

Beliefs Matter

Discovery Starters

Worship

We are called to **praise and worship God alone**
[Exo 20:2-3](#); [Deu 6:4-5](#); [2Ki 17:35-39](#); [1Ch 16:28-30](#); [Neh 8:2-10](#);
[Mar 12:29-30](#); [Rom 15:5-13](#); [Jud 24-25](#); [Rev 5:6-14](#); [Rev 19:5-8](#)

Belief #1 – Worship: Worship Only God

Biblical Foundation:

For the LORD had made a covenant with the descendants of Jacob and commanded them: "Do not worship any other gods or bow before them or serve them or offer sacrifices to them. But worship only the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt with great strength and a powerful arm. Bow down to him alone, and offer sacrifices only to him. Be careful at all times to obey the decrees, regulations, instructions, and commands that he wrote for you. You must not worship other gods. Do not forget the covenant I made with you, and do not worship other gods. You must worship only the LORD your God. He is the one who will rescue you from all your enemies" (2Ki 17:35-39).

Discovery Starter:

Hebrew is a very concrete language. Its verb-centric vocabulary results in a very action-oriented, tactile, experiential form of communication. The word *shachah* (Strong's #7812) which is translated as "worship" literally means "to bow down" or "to prostrate oneself." The word creates a visual picture of intense desire and total devotion. It embodies the act of surrender and service, of alignment and allegiance, of honor and esteem. Not only can you imagine the respectful obedience of a subject who bows in homage before a king; you can also envision the passionate love of a young man who kneels down on one knee to ask his beloved for her hand in marriage.

We are all worshipers. We all give allegiance to someone. We all desire something. Every one of us. The question is not whether or not we will worship. The question is whom or what will we worship. Will we worship the living God or will we long after some substitute pleasure, some alternate goal? The answer we give will focus our attitudes and our actions. Worship drives us. It sets the course of our life. It determines the direction of our existence. We live for what we treasure, for what we worship.

As worship gives expression to our deepest desires, it also shapes our destiny. It is a powerful factor in discipleship. We are told in the Scriptures that those who pursue ungodly passions are shaped by their misaligned, idolatrous devotion. People become like the gods they worship. So, “those who make idols are just like them” (Psa 115:4-8; 135:16-18) – deaf, mute, powerless, lifeless. But the good news is that those who worship the living God “in Spirit and in truth” (Joh 4:23) will be transformed in their character to be more and more like him. John writes, “Dear friends, we are already God’s children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. And all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure, just as he is pure” (1Jn 3:2-3).

Keep Going:

Pick a psalm or two. Read them out loud. Meditate on the character qualities of God highlighted in what you have read. Turn your reflections on the Word into a response of worship. You may want to bow down – literally, physically – as you speak out the words of your devotion to God.

Belief #1 – Worship: Forever and Ever

Biblical Foundation:

Then I looked again, and I heard the voices of thousands and millions of angels around the throne and of the living beings and the elders. And they sang in a mighty chorus: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered—to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing.” And then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea. They sang: “Blessing and honor and glory and power belong to the one sitting on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever.” And the four living beings said, “Amen!” And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped the Lamb.” (Rev 5:11-14)

Discovery Starter:

On December 8, 1980, John Lennon, of Beatles’ fame, died after being shot four times in New York City. 3346 days earlier, his most famous song, *Imagine*, was first released. The song dreams of a time when “there’s no heaven/it’s easy if you try/No hell below us/above us only sky/Imagine all the people/living for today.../Nothing to kill or die for/and no religion too...” Sadly, he who dreamed of a world without killing was gunned down by one who did not share his dream. Though the hauntingly beautiful melody evokes deep emotions, peace without God – as envisioned by Lennon – is only an

imaginary illusion. Lasting peace is unobtainable apart from the Prince of Peace who rules from a real – not an imagined – heaven.

In contrast to Lennon's fictional dream, John the apostle's vision describes a genuine reality. Though many things about the future are uncertain, we can be sure of this: some things are going to look very different! A day is coming when *"God's home [will be] among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain"* (Rev 21:3-4). Now that is a dream worth singing about. And it's not a figment of our imagination. The kingdom of God is really coming. And when it comes there will be much singing.

Because that day will usher in a new reality, Paul tells us that some of our current religious activities "will become useless;" there will be no need for speaking in tongues or for prophecies (1Co 13:8-10). Missions and evangelism will be something of the past. What will remain? Worship. For this reason, nearly 30% of the book of Revelation describes worship. What will it be like? According to another song (this one written by MercyMe's lead vocalist, Bart Millard), "I can only imagine when that day comes.../I can only imagine when all I would do is forever/forever worship You/I can only imagine.../Surrounded by Your glory/what will my heart feel.../I can only imagine..."

