

IN HIS
PRESENCE

a devotional guide

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An Introduction

Last year as a church, we focused much of our time and energy discussing what it means to be faithfully present and how to invite people into our lives. Hopefully you have found ways to gather your neighbors, coworkers, family and friends in your living rooms and around your tables. Conversations are happening and friendships are forming, but now what?

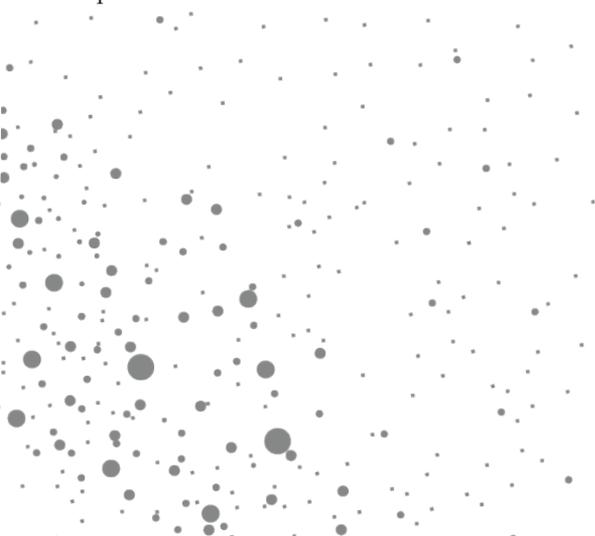
We ask people to join us, not just for dinner or fellowship, but we invite them into our presence in order to invite them into the presence of the Son of Man. In other words, we create relationships with people as a means of making disciples who follow Jesus.

There is no better example of making disciples than the life of Jesus.

From the beginning of the year until Easter, we will be following the gospel readings of the lectionary. We have chosen to follow along with the lectionary compiled by the Vanderbilt Divinity Library.

It is our hope that we will be a church who are changed by exploring the words, the works and the ways of Jesus Christ. In his presence, the truth is proclaimed and lives are forever changed.

Imagine if our church lived like Jesus. What would happen in our neighborhoods, in our workplaces and in our city if we were bringing the presence of Jesus into every moment? As we emulate Christ, we pray that his kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven, that we might live in the presence of the Son of Man.



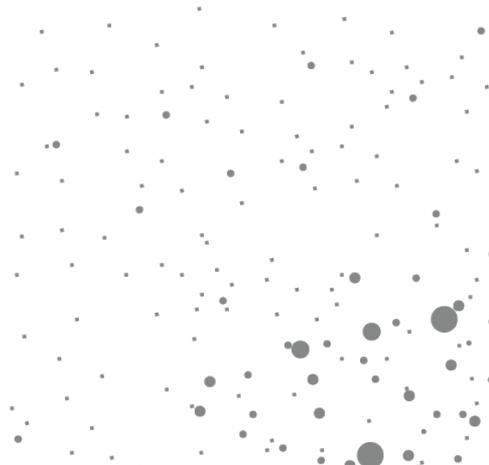
In This Guide, You'll Find:

- Weekly Devotionals written by some members of our teaching team that will follow along with our weekly sermons. Feel free to use this in your Missional Communities or as part of your personal walk with the Lord. We pray these devotionals will provide clarity to these passages of scripture.
- Discussion Questions. As you walk through these weeks in community, we pray these questions will spur on conversation and will challenge you to think more deeply on what the life and example of Jesus Christ leads us to do.
- Prayers. Written to coincide with the week's passage, these prayers were written by the Vanderbilt School of Divinity and are being prayed by millions of other believers all over the world.
- Resources. These might be books, articles, podcasts or videos. We pray that these are helpful as you learn what it means to live like Jesus. They will also be made available on our website:

theparksa.org/inhispresence

As we learn about discipleship and about Jesus as a community, we hope to hear your stories and examples.

Email us your stories: devotionals@theparksa.org



In the presence of the Son of Man, Nathaniel professes Christ.

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."



Good Comes from Nazareth

Written by Patrick Miller

“We’ve found the one Moses and the Prophets wrote about!” Jesus, the Messianic King whom the Jews eagerly expected, had finally appeared. After a life-changing encounter with Jesus, Philip excitedly heralded this news to his friend, Nathaniel. Like many, Nathaniel was hesitant and full of doubt. “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”, he murmured. Nothing in Jewish tradition hinted toward expectation from this quiet little town. For over 500 years, the Jewish people had been in bondage subject to other world rulers. What guarantee was there that this wasn’t another dead end? What separated this man from the rest? Sensing the suspicion, Philip extended Nathaniel an invitation, “Come and See!”

