

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread
and to prayer. Everyone was full of awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by
them among the people. They were all together and had everything in common. They sold their
possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet
together in the temple courts. And they ate and drank with glad and sincere hearts, praising God
and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

ANCIENT PRACTICES TO (CHANGE YOUR LIFE



SEVEN WEEK LIFE GROUP STUDY

September 9—October 27



COAST HILLS
COMMUNITY CHURCH

ANCIENT PRACTICES to CHANGE your LIFE

From Biblical times to the present there have been practices that people have incorporated into their spiritual lives. These practices are anchored in the life of Jesus and his disciples, growing from the desire to know Jesus better. For centuries people have found these practices to revolutionize their lives as they learn to pay attention to Jesus' active work in them, know him better and allow him to change them from the inside out. At first these practices can be new, uncomfortable territory, taking discipline to develop, but they help us allow greater space for Jesus to work in every area of our lives.

This is NOT a series that attempts to get you into some new fad technique with empty promises or to work harder at spirituality, but rather an ancient time tested way of living that points us more to Jesus allowing him to CHANGE your LIFE the way he has for thousands of people throughout history.

STUDY SESSIONS

- Week 1** **Introduction—Your Ears Will Hear**
- Week 2** **The Practice of Asking**
- Week 3** **The Practice of Slowing Down**
- Week 4** **The Practice of Being a Servant**
- Week 5** **The Practice of Thanksgiving**
- Week 6** **The Practice of Confession**
- Week 7** **The Practice of Poverty**



RESOURCES

We have put together a list of resources that we have found to be helpful in practicing spiritual disciplines. We have a small supply of these books that you can purchase. They will be available on Sunday mornings while supplies last.

<u>TITLE</u>	<u>PRICE</u>
1. Life Journals	\$7.00
2. "Your Ears Will Hear" A Journal for Listening to God By Steve & Evy Klassen	15.00
3. "Common Prayer" Pocket Edition A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals By Shane Claiborne	11.00
4. "Guide to Prayer for All God's People" Paperback by Norman Shawchuck & Rueben Job	14.00
5. "Experiencing God" Knowing & Doing the Will of God Paperback by Henry Blackaby	12.00

ACTIVITY:

- ⇒ Find ways to rub shoulders with someone you feel is poor. Invite them into your home for a meal.
- ⇒ For a week or month give up the little “extras” in life—dinner out, Starbucks, Tim Horton’s, etc ... and record what you would have saved and then give that away to a meaningful cause.
- ⇒ As a family or small group volunteer at the food bank or a soup kitchen.



Week 1 Introduction—Your Ears Will Hear

PASSAGE: Mark 1 – 2:11

STEVE KLASSEN—BIO:

Steve is the Director of The Mark Centre, a retreat center in Abbotsford, BC. Steve and his wife, Evy, parents to six children, have devoted their lives to helping people to experience a rich relationship with Jesus Christ by listening to God. They have recently co-authored a book, “*Your Ears Will Hear*”, which is a workbook containing stories of how people’s lives have been enriched as they have learned to listen to the voice of God.

CONTEXT:

The promise from *Isaiah 30:21* is personal and strong – *your ears will hear*. Jesus himself heard the Father’s voice at his baptism. It was intimate and affirming. God is speaking today in many different ways and he longs for all his children to hear. When we hear the Word God is speaking it is like a seed being planted in the ground. We accept what God is speaking, it grows within us, and it multiplies through us to others.

... continued on next page

QUESTIONS:

1. How does the *"rhythm in the life"* of Jesus inspire you in your journey?
2. Do you have a favourite place to be alone with God?
3. When have you experienced the intimate and affirming voice of God like Jesus did at his baptism?
4. How do you usually receive guidance from God?
5. Identify 10-15 different ways that God is speaking to people today.
6. What are the blocks or barriers that keep people from hearing God's voice today?