Keep Going:

There are over twenty songs of heavenly praise and worship recorded in Revelation. Why not take the time to read through them, pray through them, sing through them, worship through them. You can find them in: Rev 1:5b-7; 4:8b,11; 5:9b-10,12b,13b; 7:10b,12b,15-17; 11:15b,17b-18; 12:10b-12; 14:7; 15:3b-4; 16:5b-6; 16:7b; 19:1b-2,3b,4b,5b,6b-8.

Holiness

We are called to **lead holy and righteous lives** that exemplify the nature and character of God

[Lev 19:1-2](#); [Psa 51:7-11](#); [Jer 18:1-11](#); [Eze 20:10-12](#); [Zec 13:9](#);
[Luk 1:68-75](#); [Eph 4:21-32](#); [Tit 2:11-14](#); [1Pe 2:9,21-25](#); [1Jo 3:1-3](#)

Belief #2 – Holiness: Made Holy

Biblical Foundation:

So I brought them out of Egypt and led them into the wilderness. There I gave them my decrees and regulations so they could find life by keeping them. And I gave them my Sabbath days of rest as a sign between them and me. It was to remind them that I am the LORD, who had set them apart to be holy (Eze 20:10-12).

Discovery Starter:

Ezekiel makes it clear that God's purpose for us is that we be holy. God's reason is because he is holy (Lev 11:44-45; 19:2) and he wants to conform us to his image (Rom 8:29) in order that we might walk in close fellowship with him (1Co 1:9). He wants us to share in his character and have uninterrupted friendship with him. A call to holiness is not a call to limit us, but an invitation to pursue the imitation of God in order that we may enjoy intimacy with God.

God's means of making us holy is rooted in himself. His redemptive work in our lives is what makes the difference – that is why we are repeatedly told that he is the one who makes us holy (Exo 31:13; Lev 20:8; 21:8,15,23; 22:9,16,32). It's not that God does this independently from us. God exhorts us to put all his "decrees ... into practice" precisely because he is the one "who makes ... holy" (Lev 20:8). Our response of obedience to his acts of deliverance allow us to live as God intends us to live.

Jesus' exhortation "to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Mat 5:48) in the Sermon on the Mount, and the parallel "be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate" (Luk 6:36) in the Sermon on the Plain echo the command, "You must be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy" (Lev 19:2). God is to be our standard of how we should live our lives. Oftentimes moral excuses are made with the phrase, "Well, we're only human." Let us not forget that we were designed by a holy God for holiness. Jesus came to restore us to that original design by showing us what it means to be truly human. He embodies the new normal by living a life which matches God's way of living life. Jesus "faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin" (Heb 4:15). Paul enjoins us: "Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ" (Eph 5:1-2).

Keep Going:

When God wants to say something with emphasis, he underscores his words with "I am the LORD." This declaration can be found 158 times in 70 chapters across 14 books of the Original Testament. The chapter that most frequently repeats this phrase is Leviticus 19, often considered the heart of "The Law of Holiness" which comprises the last third of Leviticus. Consider the statements that climax with "I am the LORD" in this chapter:

19:3 honor your parents and the Sabbath
19:4 do not participate in idolatry
19:10 care for the poor
19:12 do not use dishonest words and thereby dishonor God
19:14 care for those with disabilities
19:16 care for those whose life is at risk
19:18 love your neighbor as yourself
19:25 take care of your physical environment
19:28 do not participate in pagan practices to honor the dead
19:30 honor God's sanctuary and the Sabbath
19:31 do not participate in pagan practices to contact the dead
19:32 care for the elderly
19:34 care for the refugees, immigrants, foreigners in your midst
19:35 do not use dishonest weights and measurements
19:37 obey all of God's decrees

How do these statements help you understand holiness? What are repeated themes? What are the inner heart issues and the outward social issues addressed in this passage? How do integrity, love and compassion display holiness?

Belief #2 – Holiness: Distanced from Sin

Biblical Foundation:

For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God, while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed. He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds (Tit 2:11-14).

Discovery Starter:

This pithy passage is an amazingly rich summary of the gospel. It affirms that Jesus gave his life "to free us from every kind of sin." The Greek preposition which is translated "from" is *apo*. It is a very dynamic word. As with all prepositions it describes the relationship between two objects. In the case of *apo*, it describes a relationship in which one object is distancing itself continually "from" the another object; as when one steps out of a house and walks away "from" it, each step leading one further and further from the house. This vivid image is also reflected in words of the angel Gabriel,

who tells Joseph, “you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from [*apo*] their sins” (Mat 1:21).

Jesus’ salvation doesn’t just forgive us and leave us mired in our sins. His redemption transforms us and draws us away from sin; distancing us from that which previously enslaved us. Jesus has indeed “freed us from our sins by shedding his blood for us” (Rev 1:5). He then proceeds “to cleanse us” (Tit 2:14). Paul’s words are echoed by John, “If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from [*apo*] all wickedness” (1Jn 1:8-9). Forgiveness and cleansing. This is our sure hope in Jesus.