Nevertheless, Nathaniel accompanied Philip down the road towards this encounter. Upon seeing him approach, Jesus exclaimed, “Look, truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” The doubt that had been swirling around in Nathaniel had been replaced with speculation. Nathaniel responded, “How do you know me?” Jesus captured Nathaniel’s heart with his answer. “Before Philip called you under the fig tree, I saw you”. Astonished and bewildered, Nathaniel proclaimed, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel!”

This scene provides a glimpse into what Jesus did best in his ministry—initiate with the downtrodden and soften their calloused hearts. Nathaniel’s story is an example of a person whom had lost all hope in the promises of Israel’s God. An interaction with Jesus quickly changed that. In his ministry, Jesus’ presence provided the liberating fragrance of redemption to those desperately in need of hope. This beautiful reality still rings true today.

Just as Jesus had seen Nathaniel before his encounter with Philip, he has seen and knows us all. Jesus is not ignorant of any jaded experience, concern, or obstacle that keeps us from His love. Jesus’ extension into the life of Nathaniel removing all doubt and suspicion is what He is busy doing in the world. He desperately wants to remove our hang-ups and hesitation, so we can enjoy His presence.

While Jesus is not physically present in our world, He extends his presence into the world today through the power of the Holy Spirit within us. As Christ’s body, we have the honor and privilege to grace someone with that same love He has bestowed upon us. Imagine what our neighborhoods and communities would look like in the City of San Antonio if we took time to look outward at whom God has brought into our lives to partake in His story of grace and truth. The story that has captured our hearts and provided us with hope as we await His return. Let us be the hands of Christ and invite others into that story this year.

? Discussion

- ? Do you ever relate to Nathanael's doubt of Jesus' legitimacy? What leads you to this doubt? How can you and your community remind you of Jesus' holiness?
- ? When did God speak to you while you felt downtrodden? How has God softened your heart? Share this story with your family or Missional Community.
- ? What does this passage teach you about God? What does it teach you about yourself?
- ? How do you see this friendship between Phillip and Nathanael in your Missional Community? Are you inviting others to come and see?

† Prayer

Insistent God,
by night and day you summon
your slumbering people,
So stir us with your voice
and enlighten our lives with your grace
that we give ourselves fully
to Christ's call to mission and ministry. *Amen.*

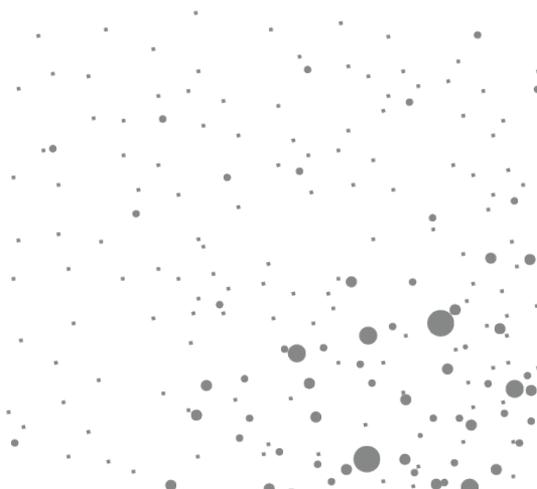
Praxis

- ✚ Read Psalm 139:1-18
- ✚ Write in a journal about the time you felt God first call you. What has God done in your life since then?
- ✚ Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20
- ✚ Have you had friends who have urged you along in your spiritual life? Write them a note thanking and encouraging them.
- ✚ We can learn much from Phillip in this short passage. In your journal, write down names of people who you could invite to come and see the Son of Man.

Going Deeper

In his book, *Faithful Presence*, David Fitch shares a story of being available every week at a McDonalds for breakfast as an invitation to others to come and see what God is doing in our world.

Have you thought about doing something similar? For more information on his book, check the list of resources in the back of this guide or on our website: theparksa.org/inhispresence



In the presence of the Son of Man, the disciples follow.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

Mark 1:14-20



Follow the Actual Messiah

Written by Aaron Villarreal

Simon and Andrew are fishermen. James and John work for their father, Zebedee, as fishermen. They were Jewish, but likely held no position or status in their society. They didn't have rabbinical training. They were merely fishermen, but even the fishermen knew of the promise of a Messiah.