ACTIVITY:

Read aloud a portion of the book of Mark together. As you read, your ears will hear. Pay attention to the words or phrases that speak to you personally. Enjoy them; don't try to figure them out. Invite God to plant them into you like a seed with great potential.

Sneak away to a solitary place this week. Even if it is for a short time, open up your heart and let God be present with you. Be yourself. Determine to enjoy God and don't be too concerned if you don't *"hear his voice"* in some remarkable way. He is probably working in some way, whether you realize it immediately or not.

CONTEXT: *(continued)*

As we do this, rather than protecting our own tribe or family, we will respond in obedience to the rich peasant king, Jesus, who embodies a kingdom so radically different from our own human limitations, that we find ourselves embracing as blessing, rather than curse, all of the poverty in this world.

QUESTIONS:

1. What do you think motivated the rich young man to ask Jesus the question he did?
2. What did Jesus mean by his reply, *'why call me good? No one is good – except God alone?'*
3. How do you explain the extreme conditions that Jesus set for the man in order for him to receive eternal life (v21)?
4. By choosing wealth over a relationship with Jesus, what was the rich man gaining? What was he losing?
5. What does this story teach us about success and wealth?
6. Think about the areas of your own life where you experience poverty. In what ways are you poor?
7. When you see someone that is *"poor"* what bias' rise up in you? Be vulnerable and share.

... continued on next page



Week 7 The Practice of Poverty

PASSAGE: Mark 10:17-31

CONTEXT:

Poverty is a central and complex sign of God's kingdom, that portrays all of humanity as hungry, and points to the continuing revelation of the Good News of the Gospel—Christ's rich love and his justice for the whole person, and ultimately for the whole world.

How often I forget that I am impoverished and that I need a God who continually transforms my life from the sin that absorbs it. All of the injustice and physical and spiritual poverty that I see around me must point me first to my own poverty, and also to the richness of God's mercy planted in me. Yet, I continue to fool myself into thinking that I have escaped this universal condition of poverty because of all of the blessing in my life, whether education, wealth, food or family.

Michael Pucci writes, *"the Gospel is asking us today to hand over to Christ what we have in our hands, not because it is as precious as we think it is, but because unless we do, we cannot empty that hand to receive what we in our poverty really need from Him."* We are not attentive to the poor because we have believed a lie that we are not of them.

Pucci calls us to place Christ and his bias for the poor at the heart of who we are, redefining our values and identity, and ultimately our decision-making.



Week 2 The Practice of Asking

PASSAGE: Mark 7: 24-37

CONTEXT:

The power and practice of the "ask". Ask God with a heart of expectation for all your needs because he is a powerful and generous God who is eager to help. Make it a life practice to, in every situation you encounter, ask God for whatever it is that you need. The Gentile woman and the people surrounding the deaf mute man boldly asked God and Jesus responded.

QUESTIONS:

1. How is Jesus revealed in these two stories? Is this what we expected? Does this challenge/change our understanding of him in any way?
2. In the context of the day, the mother of the possessed daughter was very brave to have approached Jesus as she did. They were divided by huge cultural differences. Unlike other times in Jesus' encounters with non-Jews, Jesus responds to this woman with a seemingly harsh answer. Why do you think he did this? What does this show us about Jesus? What can we learn from the woman's response? What do we learn from Jesus' subsequent actions/response?
3. The story of the deaf and mute man gives us another glimpse into Jesus' response to an ask for help. What are the similarities in these two stories? What are the differences? How is Jesus revealed in this story?

... continued on next page

QUESTIONS *(continued)*:

4. It is important to note that in both cases the person in need did not do the asking. What does this tell us about the power of our asking on behalf of others? What does this tell us about our need to have others in the journey with us seeking Jesus together? What does this tell us about how Jesus answers our prayers—do you think that the woman’s or the deaf/mute man’s friends expected him to respond as he did?