Paul affirms that God “saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit” (Tit 3:5). Now that we are God’s “own people” we are to live our lives “totally committed to doing good deeds” (Tit 2:14). God’s grace now equips us for a life empowered by the Holy Spirit – a life characterized by “wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God” (Tit 2:12). Because we have been set “free from the power of sin” we are exhorted to “do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life” (Rom 6:22).

Keep Going:

Seven times the four main authors of the New Testament use the word ‘from’ [*apo*] in relation to sin [*hamartia*], to describe how God’s redemptive work in our lives is ever distancing us from the oppression of our past sinful habits and conforming us more into a reflection of his holiness. Meditate on these passages and ask God to continue to break the power of sin over your life as you – by his powerful transformative grace – continue on the journey of holiness, distancing yourself every day further and further from the power of sin.

MATTHEW (quoting Gabriel speaking to Joseph): And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from [*apo*] their sins (Mat 1:21).

LUKE (quoting Jesus speaking to Paul): And I will rescue you from both your own people and the Gentiles. Yes, I am sending you to the Gentiles to open their eyes, so they may turn from [*apo*] darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God’s people, who are set apart by faith in me (Act 26:17-18).

PAUL: For when we died with Christ we were set free from [*apo*] the power of sin... Now you are free from [*apo*] your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous

living... But now you are free from [*apo*] the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life... And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from [*apo*] the power of sin that leads to death (Rom 6:7,18,22; 8:2).

JOHN: But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from [*apo*] all sin. If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from [*apo*] all wickedness (1Jn 1:7-9).

Witness

We are called to **share the Gospel of Jesus Christ**
with those who do not know Him

[Psa 78:1-7](#); [Isa 40:3-11](#); [Mic 4:1-2](#); [Hab 2:14](#); [Luk 24:44-48](#);
[Act 3:12-26](#); [Act 10:39-43](#); [1Co 9:19-23](#); [2Co 2:12-17](#); [1Pe 3:15-18](#)

Belief #3 – Witness: Tell the Next Generation

Biblical Foundation:

O my people, listen to my instructions. Open your ears to what I am saying, for I will speak to you in a parable. I will teach you hidden lessons from our past—stories we have heard and known, stories our ancestors handed down to us. We will not hide these truths from our children; we will tell the next generation about the glorious deeds of the LORD, about his power and his mighty wonders. For he issued his laws to Jacob; he gave his instructions to Israel. He commanded our ancestors to teach them to their children, so the next generation might know them—even the children not yet born—and they in turn will teach their own children. So each generation should set its hope anew on God, not forgetting his glorious miracles and obeying his commands (Psa 78:1-7).

Discovery Starter:

When we think of global evangelism, let us not forget a frequently overlooked demographic: the youngest among us. The renowned evangelist, Dwight L Moody, reportedly said, “At a certain meeting two and a half people were converted to Christ. A friend asked if he meant, two adults and a child. The facts were just the opposite two children and an adult. When a child is led to Christ, a whole life is saved!”¹

Reaching a younger person with the gospel should be a high priority for everyone of us. A Barna study in the US revealed that “two out of three born again Christians (64%) made that commitment to Christ before their 18th birthday” – and 77% did so in their first 21 years of life!² Certainly it is no accident that Jesus told his disciples, “Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them!” (Luk 18:16). Let’s focus on the next generation when we share the gospel.

Unfortunately, although Hezekiah was a good king (2Ch 18:3) ... his priorities were short-sighted. At the end of his reign a delegation from Babylon visited him. This occurred “to test him and to see what was really in his heart” (2Ch 32:31). Because Babylon was a only minor player on the world stage in those days, Hezekiah displayed to them all his treasures. He failed the test; his pride was exposed. As a result, Isaiah the prophet confronted him with future judgement which would result in his sons being “taken away into exile” (2Ki 20:12-18). Instead of repenting, Hezekiah compounded his sin, saying, “At least there will be peace and security during my lifetime” (2Ki 20:19). His utter disregard for how his life would impact the next generation had devastating effects. Tragically, his son Manasseh proved to be the most wicked of all of Judah’s kings, even sacrificing “his own son” – Hezekiah’s grandson – “in the fire” (2Ki 20:2-6).

May this be an ever-present lesson to us. May we never lose sight of the next generation. May we pass on to them the stories of redemption that will lead them in the ways of God.

Keep Going:

The Scriptures repeatedly underline the need of passing on the legacy of God’s redemption to the next generation. Take time to reread this discovery starter’s foundational passage and consider the following portions of Scripture:

- Exodus 10:1-2
- Leviticus 23:42-43
- Deuteronomy 4:9; 31:10-13
- Psalm 22:29-31; 79:13; 89:1-2; 145:1-7
- Isaiah 38:19
- Joel 1:2-3

In light of the exhortations in these passages, what steps do you believe God would want you to take to share the good news with a younger person? Make a determination in your heart to obey God and do what he has spoken to you.