One day, as they are fishing with their father, a man approaches them. "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." The Gospel account of Mark says they immediately left their nets and followed him. They gave up their lives and followed Jesus.

Everyone was expecting the Messiah to be this warrior king, a militaristic anarchist, who would avenge the nation of Israel's plight and exile. This figure would bring their idea of justice and power. These men choose to follow the actual Messiah, not an idea of who they think he will be. They choose to be in his presence instead of following their own plans. He, indeed, teaches them to be fishers of men.

Most of us, if we're honest with ourselves, have ideas of who God is or who he is supposed to be. We expect him to show power in the ways we think are impressive. In this reality, we actually expect God to follow us. We want his favor to work in our favor, to bring us success and victory in the paths we plan for ourselves.

Instead, Jesus stands at the dock looking out to us working on our boats and calls out, "Follow me." It requires us to drop the nets in our hands that we can feel. It requires us to say goodbye to the family members we can see. It requires us to step out of the boat and to follow — to really follow — the footsteps of a man who will choose to sit with the foreigner, the prostitute, the tax collector. It calls us to have faith in the Son of Man.

Jesus is calling you to follow him. What is God calling you to do? Are you following him or do you expect him to follow you in your pursuits?

Discussion

- ❓ What has following Jesus looked like in your life?
Did it require you to give anything up?
- ❓ Jesus chose to make fishermen his disciples instead of rabbis or royalty. What does this mean for us?
- ❓ Is there a person (or people) in your life who are discipling you?
If so, share a bit of what that looks like with your Missional Community.
- ❓ Are you discipling others? If so, share what that looks like with your Missional Community.

Prayer

God of the prophets,
you call us from evil to serve you.
Fulfill in us your commonwealth
of justice and joy,
that the light of your presence
may be revealed to all nations,
to the glory of Jesus' name. *Amen.*

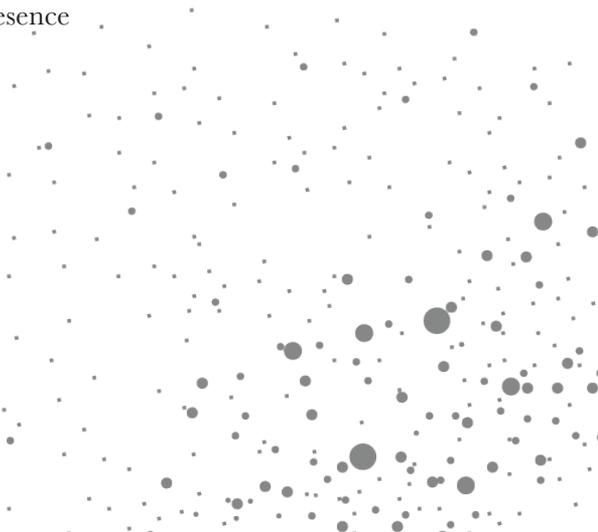
Praxis

- ④ Read Psalm 62:5-12
- ④ Write in a journal about what it means to truly follow Christ.
- ④ Read 1 Corinthians 7:29-31
- ④ Are there people in your life who have displayed a desire to learn more about Christ? Ask them to get lunch or a cup of coffee and ask them to follow you as you follow Christ.
- ④ In your journal, write out a plan for how you might make disciples. If you want to make disciples but don't know where to start, reach out to your missional community leader or to a church staff member for more resources and thoughts.

Going Deeper

In her talk, *An Image of Discipleship*, Jo Saxton teaches about the call to be a disciple and the call to make disciples. She is the author of many books including *Real God, Real Life*, in which she discusses the need for discipleship to help us navigate the waters of everyday life. More information on this book is included in the back of this guide.

The video of this sermonette is available on our website:
theparksa.org/inhispresence



In the presence of the Son of Man, the demons flee.

And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.



Between Good and Evil

Written by Scott Austin

In 313 AD, Constantine officially adopted Christianity as the state religion of Rome. Constantine, a brilliant administrator, realized that embedded in the fabric of Christianity were certain aspects that if lived out by an empire would make its people much easier to govern. Among these elements love, patience, peace, and kindness.

There's a great deal of debate as to whether Constantine ever truly believed in Christ as his Savior, but there's widespread agreement that adopting Christianity as a state religion was the most practical thing for a leader given the cultural climate and overall state of the Roman Empire.

