon nap... Maybe it's the whole day or just the morning.

Your Sabbath time is also a great opportunity to go back and read, meditate, and pray through any days you may have missed this week.

Read 2 Chronicles 36:20–21 if you need a relevant passage for today.

When Israel rebelled against God and he turned them over to Babylonian captivity, it was in part because they did not observe the Sabbath. Interestingly, the promised land gets its Sabbath when the nation of Israel is in exile.

Sabbath Plan

Start time: _____ Date: _____ End time: _____

Jot down some of your key thoughts from the last two weeks about how you want to spend your Sabbath. Maybe list the things you will do and not do. When will it start and end? How will this day be a day of solemn rest to the Lord?

Is there anything you want to change from last time?

For your DNA group

Going through this book with your DNA group? When you gather, don't wait—within the first five minutes, get talking about your experience learning about the Sabbath. What stuck out to you?

Discuss how you plan to apply what you are learning about the Sabbath this week. Go over your plans with one another, challenge and help each other to find rest in the Lord of the Sabbath.

For your Missional Community

If your MC is in this book together, bring these to your gathering:

Spend a few minutes discussing your experience of Sabbath last week. Consider questions like these:

- Have you ever taken a Sabbath before?
- Did it feel easy or challenging?
- What worked well during your Sabbath time?
- How did it affect your week?

Week Three

This week, we begin investigating the practice of solitude. If you haven't already, block in your calendar a full day or at least several hours to spend in solitude. Day 7 of Week Four is ideal if that can work for you. If not, pick another day near the end of these four weeks—you may need to skim ahead to look at the "Planning for Solitude" sections.

Day 1

We know more about the personal, spiritual practices of Jesus than anyone else in the Bible. We may long to know more, but God has given us exactly what he wanted us to have.

Read Luke 5:12–16

The line, "he would withdraw to desolate places and pray" speaks of a continual pattern in Jesus' life. In this and many other passages, we observe that Jesus made a habit of solitude and prayer despite the obvious needs before him and the rapidly growing demands for his time. Now the interpretation step... Jesus was God made flesh, after all, so what does it mean that he regularly practiced solitude?

Day 2

This scene begins with Jesus doing the kind of thing that shows he is Lord of the Sabbath and would get him in trouble with the religious leaders.

Read Mark 1:21–34

Mark is characteristically direct and sparse with details, but a few key observations can help us imagine this day in the life of Jesus.

What time of day were the sick people brought to Jesus?

It's in the evening. Why? Because it was the Sabbath and the people were not supposed to travel around town on the day of rest.

How many people were there?

All the sick and oppressed people, and the whole city was at the door! Assuming this is hyperbole, the point is that there were a lot of people.

What do you think it might have felt like for Jesus to be in that moment?

Lots of people to heal and starting after dark means Jesus was probably up very late. Imagine the outpouring of wonder and gratitude he must have experienced that night. Tears and laughter, shouts for joy, the lame doing cartwheels. And we have no idea how draining it might have been to perform miracles.

Read Mark 1:35–39

Jesus is determined to get some solitary prayer time the next day. He got up very early, while it was still dark, and went off on his own to a spot where he could be alone with the Father. It must have been tempting to stay where he

was, set up shop, and let the sick be brought to him from all over. It might have been tempting to at least stay for a little while, soaking up all the joy of the moment. But in solitude, to the surprise of his disciples, Jesus hears from the Father and decides to move on.

Jesus had the presence of mind and heart to prioritize prayer in this moment. How might Jesus' example of solitude affect how you approach this spiritual practice?

Day 3

The Bible rarely gives details about the exact form of any spiritual practices but teaches the importance of them and the principles behind them. We don't know exactly what Jesus did during his times of solitude, but we know that they were a key rhythm of his life. Just like we've learned methods of Bible study and prayer from brothers and sisters in the church throughout history, we can also look to them for examples of how to practice solitude.

Typically, when Christians discuss the spiritual practice of solitude, we're talking about a significant period of time alone with God—most often it's a day of solitude, but it could be longer for a special purpose or as short as a couple hours one afternoon.