1. See <https://www.quotetab.com/quote/by-dwight-l-moody/at-a-certain-meeting-two-and-a-half-people-were-converted-to-christ-a-friend-as?source=opposites>
2. <https://www.barna.com/research/evangelism-is-most-effective-among-kids/>

Belief #3 – Witness: Peter’s Conversion

Biblical Foundation:

And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name (Act 10:39-43 ESV).

Discovery Starter:

Shouldn't the title be "Cornelius' Conversion"? Hold on for just a bit... Peter's opening statement at Cornelius' house reflected his reluctance to be among Gentiles. "You know it is against our laws for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home ... tell me why you sent for me" (Act 10:28-29). It had not occurred to him to preach the gospel! Cornelius had to coach him how to proceed. Then Peter misquoted Jesus. Peter stated that Jesus "commanded us to preach to the people." The word translated here is not *ethnos* (the word Jesus used in Mat 28:18-20), but *laos*. Whereas *laos* was used to describe exclusively the Jewish people, *ethnos* denoted all other people – the Gentiles. Though Jesus said one thing, Peter had heard another. Like Peter, we're often deaf to words which challenge our cultural paradigms.

Acts tells the story of the expanding reach of the gospel. At first all the followers of Jesus were Aramaic-speaking, Jewish "men of Galilee" (1:11). Then they included women (1:14) and non-Galilean Jews (2:5-11). The growing number of Greek-speaking believers even included one ex-Gentile (6:1-6)! The story continues with the inclusion of half-Jews (Samaritans in 8:1-25) and a wanna-be Jew (an Ethiopian in 8:26-39). That brings us to the two central conversions in the book: Paul's (9:1-22) and Peter's (10:1-47). So why call it Peter's conversion? Well, Cornelius obeyed immediately (10:7) but Peter did not. When God visited him his immediate response was, "No, Lord" (10:14) – two words which should never be used together. If he's Lord, shouldn't the

answer always be “Yes”? But after three visions and one prophetic word, Peter finally obeyed. So though both changed, it was Peter’s “conversion” that required the greater effort.

Let’s step back and look at the big picture. Acts is built around the stories of Peter and Paul. Their respective conversion stories are each retold twice (Peter’s in 11:4-18; 15:7-11; Paul’s in 22:3-21; 26:2-23). The telling and retelling of these two iconic stories occupies one eighth of Acts. They embody its central message: all who desire to follow Jesus are to be included! And for that reason we must all bear witness to all.

Keep Going:

Consider Peter’s situation. Seven years after Jesus’ instructions to preach the Gospel to every person (Mar 16:15), he still was only moving in familiar, culturally-comfortable circles. How about us? Are there changes God wants to make in the way we think and live like he did in Peter’s life? Are we moving beyond the known and the familiar to reach those who are culturally different from us? Are we sharing good news with those who were born elsewhere and speak a different language? Are we communicating redemption to those who are outside our day-to-day activities? Take time to consider how you can move beyond your relational circles to share the gospel with those who are different from you. How can you include them? How can you reach them? Take time to listen to God about your role in extending his kingdom with a commitment to say, “Yes, Lord” when he speaks.

Prayer

We are called to **engage in intercessory prayer** for the people and causes on God’s heart, including standing against evil in every form
[Gen 18:20-33](#); [Exo 32:1-16](#); [Jdg 3:9,15](#); [1Ki 8:22-61](#); [Eze 22:30-31](#);
[Eze 33:1-11](#); [Mat 6:5-15](#); [Mat 9:36-38](#); [Eph 3:14-21](#); [2Th 3:1-5](#)

Belief #4 – Prayer: A Tragic Day

Biblical Foundation:

“I looked for someone who might rebuild the wall of righteousness that guards the land. I searched for someone to stand in the gap in the wall so I wouldn’t have to destroy the land, but I found no one. So now I will pour out my fury on them, consuming them with the fire of my anger. I will heap on their heads the full penalty for all their sins. I, the Sovereign LORD, have spoken!” (Eze 22:30-31)

Discovery Starter:

The interplay of justice and mercy is one of the overarching themes of the Scriptures. Both are attributes of love. Therefore, a loving person will always be just. Injustice has no place in the life of a loving person. Similarly, a loving person will seek every opportunity to be merciful. A lack of mercy is contrary to love. Because "God is love" (1Jn 4:8), he does everything "in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy" (Hos 2:19 *ESV*). As a just God, equity is his standard, so he makes sure that no one gets less than they deserve. But as a merciful God, grace is his goal, so he looks for every opportunity to give us better than we deserve.

The prophets of old prophesied with this framework. They understood that the actions of a just and merciful God take our actions into account. Certain actions on our part require a response of justice on God's part. Other actions on our part make possible a merciful response on God's part. This principle is at the heart of Jeremiah's vision at the potter's house (Jer 18:1-11) and Ezekiel's description of God's heart (Eze 18:1-32). You can count on God always being just and yet always looking for an opportunity to show mercy. This is the story line behind the iconic events found in Exodus 32:7-14; Jonah 3:4-4:2; and 2 Kings 20:1-7. Prayer, fasting, repentance, intercession – freely undertaken by humans – gave God the just reason to replace expected punishment with unexpected redemption. These stories climax in a grand finale as "mercy triumphs over judgment" (Jam 2:13 *NIV*).