ACTIVITY: Practice “Ask”

Praise: Take a few minutes and ask Jesus to reveal to you prayers that he has answered in your life over the last year. Maybe even before you asked? Tell someone about this. Thank Him.

Press In: What are specific needs that you have right now? That others you know have right now? Ask Jesus what he wants you to ask him for. Ask Jesus for the courage of the woman and the friends to approach him with these needs. Who can journey with you as you ask? Who do you need to journey with as they ask for specific needs. Ask them to join you and join them in asking.

ACTIVITY: *(continued)*

Confession: Confessing our struggles and sins to others has been a practise of the church since its conception. As evangelicals we have ventured away from this practise, often with a sense that Jesus is the only one we need to confess to. While we do believe that it is only through Jesus that our sins are forgiven, he has uniquely gifted us, members of his body, to be an encouragement to each other through confession as we journey through sacrifice and temptation together. Beyond encouragement, confession to one another allows for others to remind us of the forgiveness and grace that Jesus extends to us. Ask Jesus if there are a few people in your life who it would be beneficial to practise confession and confessing the name of Jesus with. Set aside time once a month, share a cup of coffee (or a glass of wine), confess what Jesus is doing in your life, and confess the areas of struggle. Ask Jesus to reveal to you areas of your life that it would be beneficial to confess to others. Allow the words of grace, encouragement and exhortation that you receive to point you more to Jesus. Ask Jesus for words and actions of grace, encouragement and exhortation for others.

Memorization: One of the greatest things about being a follower of Jesus is that he sympathizes with our weaknesses. We have a Saviour who has walked in our shoes, experienced temptation, has set his own agenda aside and become a servant, and loves us deeply. Memorize Philippians 2:1-11, recite it to yourself at least once a day. Let the encouragement about life together and the reminder of Jesus’ actions shape you and strengthen you as you remember that Jesus is not asking you to do anything that he hasn’t done first.

... *continued on next page*

QUESTIONS: (continued)

5. And here we come to the main point—we can't do any of this without Jesus. John could not see that there are no elites in the kingdom—those who drive out demons and those who serve water in the name of Jesus stand shoulder to shoulder, equals. It is so easy to trample the faith and the spirit of children and “*little ones*”, it is hard work to cut off the things in our lives (*make changes, resist sin*) that are keeping us from serving Jesus wholeheartedly, and it is very hard work to hold saltiness and peace in balance while living in community with others in the Kingdom. We can't do this on our own. We can only do this through the work of Jesus changing us—strengthening us—giving us courage, and the greatest part is we have a Saviour who sympathizes with our weaknesses.

ACTIVITY: Practice Confessing Jesus' Name

Confessing: In this passage we are again reminded of our great need for Jesus. He is the one who changes us, gives us the ability to avoid sin, calls and enables us to serve others and makes us salty and peaceful. Ironically, in daily life, it is rare for us to use his name in conversation or consciously ask him how he wants to tangibly work through us. Mother Teresa once said “*Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary use words*” — Jesus is our Gospel – not only to each other, but continuously to ourselves. It is great news that he is changing us from the inside out. Ask Jesus to teach you to preach the gospel without words. Is there a specific way he wants you to practise this— this week? Ask him to transform you from the inside out so that you think, act, see, hear, etc. as he does. Is there a specific area he wants to work on right now? Ask Jesus to teach you to speak of him simply and easily in daily life—confessing his name.

ACTIVITY: Practice “Ask” (continued)

Tangibles:

Prayer Pot: Designate a pot/jar/basket, etc. as the “*Prayer Pot*” (you can do this personally, as a family, as a life group, etc) Keep slips of paper close by that you can write out requests on and then drop them into the pot. Let the act of putting the paper into the pot remind you that this is now in Jesus' hands—he is responsible for it and will take care of it. You may need to put the same request in the pot multiple times. Periodically read through the pieces of paper in the pot and reflect on how you have seen Jesus move in these areas.