David Mathis writes, "For two thousand years, the teachings of Christ have called his people into rhythms of retreating from the world and entering into it. The healthy Christian life is neither wholly solitary nor wholly communal. We withdraw, like Jesus, to 'a desolate place' to commune with God (Mark 1:35), and then return to the bustle of daily tasks and the needs of others."

Times of solitude often include silence, prayer, rest, Scripture, meditation, journaling, enjoying God's creation, etc. Any and all of the habits of grace we've practiced throughout this series can easily be incorporated into a day of solitude. During these final two weeks, we'll spend some short daily times in some of these practices that you can extend and combine for a longer time of solitude.

> **Romans 5:5**
>
> *God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

Try it

One good way to meditate on a verse is to repeat it, emphasizing a different word each time.

> ***God's*** *love has been poured into our hearts...*
>
> *God's* ***love*** *has been poured into our hearts...*
>
> *God's love has been* ***poured*** *into our hearts...*

This meditation exercise is the very first one we did together in Book 1. Read this verse and think deeply about it again. Let the truth sink in.

Planning for Solitude

This meditation is something you might do during your time of solitude. Maybe you choose this verse and/or this method to help you think deeply. Jot it down on the last page of the booklet if you think you might try this on your day of solitude.

Day 4

Silence and solitude often go hand-in-hand. Silence is something you can practice every day, but solitude as a spiritual practice is typically less frequent. However, a time of solitude almost always includes some practice of silence. The more you practice silence day-to-day, the more fruitful solitude seems to be. So, we'll be reviewing some of what we learned about silence in Book 3.

Find a spot where you can be alone and undisturbed for a few minutes before you continue.

Connected to our exploration of Sabbath, silence is a key part of true rest for your soul.

> **Psalm 62:1–2, 5**
>
> *For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken... For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him.*

After reading this passage, ponder the truth that God is great, so we don't have to be in control. And just close your eyes and rest in his presence. Try to stay awake though. ;)

Planning for Solitude

Think about how you might incorporate silence into your time of solitude. Jot down your ideas on your Solitude Plan.

Day 5

You may have noticed that it's often hard to draw clear distinctions between spiritual practices like prayer, silence, meditation, and listening. And, you know what? That's OK. It's about being with the Father, not about following a certain practice to the letter. If you start off in silence and are prompted to worship Jesus in prayer, that's wonderful. You didn't "do it wrong."

In meditation, the focus is thinking deeply about God revealed in Scripture. It's an active process in our minds and hearts. Silence as a practice is very similar in that it's best to have a verse of Scripture to anchor your mind with, but the mental pace is slower. Silence is more about stillness, letting go, and simply being with the Father. As an act of worship, your silence and stillness declares God is in control and that it's not all up to you.

Silence is usually a precursor to listening. It's obviously harder to listen if you're talking. The practice of listening to God in prayer also involves meditating on Scripture because it's what we know for certain he has said to us.

And broadly, a time of prayer could involve being silent, meditating on God's Word as you talk to him, and listening to him. However, when we talk about prayer, we typically assume it's a time when we are talking to the Father, through Jesus, empowered by the Spirit.

If those lines seem blurry, don't fret about it. There is a natural overlap between these practices. The goal is that you find some habits that help you connect with God and think deeply about his Word which you can help someone else grow in also.

Read Psalm 46

The most famous verse is 10: "Be still, and know that I am God." Practice that today. You might emphasize the silence and stillness from the start, or you might actively meditate on that verse for a while before you try to be still. Maybe you need to begin with prayer asking the Father to help quiet your racing mind.

Planning for Solitude

Consider that meditating on this verse might be something you repeat during a time of solitude.

Day 6

Today, let's focus on prayer. Many of us have enjoyed the simple, memorable pattern of the 3Rs, especially when we start with a passage of Scripture as the springboard. The combo of reading Scripture, meditating on it, and then praying in light of it is a perfect way to spend an extended time of solitude as well as shorter daily time with God.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17–21

Meditate on the beauty of this passage, and then in prayer, Rejoice, Repent, and Request.

Day 7

This week, we've hit many related spiritual practices because a time of solitude usually involves a combination. If you missed one, take today to go back and try it.

Otherwise...

Pick a passage

Choose a passage from the book of John to read again today. You might choose one you really enjoyed, one that revealed something about God to you, or even one you don't understand well and want to investigate.