But not so in Eze 22:30-31. The situation merited divine judgement. But – as always – God would have preferred mercy over justice. He looked for someone who through their prayers would give him a just cause to stay judgment. But he found no one. Therefore, he could not justly extend mercy. He had to bring upon them the deserved punishment. With a broken heart God had to withhold the mercy he desired. Our actions are significant. Prayer does indeed change things. On this day there was none, so no change was possible. What a tragic day!

Keep Going:

Take time to read the book of Jonah through from beginning to end. It only takes about seven minutes. After this quick overview go back and consider the different prayers prayed in the book. Reflect on who prayed; what was the content of their prayer; what was the result of their prayer; what difference did those prayers make; and how was God's justice and mercy reflected in his response to each prayer. Note particularly:

- The sailors' prayers in Jon 1:14.
- Jonah's prayer in Jon 2:2-9.
- The Ninevites' prayers in Jon 3:6-9.

- Jonah's prayer in Jon 4:3.

Belief #4 – Prayer: Mentored in Prayer

Biblical Foundation:

"When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

"When you pray, don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! Pray like this:

*Our Father in heaven,
may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come soon.
May your will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven.
Give us today the food we need,
and forgive us our sins,
as we have forgiven those who sin against us.
And don't let us yield to temptation,
but rescue us from the evil one.*

"If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins (Mat 6:5-15).

Discovery Starter:

This language would have been quite surprising for Jesus' audience, because in the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures God is referred to as Father on only 19 occasions (Deu 32:6; 2Sa 7:14; 1Ch 17:13; 22:10; 28:6; 29:10; Psa 68:5; 89:26; 103:13; Pro 3:12; Isa 9:6; 63:16a,16b; 64:8; Jer 3:4,19; 31:9; Mal 1:6; 2:10). Jesus' frequent usage of the term was a distinctive mark of Jesus' ministry. With his advent, God was no longer just "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Exo 3:6; Mat 22:32). God had met personally with these revered fathers. But as the generations passed, the reality of those intimate encounters became increasingly distant. Jesus changed all that! In him, God is no longer the distant God of the fathers. God is *our* Father. There is a fresh proclamation of familial intimacy in Jesus' words.

The term "Father" is a reflection of the intimacy inherent within the Trinity. Jesus lived His earthly life conscious of the love His Father had for Him. In the place of prayer Jesus three times underscores His experience of the love of the Father (Joh 17:23,24,26). Indeed, much of the imagery of God as Father is expressed in the context of prayer (Mat 6:6,8-9; 11:25-26; 26:39,42; Mar 11:25; 14:36; Luk 10:21; 11:2; 22:42; 23:34,46; Joh 11:41; 12:27-28; 17:1,5,11,21,24-25.) This is a term of devotional endearment, of prayerful passion, expressing profound relational intimacy.

If prayer is nothing more than a functional task to be fulfilled, Paul's command to "never stop praying" (1Th 5:17) is endlessly burdensome. But if prayer is a relational invitation to be embraced, it is extraordinarily winsome. Paul understood what was implied when Jesus taught us to pray "Our Father..." – God is inviting us into unceasing relational intimacy in which we can always bear our hearts to him as we walk in continual, familial fellowship with him. Prayer can take many forms. It can include strategic intercession, personal petitions, spiritual warfare, high praises, adoring worship, intentional listening, faith-filled proclamations, repentant confession leading to heart realignment and reflective meditation. But whatever the particular expression, the essence of prayer is the call to live continuously in the refreshing renewal of God's presence.

Keep Going:

Prayer was a part of Jesus' daily life – and it should be part of ours as well. Consider the example left by Jesus in the following passages. What did Jesus model for us when he prayed:

1. at the time of his baptism (Luk 3:21-22)?
2. in the early morning in Capernaum (Mar 1:35)?
3. late at night after feeding the 5,000 (Mat 14:23; Mar 6:46)?
4. all night before selecting the twelve (Luk 6:12-16)?
5. alone (Luk 11:1)?
6. with three disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luk 9:28-36)?
7. with the twelve disciples (Luk 9:18)?
8. blessing the children (Mat 19:13-15; Luk 18:15-17)?
9. blessing before eating (Mat 14:19; Mar 6:41; 8:7; Luk 9:16; 24:30-35)?
10. to calm the storm (Luk 8:24-25)?
11. to thank God (Luk 10:21; Joh 11:41-42)?
12. to glorify God (Joh 12:27-29)?
13. for the protection of his disciples (Luk 22:31-32)?
14. for the unity of his disciples (Joh 17:1-26)?
15. while establishing the new covenant (Mat 26:26-29; Mar 14:22-25)?
16. in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mat 26:36-46; Mar 14:32-42; Luk 22:39-46)?