Prayer Journal: Keep a daily journal of what you are talking with Jesus about. Requests, praises, questions, mourning, what you are sensing he is saying to you, answers to prayer, etc. Make it a practise to read back through this journal periodically and celebrate what Jesus is doing.

The Lords Prayer: When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray he taught them, what we now refer to as, The Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:2-4). Memorize this prayer. Pray it once a day for the next week and ask Jesus to teach you to pray as he did the disciples. Try using this prayer as a pattern to branch out from in other times of prayer. Share your experience/reflections with your life group.



Week 3 The Practice of Slowing Down

PASSAGE: Mark 6:30-33; Mark 8:27-38

CONTEXT:

Peter gives us a clear example of a stark reality—often times the Word Of God changes our minds but does not sink into our hearts, changing us and our actions. Peter growing up Jewish knew all the prophecies about the Christ, he walked alongside Jesus from the beginning of his public ministry so when asked “*who do you say I am?*” he confidently was able to respond “*You are the Christ*”. A minute later Jesus asked him to apply this understanding by accepting another part of the prophecy about Christ—that he must suffer, die and come back to life—but Peter could not get his head around it—the truth had not yet changed his heart so that he was able to hear and respond to the truth of Jesus' words. We experience this temptation today as well.

QUESTIONS:

1. The Gospels convey the picture that life with Jesus was an exciting action packed affair. (See *Mk 6:30-33*) We also see that Jesus had a regular practise of getting away by himself or with his disciples to pray, rest and recoup. What does this tell us about Jesus? Is this a pattern that you find easy to emulate? What do you think are the costs and benefits of not having a pattern like this in your life?

QUESTIONS: (continued)

2. As Jesus goes on in vs 42-50 what stands out to you? In context of the previous verses what do you think Jesus is saying here? Is Jesus only talking about children when he refers to “*Little ones*”? How is Jesus asking us to interact with “*Little Ones*”? Going on—is Jesus calling us to self-mutilation? What do his words about hell teach us? Do we sense the seriousness and urgency that it seems Jesus is feeling as he teaches us here?
3. Jesus makes three bold statements, maybe even promises, in this passage—first in vs 40 about not losing your reward, second in vs 42 about a large millstone tied around the neck and third in vs 49 about being salted by fire. What do we learn from these three statements? Is there anything that surprises us?
4. As Jesus comes towards the end of this conversation (vs 49 - 50) he in no way lets us off the hook—giving us an easy way out. After calling us to cut off anything that hinders us from entering the kingdom of God he promises us that we will be “*salted by fire*” vs 49 (generally meaning that we will grow and receive wisdom through hardships) and then commands us in the midst of having gained saltiness to keep it and live at peace with each other—WOW. Throughout scripture salty is generally a term that leads us to think about stirring up or rubbing/sharpening others in a way that causes them to think—friction—not necessarily peaceful. How can we do this?

... continued on next page



Week 6 The Practice of Confession

PASSAGE: Mark 9:38-50

CONTEXT:

Jesus was warning his disciples not to lose that characteristic in them that brought life to the world and prevented its decay, that is, not to lose their spirit of devotion and self-sacrifice to Jesus Christ and the Gospel. It's a practice of confessing HIS name.

Confessing Jesus Name in word and action brings salt into the world. *"Have salt in yourselves"* has been variously interpreted to refer to being willing to be sacrificed, common sense loving neighbors, wisdom, fellowship and friendship, and being at peace. In Jesus name, give life and preservation to the world. Be a power for God in the world. Exert a beneficial influence for the glory of Christ. Be intolerant of anything in your life that might lessen your effectiveness for Him.

QUESTIONS:

1. What does Jesus' response to John tell us about him (vs 38-41)? What does it tell us about the Kingdom of God? Has John grasped what Jesus taught him in 9:35-37? Why or why not? Is it surprising that Jesus talks of both driving out demons and giving a cup of water as his work?