This might be a bit rambling given our text today, where Jesus chases off a pack of demons, but it's the contrast we need to focus in on. For Constantine, and many others, Christianity is practical, but for Jesus it is spiritual. Not only was it spiritual it was spiritual warfare. Jesus could see the temporal and spiritual worlds, and he moved in both. Don't allow anyone to boil Christianity down to practical sayings about how to have a good life... it's warfare, between good and evil, death and life.

We see this in Mark 1:21-28. Jesus is in the synagogue with scholars who had turned the law into something practical. Jesus' knowledge is astonishing to them. Then a man with an unclean spirit comes face to face with the Son of Man. He asks if the Holy One of God was going to destroy the unclean spirit. What was practical had suddenly become spiritual. With authority, Jesus rebukes the unclean spirit and the spirit leaves.

When we make our faith practical, we depart from the mission calling of the church, in the same way the early church struggled after Constantine co-opted Christianity. Look for the power in your faith and realize there is something much deeper happening in the hearts of man, something deeply spiritual. Instead of rules, the Son of Man has brought freedom and life.

Discussion

- ② What is your idea of spiritual warfare? How have you heard it explained before?
- ② What can you learn about spiritual warfare from this example in Scripture?
- ② How often does faith become a practical thing rather than a spiritual reality for you? What does this do to your spiritual disciplines of prayer, of community and of worship?
- ② Is there something spiritually plaguing you? Share this and ask for prayer in your Missional Community, as is appropriate. This might require a gender-specific group.

Prayer

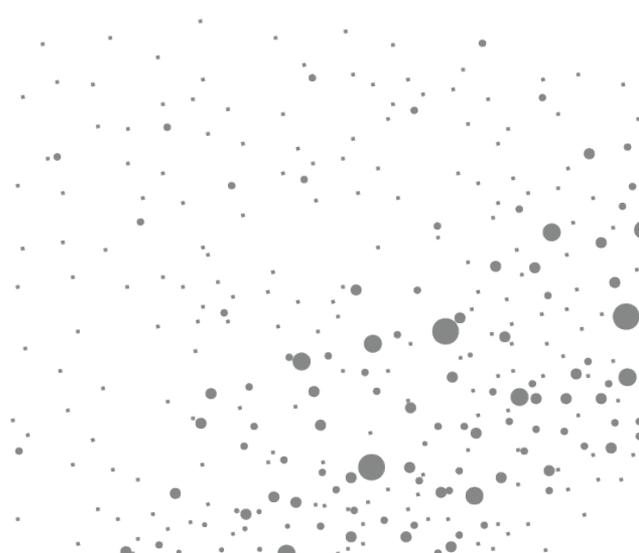
Holy and awesome God,
your Son's authority is found
in integrity and living truth.
Open our imaginations
to new dimensions of your love,
and heal us of all that severs us
from you and one another,
that we may grow into the vision
you unfold before us. *Amen.*

Praxis

- ④ Read Psalm 111
- ④ In your journal, write a prayer of confession of the times you have turned your faith into something practical instead of something spiritual.
- ④ Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-13
- ④ Is there someone you know who is struggling a spiritual battle? Find time this week to pray with them.
- ④ What would our church look like if we fought for each other in these spiritual struggles? Take some time to write a plan for how to ask about and pray for the spiritual struggles in our church.

Going Deeper

Prayer and spiritual warfare is a hefty subject. Theologians and scholars have studied and written immensely on these topics. We highly recommend reading *Spurgeon on Prayer and Spiritual Warfare*. For more information on his book, check the list of resources in the back of this book or on our website: theparksa.org/inhispresence



In the presence of the Son of Man, Simon's mother-in-law is healed.

And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.



Letting Go

Written by Kyle Isenhower

When Simon Peter's mother-in-law lies in her bed ill with a fever, so is prevented from fulfilling her role of serving a preparing a meal. This task falls to the senior woman in the household, and it is not a burden as we would see it. Instead, it is an honor and a privilege for a person to be the one in charge of hospitality to those who visit the house, especially when that house guest is Jesus himself. Many woman today might negatively react to this stereotypical task for a woman, but an understanding domestic gender roles in first century Palestine reveals that this was a matter of honor, not of servitude.

When we look at how Jesus heals her and that she began to serve them, we see how Jesus has not only healed her but also restored her to her proper position in society. This healing was a physical healing, but we should also understand that it was also a social healing. As we continue to walk through Jesus' ministry, we see that he is continually healing. This healing is never only about the physical ailments, but quite often about restoring the dignity and honor of a person in society.