17. for forgiveness upon his enemies (Luk 23:34)?
18. entrusting himself into God's care (Luk 23:46; Joh 19:30)?

Jesus' famous prayer recorded in the Sermon on the Mount is known as the Lord's Prayer. But on eight other occasions the words of our Lord's prayers have been recorded. You will find them all in the following passages. Take time to read them ... to meditate on them ... to pray them.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| • Mat 6:9-13; Luk 11:2-4 | Jesus models prayer |
| • Mat 11:25-27; Luk 10:21-22 | while in public ministry |
| • Joh 11:41-42 | while in public ministry |
| • Joh 12:23-33 | while in public ministry |
| • Joh 17:1-26 | while preparing for the cross |
| • Mat 26:39,42; Mar 14:36; Luk 22:42 | while preparing for the cross |
| • Mat 27:46; Mar 15:34 | while on the cross |
| • Luk 23:34 | while on the cross |
| • Luk 23:46 | while on the cross |

Fellowship

We are called to **commit to the Church**

in both its local nurturing expression and its mobile multiplying expression
[2Ch 29:20-30](#); [Psa 22:25-28](#); [Psa 122:1-4](#); [Joe 2:15-17](#); [Mat 18:19-20](#);
[Act 2:44-47](#); [Act 4:32-35](#); [1Co 14:26-40](#); [Eph 2:11-18](#); [Heb 10:23-25](#)

Belief #5 – Fellowship: Pilgrims Together

Biblical Foundation:

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD." And now here we are, standing inside your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is a well-built city; its seamless walls cannot be breached. All the tribes of Israel—the LORD's people—make their pilgrimage here. They come to give thanks to the name of the LORD, as the law requires of Israel (Psa 122:1-4).

Discovery Starter:

Fellowship is more than just hanging out. It's togetherness with a purpose. It's an intentional pilgrimage in which we are going somewhere one with another; journeying together towards a common goal. The ultimate purpose is to meet with God and to be

shaped by him, “looking forward” in faith to that which God has “designed and built” for us (Heb 11:10).

In ancient Israel every Jew was expected to journey to Jerusalem for three annual pilgrim festivals (Deu 16:16). These pilgrimages are often mentioned in the Scriptures. Isaiah declares, “You will be filled with joy, as when a flutist leads a group of pilgrims to Jerusalem, the mountain of the LORD” (Isa 30:29). Jeremiah speaks of a time when “pilgrims [were] carrying grain offerings and incense on their way to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem” (Jer 41:5 MSG). He mourns Jerusalem’s demise after the Babylonian destruction: “Zion’s roads weep, empty of pilgrims headed to the feasts” (Lam 1:4 MSG). Jesus’ one childhood event recorded in the gospels occurs during a festival pilgrimage. We are told that Joseph and Mary left Jerusalem for the homeward journey thinking Jesus “was somewhere in the company of pilgrims” (Luk 2:44 MSG).

Psalms 120-134 – today’s Biblical foundation – is one of fifteen “songs of ascents” (Psa 120-134) which pilgrims traveling “up” to Mount Zion would sing together as they approached Jerusalem. Since those times, many Christian authors – from John Bunyan to C. S. Lewis – have written allegories to encourage pilgrims in their onward journey. In the final scene of *The Last Battle*, the last book in C. S. Lewis’ extraordinary *Chronicles of Narnia*, the Unicorn “summed up what everyone was feeling” when he said, “I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now... Come further up, come further in!”

We are all expected to live in this world as “strangers and pilgrims” (Heb 11:13; 1Pe 2:11 KJV) as we journey homeward towards God, for he is our ultimate destination. “LORD, through all the generations you have been our home” (Psa 90:1).

Keep Going:

“Come further up, come further in!” You can read these fifteen songs of ascent (Psa 120-134) in just 10-12 minutes. Savor the longing for more intimacy with God that is woven into the words: “Let us go to the sanctuary of the LORD; let us worship...” (Psa 132:7). May you desire to be among “those whose hearts are in tune with” God (Psa 125:4). What else stands out to you as you meditate on these words. Take a look at some of the key repeated words in these fifteen Psalms in the following word cloud

You may also want to take some time to read some classic Christian allegories, which portray the Christian journey in visually rich ways. Consider reading these together with friends and family around the dinner table. May you be encouraged in your faith pilgrimage!

- *Pilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyan
- The seven-book series known as *The Chronicles of Narnia* (*The Magician's Nephew*; *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*; *The Horse and his Boy*; *Prince Caspian*; *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*; *The Silver Chair*; and *The Last Battle*), all by C. S. Lewis
- *Hinds Feet on High Places* and *Mountains of Spices*, both by Hannah Hurnard
- *The Singer* and *The Song*, both by Calvin Miller

Belief #5 – Fellowship: Radical Koinonia

Biblical Foundation:

And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved (Act 2:44-47).