Pick a practice

Choose if you want to study the passage with the inductive method (Observe, Interpret, Apply), use it as a springboard to prayer, memorize a verse from it, etc.

Choose your own adventure...

For your DNA group

Going through this book with your DNA group? When you gather, don't wait—within the first five minutes, get talking about your experience with these practices this week.

Discuss these together:

- When do you plan to take a time of solitude? What's your plan so far?
- How can we help one another make sure we take the time of solitude?

For your Missional Community

If your MC is in this book together, bring these to your gathering:

Discuss these questions with your MC:

- Which of the spiritual practices we've tried across this series resonates with you the most?
- Is there a practice you want to grow in? Is there someone here who loves to do the one you want to grow in?

Week Four

You can think about an extended time of solitude as the capstone of the whole Abide series. You'll incorporate many things you've learned into this one day.

Day 1

We've seen that Jesus often went away to remote places, sometimes early in the morning, to be alone with the Father and pray. In Mark 6, he invites the disciples to come away and rest as well.

Read Mark 6:30–32

Not only did Jesus retreat to be alone with God, he taught the disciples to do the same. If you keep reading in Mark, you'll see that in this case the disciples didn't actually get the solitude and rest that day because the crowd figured out where they were headed and beat them there, and Jesus had compassion on them. Nevertheless, the example here is of Jesus teaching his followers to take time away, even when they were so busy they didn't even have time to sit down to a meal.

Last week, we looked at Mark 1, where Jesus got up early after a long night of ministry for solitude and prayer. Here, the story tells us the disciples had just come back from their first missionary trip without Jesus at their side, and because of the crowds, "had no leisure even to eat."

Why do you think that at these points where it seemed most difficult to get away, when there seemed to be so much good work to do, Jesus was so intent on getting solitude for himself and the disciples?

Day 2

Continuing in Mark 6, the night after Jesus feeds the 5,000, he goes up onto the mountain to pray. When he comes down, he walks over to the boat, undeterred by the fact the boat was in the middle of the lake in a storm.

Read Mark 6:45–52

Though Jesus didn't have a personal copy of the Bible in his pocket as he went up the mountain, Jesus was profoundly shaped by the Scriptures and knew them well. We live in a time where it's easy to have the Word of God in front of us, whether in print or digital. An important part of our times of solitude can be studying and meditating on Scripture.

Like we did in Book 5, let's spend two days on this passage using the inductive method. Before you begin making observations, read it again in one or more different translations. If you started in the ESV or NIV, try adding The Message or the New Living Translation. You can find these translations free online at biblegateway.com.

Observe & interpret

Prayer

Pray in response...

Day 3

During a time of solitude, you could easily do all three steps (Observe, Interpret, and Apply) in one sitting.

Read Mark 6:45–52

Interpret & apply

Pray in response...

Day 4

Many disciples of Jesus have found journaling to be a huge benefit to their spiritual growth. You may love it and have stacks of old journals, or you may have never tried it at all, or you may have started and stopped several times. No matter what, putting some thoughts to paper about what you are learning can be a huge help in solidifying those lessons. Journaling is also often a key part of how people make the most of a day of solitude.

> **Psalm 139:23–24**
>
> *"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"*

Through these weeks, God has been leading you in the way everlasting. As you look back at your journal or what you've written in these Abide guides, answer this question as a journal entry right here (or in your own journal, if you prefer).

What do I need to remember that the Lord has taught me?

Planning for Solitude

The verses above are great ones to meditate on during a time of solitude. They are a prayer inviting God in, a request to reveal what keeps us from him, and a plea to help us move closer to him.

You may need an extended time to dig into journaling prompts. Consider one or more of these:

- **What do I need to remember that the Lord has taught me?** Look back at what you've been learning.

- **How's the health of my relationships?** Pray through your important relationships and assess their quality.
- **What part of my story does the Father want to address?** The Father may want you to repent of past sin, heal you of certain wounds, encourage you to excel more in an area, etc.
- **What dreams or passions am I being invited to pursue?** Ephesians 2:10 says God has prepared beforehand good works for us to do. Listen to the Spirit about what those might be.