QUESTIONS: (continued)

2. Jesus asks his disciples to give him the results to their informal poll: *"who do people say that I am?"* (8:27) What do you think about the disciples' answers? What do you think about Peter's answer? How do their answers match with what the general public of today thinks? How do you think Jesus would want us to respond to this?
3. Jesus then moves to a more difficult question: *"who do you say that I am?"* This prompts Peter to declare: *"You are the Christ"*. In what ways was this a pivotal moment for the disciples? Do you identify with Peter's answer?
4. A few minutes after declaring that Jesus is the Christ, Peter then rebukes Jesus telling him that he is wrong in the predictions he is making about his death (9: 31-32). Jesus then rebukes Peter saying *"Get behind me Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."* (vs 33) What do you think about Jesus' response? What does this tell us about Jesus? Can you identify with Peter—one minute proclaiming Jesus and the next minute not in line with his ways and plans? How do you think Jesus would want you to respond to this?

...continued on next page

PRACTISE:

Lectio Divina: We often approach the Bible, the written Word of God, as a textbook to be mastered, memorized and utilized—often times not slowing down enough to hear it, allow it to sink deep inside of us and change us. The ancient practice of **Lectio Divina** combats this. **Lectio Divina** is the art of slowing down in our reading of Scripture. Reading small portions at a time, pausing to listen, breath, reflect as we go—ask the Holy Spirit what He means by what is written—and let the words sink in.

For the next week read Psalm 1 through everyday—slowly, reflectively. Ask Jesus to speak to you through his written Word. Next week share with your life group about this experience. Was it easy? Hard? What did you learn? Do you sense any changes in you? How do you see this practise helping in your daily life?

Sabbath: When God created the world he had a busy six days and on the seventh, Genesis says, he rested. When God gave the Israelites the ten commandments, his 10 rules for living, one of them was to have a Sabbath, a day of rest, every 7 days. Do you currently practise this rhythm of rest and work? Why do you think God wants us to rest, and slow down? What would it take for you to make Sabbath a regular part of your life? What changes would you need to make for this to happen? Is God asking us to enter into a day of rest just for rest sake or is there something more? Commit, as a group, to practise Sabbath for one month. Come together and share your experience. How can the Church help you in this practice?

Memorize: Memorize Psalm 103:1-5. Repeat this to yourself daily for a week. What does this passage teach us about slowing down and Sabbath? How does slowing down protect us?

QUESTIONS: *(continued)*

3. In what ways can you identify with the disciples' objection that feeding these people was an impossible task? How do you hold onto hope for what you are asking for in what seems like impossible situations? How have you seen God answer prayer in seemingly impossible situations? How would your experience have changed during that time if you had practised being thankful in everything?
4. What does the surplus amount of food tell us about God and his care (v8)?
5. What do you think about the practise of giving thanks for pain and problems as may be implied in the I Thess. 5:18 passage? Giving thanks does not preclude the occasional lament—does that comfort you? What does the Psalms teach us about thanksgiving and lament? How can we use the Psalms to help us learn to be thankful and honest always?

ACTIVITY:

Journal: Everyday end the day by finding three things that you can thank God for. Write them down. After a week what have you learned? After a month how has this changed you?

Eat Together: Jesus was always eating with people and the new testament church followed this pattern of sharing food regularly. As a Life Group commit once a month to share a meal together. Enjoy the time, watch for Jesus' work in and through each other, set aside time as you eat to share what Jesus has been doing in your lives and give thanks. Why do you think sharing food and feeding others is such a common practise in Scripture?



Week 5 The Practice of Thanksgiving

PASSAGE: Mark 8:1-10; Philippians 4:6; I Thessalonians 5:18

CONTEXT:

Making a practice of giving thanks to God in every situation brings about a sense of His presence and His work. It actually opens up a realm of possibilities that did not initially seem possible. As Jesus faced this seemingly impossible situation of 4000 hungry people and only 7 loaves and a few small fish, he took them and thanked God for them. The act of thankfulness was a pivotal point in the work of God. How often we spend our time thinking about what we don't have rather than to see what is right before us and that God is present in his provision for us. Jesus' first thoughts were toward His father and His care and concern for us and He would thank him in advance for providing all that we need for that moment.