Discovery Starter:

The Greek words *koinonia* and *koinonos* may conjure up images of delicious dinners and cozy sofas where we can hang out and “fellowship” with one another. This is not what came to the mind of first-century believers. A *koinonos* referred to a voluntary

association of human beings. It was a purposeful corporation formed for political, educational, religious, athletic, or commercial reasons. Plato, in his *Republic* speaks of the *koinonos* as the smallest, most basic building block of society. When the early church described itself as a *koinonos* it was a bold, counter-cultural declaration, affirming that they were a new society which challenged the existing world order.

Jesus did not call us to himself in an individualized manner. He called individuals into a body with Jesus at the center. This is what he did with the first twelve that followed him. This is also what he does with those of us who follow him today. Jesus promises, "where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them" (Mat 18:20). We're called into a *koinonia*. Paul writes how the "meetings of God's holy people" (1Co 14:33) should be conducted to "build up the church" (Eph 4:11-13). The main point is that everyone has something to contribute – like partners in a *koinonos* – and that "everything that is done must strengthen all of you ... so that everyone will learn and be encouraged" (1Co 14:26,31). Indeed, believers are admonished, "Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another" (Heb 10:24-25).

But the gathering of God's people is not only for edification and encouragement; it is also to equip for external expansion. Peter writes, "for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light" (1Pe 2:9). This chosen people is called a *koinonos* because as a counter-cultural movement it's committed to expanding the kingdom of God on earth.

Keep Going:

Do some research. Dig into history. Explore a time in the past when the church was the catalyst for some disruptive innovation that ushered in transformative change in society. Read some books. Watch some videos. Consider how you can contribute to the people of God in this generation. How can you be a part of an activated *koinonos*, expanding the kingdom of God in powerful redemptive ways? Gather with a group of friends in Christ. Seek his face. Pray. Read the Scriptures. Listen to his voice. Help each other grow. Encourage one another. Dream big. Get practical. Serve your community. Discover how you can extend the kingdom of God. With others be a truly radical *koinonia*!

Service

We are called to **contribute toward God's Kingdom purposes**
in every sphere of life

[Deu 15:7-11](#); [Deu 24:17-22](#); [Psa 112:4-9](#); [Pro 11:10-11](#); [Zec 7:8-10](#);
[Mat 5:14-16](#); [2Th 3:13](#); [Tit 3:4-8](#); [Heb 13:15-16](#); [Jam 2:14-26](#)

Belief #6 – Service: When the City Rejoices

Biblical Foundation:

The whole city celebrates when the godly succeed; they shout for joy when the wicked die. Upright citizens are good for a city and make it prosper, but the talk of the wicked tears it apart (Pro 11:10-11).

Discovery Starter:

What a stunning statement! Why does the city celebrate when the godly succeed? Usually people rejoice only when they, or their team, succeeds. What is different here? The Hebrew word for “the godly” is *tsadikkim*. They are the ones “who are willing to disadvantage themselves for the community, while the wicked are those who put their own economic, social, and personal needs ahead of the needs of the community” (Timothy Keller, quoted in Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*).

Jesus said that the “entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based” on two commandments: to love God and to love neighbor (Mat 22:37-40). The two sins most frequently addressed in the Scriptures are idolatry (not loving God) and social injustice (not loving neighbor). In the law, the essence of loving neighbor is exemplified in this exhortation:

“True justice must be given to foreigners living among you and to orphans, and you must never accept a widow’s garment as security for her debt. Always remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God redeemed you from your slavery. That is why I have given you this command” (Deu 24:17-18).

The prophets continue this theme:

“This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies says: Judge fairly, and show mercy and kindness to one another. Do not oppress widows, orphans, foreigners, and the poor. And do not scheme against each other” (Zec 7:9-10).

Throughout the Scriptures, God expects his people to act kindly towards the most disadvantaged. The marginalized in our midst are often described as “widows, orphans, foreigners, and the poor.” God is described as a “Father to the fatherless, defender of widows” (Psa 68:5). Because God’s people are to reflect his heart, “You must not

exploit a widow or an orphan" or any other "at-risk" person (Exo 22:22-23). This imitation of God's goodness towards the "least of these" (Mat 25:31-46) must be part of our everyday lives. We are called to holistic service: an integrated, two-handed gospel proclaiming the truth of God and demonstrating the love of God to all those in need. When we do this the city will indeed rejoice!

Keep Going:

It is estimated that by 2030 over 3.2 billion people will be living in 700 cities of a million or more. Many "widows, orphans, foreigners, and the poor" will occupy these needy urban landscapes. The following list of passages addresses the issue of these precious individuals who are most at risk in our society. These passages are a Biblical sampling of commands, proverbs, exhortations, and portrayals of God's heart for "the least" among us. This is a long list, because the Bible has much to say on this subject. Don't rush through these references. Pick a few. Read them slowly. Meditate on them deeply. Ask God to reveal his heart to you. In light of these passages, ask him how he wants you to respond. What is your heaven-sent assignment?