Answering questions like these can lead you to a plan for what comes next in your spiritual development. Solitude often brings rest and respite from the busyness of the present but also energy and passion for the future.

Day 5

In the beginning, God created humanity out of the dirt and put us in a beautiful garden paradise. He created us to enjoy the greatness and beauty of his good creation. When Jesus got away for times of solitude, it seems it was always outside, surrounded by God's creation. And his followers throughout the centuries have found during times of solitude, creation often amplifies our pleasure and connection with the Creator.

> **Romans 1:20**
>
> *"For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made."*

If you can, get outdoors while you meditate on this verse. What does creation tell you about the Creator? If being outside is unreasonable, maybe sitting by a window or even observing the beautiful intricacies of a house plant can inspire you to worship the Creator.

Pray in worship after meditating on this verse and the beauty of God's handiwork.

Planning for Solitude

If possible, get outside for all or part of your time of solitude. This is admittedly tougher when it's dark, cold, and rainy—not particularly inspiring for most people. Consider taking a walk in the neighborhood or, better yet, hike a trail in the woods. Dash Point State Park and Point Defiance both are nearby and have miles of well-maintained trails. Another option is to drive somewhere with a beautiful view, park, hop over to the passenger seat, and enjoy the almost-outside. The parking lot at the Dash Point pier is a great option.

Day 6

As humans, we are embodied souls—not only physical or spiritual, but both. Consider that in daily times with God and periodic times of solitude, your body can affect your spiritual experience. If, for instance, you are very tired, it's usually harder to experience grace, joy, and love in prayer.

Try reading and meditating on these two passages in turn, and if you are able to, take the posture described as you think deeply about each passage.

> **Psalm 95:6**
>
> *"Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!"*
>
> **2 Thessalonians 2:15–17 (MSG)**
>
> *"So, friends, take a firm stand, feet on the ground and head high. Keep a tight grip on what you were taught... May Jesus himself and God our Father, who reached out in love and surprised you with gifts of unending help and confidence, put a fresh heart in you, invigorate your work, enliven your speech."*

Planning for Solitude

Get the sleep you need before starting a time of solitude, and don't be afraid to experiment with your posture throughout. It might help at times to walk, sit, stand, kneel, etc.

Finalize the plan for your time of solitude.

Day 7

Ideally, today's your day for solitude. Follow the plan you've made. If you need a little more time to review the last couple weeks and make a brief plan, go for it.

If you've already done your time of solitude, express your gratitude to the Father in prayer for all he's taught you through this series.

Read Psalm 30

If you can, read it out loud as a prayer to God.

For your DNA group

Going through this book with your DNA group? When you gather, don't wait—within the first five minutes, get talking about your experience with these practices this week.

Discuss these together:

- When do you plan to take a time of solitude? What's your plan so far?
- How can we help one another make sure we take the time of solitude?

For your Missional Community

If your MC is in this book together, bring these to your gathering:

Discuss these together:

- Of all the ideas for what to do during a time of solitude, what are you most looking forward to trying?
- What have you most enjoyed from the Abide series?

Tying a bow on the whole series

Soma family, Jesus' metaphor of the vine and the branches in John 15 has been the central image of this entire series. All the spiritual practices we've learned about and tried are simply tools to help us abide in Jesus, the vine who is the only source of nourishment and life for us, the branches.

And these practices never expire. Whether you are brand new to following Jesus or have walked with him for decades, we simply grow deeper into them. Come back to these guides any time—on your own, with your DNA group, or with your whole MC—whenever you want to reestablish the everyday rhythms that keep you close to Jesus. They pair naturally with the other resources in the Soma Discipleship Toolkit as we help one another grow up in Christ.

May we continue to abide in Jesus richly and get to see him produce a bumper crop of fruit in and through us for his glory, our good, and the good of Federal Way and beyond. May we experience a revival of Jesus' church, seeing the gospel saturate Federal Way so much that every man, woman, and child has a daily experience of the love of Jesus through the words and deeds of his people.

Solitude Plan & Journal

Start time: _____ Date: _____ End time: _____

Whether you take a full day or a couple hours, outline a general plan for how you want to spend that alone-time with the Father.

Use this space to journal or answer key questions you want to think through in God's presence during this time. Of course, you can use more paper or your own journal as well.

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