QUESTIONS:

1. Jesus takes the initiative in wanting to provide a meal for this huge crowd. What does this tell us about Jesus?
2. Giving thanks before a meal has become a widely observed practise in Christian circles. Has this been a positive, neutral, or negative thing for you?



Week 4 The Practice of Being A Servant

PASSAGE: Mark 9:30-37

CONTEXT:

Richard Foster in his book *'Celebration of Discipline'*, makes the distinction between "serving" and "being a servant". We can serve without sacrifice and without surrendering control of our agenda, but when we become servants we move into the area where no sacrifice is too big for Jesus' sake, and our agenda changes from worrying about ourselves to a willingness to surrender all to Jesus and his kingdom's agenda. This process will be exhilarating as we experience the freedom it will bring to us.

QUESTIONS:

1. In Mark 9:30-37 we find Jesus teaching one of the most important lessons about our new life as his followers. The disciples then get into an argument about who is the greatest in the kingdom and they are afraid to let Jesus know this when he asks. Why do you think they were afraid to answer him?
2. He then goes on to say to them in vs 35 "*If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all*". Then pulling a child into his arms he says "*Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.*" How does Jesus validate the desire to be great? Or does he? What childlike qualities does Jesus want us to have?

... continued on next page

QUESTIONS: *(continued)*

3. What do you see as the main difference between “*servicing*” and “*being a servant*”? Is Jesus asking us to do anything he has not done (see Mk 10:45)? Does this encourage and strengthen us?
4. In John 13:1-17 we find Jesus demonstrating servanthood for us again through the act of foot washing, a task normally assigned to slaves. Put yourself in the disciples’ shoes. What might be some modern day practical equivalents? How do you feel about Jesus asking us to practise this towards one another?
5. As always, Jesus is not just asking us to consider taking on a new set of tasks so that we act like servants. Jesus is asking us to seek him, allowing him to give us a servant’s heart, finding in him the strength to set aside our desires for power and serve as he would, where he wants us to. What is hardest for you about this idea? Do you really believe that Jesus can make this change in your life?
6. Are there areas where Jesus is asking you to be a servant? Are there areas where you have been serving for the wrong reasons that Jesus is asking you to step back from? Are there areas that Jesus is asking you to allow others to serve you in?
7. What role models come to your mind of people who have impressed you by how they have served others with a servant’s heart?

PROJECT:

Servant Heart: Ask Jesus to reveal to you areas that he has used you to be a servant to others. Thank him for the changes he is making in your life to allow you to do this. Ask Jesus to reveal to you where he has used others to serve you. Thank him for this and then thank those people for allowing Jesus to work through them. (Consider that this may even be through someone who does not know him yet—what would it look like to thank someone who does not yet know Jesus for being an example of being a servant as Jesus would to you?)

Servant Work: Spend some time alone to devise a plan where you will carry out the function of a being a servant that will take you outside your comfort zone. Surprise someone with a humble act of service for which the person will not be able to compensate you or reciprocate. (For some husbands this may mean—clean all the bathrooms of the house and mop the floors—okay, you’ll likely be rewarded for such an action but that will be allowed in this case.) The point is that it’s okay to be practical and local. Plan on reporting the results of your project at next week’s LIFE group meeting.

Serving Together: Jesus has given us his body, the Church, for many reasons—one of which is a place to practise what he is teaching us. Ask Jesus if there is an area within the Church (local or wider) that he is asking/allowing you to practise/learn to be a servant in/through. Is there an area as a Life Group that together you feel Jesus is asking you to take on and practise being servants through? Before doing this work—ask Jesus to be your strength, serving on through the work that he is doing in you.