Listen, obey and don't give up.

- Exo 22:21-24; 23:3,6,9-11
- Lev 19:9-10,15,33-34; 23:22; 25:35-38
- Deu 10:17-19; 14:28-29; 15:7-11; 24:12-15,17-22; 26:12-13; 27:19
- Job 29:11-17; 31:16-23,31-32
- Psa 10:17-18; 12:5; 35:10; 68:5; 72:1-2,4,12; 82:3-4; 94:4-9; 107:41-43; 109:15-17; 113:5-9; 146:9
- Pro 14:21; 15:25; 19:17; 21:13; 22:9,16,22-23; 23:10-11; 28:8,27; 29:7; 31:8-9,20
- Isa 1:17,21-23; 10:1-2; 11:1-5; 25:4; 61:1
- Jer 5:26-29; 7:5-7; 22:3,15-17; 49:11
- Eze 16:49; 18:10-17; 22:6-12
- Dan 4:27
- Amo 2:6-7; 4:1-2; 5:10-12; 8:4-7
- Zec 7:10
- Mal 3:5
- Mat 19:21; 25:31-46
- Mar 10:21; 12:38-40
- Luk 3:11; 4:16-21; 6:20; 11:39-41; 14:12-14; 18:22; 19:8-10; 20:45-47
- Act 10:2-4,31
- Rom 15:26
- 1Co 13:3
- 2Co 9:9

- 1Ti 5:3-7
- Heb 13:2
- Jam 1:9-11,27; 2:1-7
- 3Jo 5.

Belief #6 – Service: Faith-Inspired Good Works

Biblical Foundation:

What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith; others have good deeds." But I say, "How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds." You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good deeds is useless?

Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." He was even called the friend of God. So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.

Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works (Jam 2:14-26).

Discovery Starter:

James contains an astounding number of commands: 62! Since there are 1,742 words in the Greek text, this works out to be 28.1 words per imperative (WPI). The books with the next highest ratio of imperatives in the New Testament are: 1 Timothy (37.0 WPI), 2 Timothy (37.5 WPI), 1 Peter (44.3 WPI), and Titus (47.1 WPI). Surely James uses these many imperatives because he desired to teach us how to live a life of practical faith that is "pure and genuine" (Jam 1:27).

Imagine having grown up in a household with Jesus as your elder brother! What would it have been like? Jesus was not a theoretical, abstract idea to James, but a genuine, living person with whom he experienced life in all its real practical dimensions. James shared this experience with Jude (both are mentioned in Mat 13:55; Mar 6:3; Jud 1:1. James is mentioned in Act 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; 1Co 15:7; Gal 1:19; 2:9,12; Jam 1:1). It is remarkable that neither of them leverage their sibling relationship with Jesus to gain extra status. In fact, instead of presenting themselves as brothers of the Lord, each deliberately introduces himself as "a slave of Jesus Christ" (Jam 1:1; Jud 1:1). They had observed Jesus' unparalleled example of how to live life. Jesus was their Lord whom they followed.

No wonder that many of James' statements naturally echo Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Mat 5:3-7:29). Jesus' life was reflected in this sermon; a life which whole-heartedly trusted God and lovingly served people in need. James had observed how Jesus has seamlessly blended faith and works in his life. For this reason it is not surprising that James mentions the words *pistis* (faith) and *ergon* (works) exactly 15 times each. There is a perfect equilibrium of these in Jesus' life and in James' words. For them, true work believes (Joh 6:29) and true faith works (Jam 2:17-18,20). Is your faith inspiring your work? Reflect on James' exhortation, "If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom" (Jam 3:13).

Keep Going:

It only takes 15 minutes to read James and about 16 minutes to read Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Note the following parallels between James and the Sermon on the Mount. I would like to suggest that these parallels exist not because James read and tried to copy Matthew 5:3-7:29, but because he had lived and talked with Jesus day after day for most of his life. His words reflect the life of the Jesus he had known. As you read through these passages, what stands out to you? What is the Holy Spirit wanting to bring to your attention as you read through these passages? What steps of obedient, working faith can you take in response?

•Jam 1:2-3 Mat 5:10-12

- Jam 1:4 Mat 5:48
- Jam 1:13 Mat 6:13
- Jam 1:22 Mat 7:20-21
- Jam 1:23-25 Mat 7:24-27
- Jam 2:5 Mat 5:3
- Jam 2:8 Mat 5:17
- Jam 2:10 Mat 5:19
- Jam 2:12-13 Mat 5:7; 6:14-15
- Jam 2:14 Mat 7:26
- Jam 2:20 Mat 7:22
- Jam 3:12 Mat 7:16-18
- Jam 4:3 Mat 7:7
- Jam 4:11-12 Mat 7:1-2
- Jam 5:1-3Mat 6:19-20
- Jam 5:10 Mat 5:12
- Jam 5:11 Mat 5:10
- Jam 5:12 Mat 5:34-37

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