The Greek word *aphiemi* occurs a number of times in the opening chapters of Mark, with it's uses varying widely.

- It is used of the fishermen who leave work and family in order to follow Jesus (1:18, 20).
- It is used of the fever that leaves Peter's mother-in-law (1:31).
- It is used of Jesus not allowing the demons to speak (1:34)
- It is used of Jesus/God forgiving sins (2:5, 7, 9, 10).

This word then seems to denote a drastic change from what was before to the present. It is a "letting go" of something in order to move on. Neither family, job, sickness, nor sins are to control our present life. They are all "left behind" when we encounter Jesus.

So when Simon's mother-in-law was in the presence of Jesus, she was healed. Her life was never the same again. She had been shown love and honor in his presence and was first restored to right standing in society through both physical and social healing. She was able to let go of what had been before and to move on to new life as one who had now encountered Jesus.

Discussion

- ❓ Have you ever felt like you could not fulfill your role due to circumstances beyond your control?
- ❓ Have you ever experienced healing?
Share this story with your Missional Community.
- ❓ Is there pain in your physical, spiritual, relational or emotional life that you are still holding onto? Do you truly believe that God can help you move past and let go?
- ❓ Are you in need of healing?
Ask your Missional Community for prayer.

Prayer

Everlasting God,
you give strength to the powerless
and power to the faint;
you raise up the sick.
Make us agents of healing and wholeness,
that your good news
may be made known
to the ends of your creation. *Amen.*

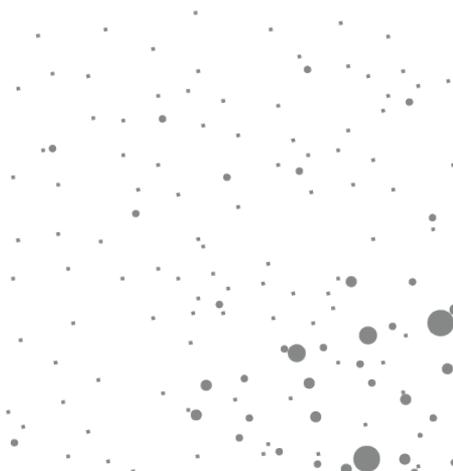
Praxis

- ④ Read Psalm 147:1-20
- ④ In your journal, write down all of the roles you play: mother, father, husband, wife, employee, friend, etc. These are all gifts from God. How do they enrich your life? What would your life look like without these gifts? How has your faith in Jesus shaped the way you live out these roles?
- ④ Read 1 Corinthians 9:16-23
- ④ Write in your journal about a time that God has healed you. This could be physically, spiritually, emotionally, relationally. What did God teach you in that time?
- ④ What would your Missional Community look like if you prayed for healing together? In your journal, write a plan for how you can pray for healing in our church.

Going Deeper

Have you suffered and longed for God to show up and help you leave behind and let go of something in your life that is hindering you? Have you ever prayed for healing that never came? Tim Keller has written a great book on *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*.

On our website, we have a link to a video of him talking about pain and suffering: theparksa.org/inhispresence



In the presence of the Son of Man, Peter is silenced.

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.

And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Mark 9:2-9



We Must First Rightly Hear

Written by Chris Nikkel

Jesus is continuing to prove he is even more powerful than the disciples could have imagined. Jesus takes Peter, James and John to the mountains one day. Jesus climbs the mountain and is transfigured, meaning radiantly transformed. Suddenly, Jesus is talking with two of the greatest Old Testament figures in Elijah and Moses.

Peter had just been rebuked only six days earlier. In fact, his sin was so detestable to Jesus that he called Peter, “Satan.” Now in awe of the Son of Man, glowing and beautiful, Peter devises a plan to build tents for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Peter does not know what else to do so he defaults into action. He knows something supernatural is taking place here and he does not want to leave it behind.

Isn't it fascinating that the voice of the Father jumps in at this point and simply gives the command to listen to Jesus? Throughout the gospel narratives, the Son of Man is calling people to first hear him, before he commands them to do anything. Before he calls them to speak or act, he calls them to listen. He shows those around him that, in order to rightly do or to rightly follow, they must first rightly hear.

Our culture today teaches us to do before we listen, to act before we pray. Like Peter, the church often chooses to keep the supernatural workings of the Son of Man to ourselves. We act as if we can control the works of God, as if our actions are holy in and of themselves. As we spring into action, often we forget that the invitation extended to us by Jesus is to merely, “Come and see.”

Peter wanted to show his commitment by inviting the mysterious work of God and to keep it close to himself. We tend to do the same. However, God the Father shows his commitment to his people by calling them to listen to His Son. This was the call to the disciples when Jesus walked among them and it is the same call to his church today.

Discussion

- ❓ What are your current rhythms of listening to the Son of Man? Do you pray often? Do you carve out time to just listen to God the Father? How does prayer look in your life, as it was modeled by Jesus?
- ❓ Have you ever taken the time to sit and to be still in the presence of God? What did you learn? Did you feel God say anything to you or gain some clarity? Share this with your Missional Community.
- ❓ What would your reaction be on that mountain? Do you identify with the disciples, with Peter?
- ❓ How do you live out the command, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him?”

Prayer

Holy God,
you have revealed the glory
of your love in Jesus Christ,
and have given us a share in your Spirit.
May we who listen to Christ follow you faithfully,
and, in the dark places where you send us,
reveal the light of your gospel. *Amen.*



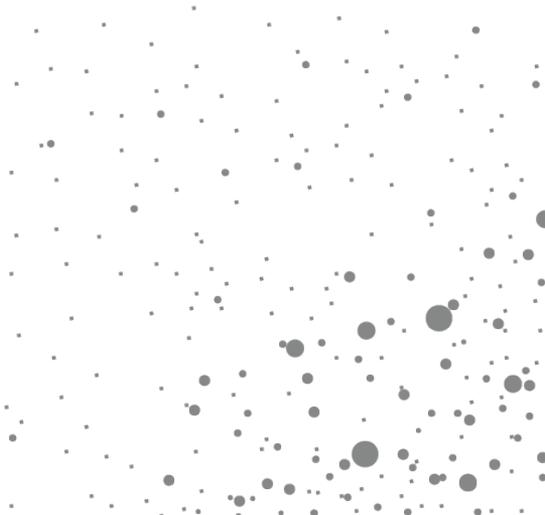
Praxis

- ④ Read Psalm 50:1-6
- ④ Take 15 minutes this week and unplug from all distractions. Meditate on the phrase, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” Reflect on the words: “my,” “beloved,” “Son,” and “listen.”
- ④ Read 2 Corinthians 4:3-6
- ④ Write in your journal how the act of listening to Jesus can influence your relationships within your Missional Community.
- ④ What would it look like for you to sit and pray with someone else? Ask a member of your Missional Community to pray with you and listen for God together.



Going Deeper

Have you ever thought of God as the author of time? When you realize that every hour was designed by him, maybe it would be easier to sit and to pray. Phyllis Tickle wrote a book called *The Divine Hours*, which challenges us to pray every hour. For more information on his book, check the list of resources in the back of this book or on our website: theparksa.org/inhispresence





Going Deeper

The Lectionary

This sermon series, we will follow along with the lectionary passages. The lectionary we follow is from the Vanderbilt Divinity Library. According to their website, their daily readings expand the range of biblical reading in worship and personal devotion by providing daily citations for the full three-year cycle of the Revised Common Lectionary. These weekly readings complement the Sunday readings.

The lectionary can be accessed from our website or by searching “Lectionary Year B by Vanderbilt Divinity Library.”

Text Week

Another online resource for navigating through the lectionary is available at textweek.com. They compile examples of art, commentaries, articles, books and other reference material for your use from a variety of different Christian traditions. It is a wonderful aggregate of knowledge, insight and experiences.

Resources by Week

Below are some supplemental resources and illustrations of the content, week to week. We hope these are helpful to you and your Missional Communities as you navigate the waters of discipleship together.

Week 1 // John 1:43-51

Faithful Presence by David Fitch (book)

Week 2 // Mark 1:14-20

“An Image of Discipleship” by Jo Saxton (video)

Gospel Centered Discipleship by Jonathan Dodson (book)

Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus by Mark Dever (book)

Following Jesus, the Servant King by Jonathan Lunde (book)

Week 3 // Mark 1:21-28

Spurgeon on Prayer and Spiritual Warfare by Charles Spurgeon (book)

Week 4 // Mark 1:29-39

Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places by Eugene Peterson (book)

A Place of Healing by Joni Eareckson Tada (book)

Walking with God through Pain and Suffering by Tim Keller (book)

The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society by Henri Nouwen (book)

Week 5 // Mark 9:2-9

Prayer by Tim Keller (book)

The Divine Hours by Phyllis Tickle (book)

