

SUMMER GROWTH CHALLENGE



King's Cross Church

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The year has seasons and rhythms. In the fall, we gear up for school and harvest. The winter brings Christmas break and family holidays. Spring is packed with events as school wraps up. But summer is a deep breath and an opportunity to rest more intentionally.

This summer we want to invite you into a new challenge. We want to call you to grow spiritually and relationally with renewed vigor. This may be hard or inconvenient at times. Honestly, that's the hope. Growth rarely ever happens without endurance and stretching down roots. So join us this summer for a growth challenge and see what kind of new strength and life is in you as you dedicate yourself to new rhythms and practices.

IMPORTANT: While doing this alone will be beneficial, we grow more when we do things together and with accountability. So as you use this guide, make sure that you have also signed up for a **summer growth group**. These will be text groups of three to five people who are similarly walking through these practices this summer. Out of those who sign up we will be selecting leaders for each group so that someone is prompting discussion and updates. Sign up via our website www.kingscrosslyons.org/summer-growth-challenge

THE PRACTICES

Over the next three months (June/July/August), we will engage in SEVEN different practices and each month we will raise the bar and challenge you to go a little deeper. Just as a runner may slowly add more miles to their route or a strength trainer more weights on the bar, so also we will slowly build up the resistance. These practices will be:

1. Praying the Scriptures¹

Reading the Bible and prayer are well-known spiritual disciplines. However, many Christians struggle to remember what they read or to connect it to their heart. And they find it difficult to pray for more than several minutes. We run out of things to say or get distracted. Praying the Scriptures helps with both of these problems by getting us to meditate more deeply on what we are reading by turning each verse into a prayer. Rather than rushing through a whole chapter, you simply read one verse then stop and turn it into a prayer. Then once you have said what you felt was needed from that verse, move onto the next verse. This method works particularly well with the Psalms.

¹ *Praying the Bible* by Donald S. Whitney is a great, succinct explanation of this spiritual discipline. Whitney encourages people to quickly scan five psalms and then choose one that seems to be the best fit for you that day. For instance, if it is the 1st day of the month, scan Psalm 1, 31, 61, 91, and 121. Choose which one fits the best and then pray through it. Then on the second day of the month scan Psalm 2, 32, 62, 92, and 122 and so on through the month. This will lead you through all 150 psalms in 30 days.

We encourage you to follow the method shared by Donald S. Whitney. For instance, if it is the 1st day of the month, scan Psalm 1, 31, 61, 91, and 121. Choose which one best fits your day and pray through it. Then on the second day of the month scan Psalm 2, 32, 62, 92, and 122 and so on through the month. This will lead you through all 150 psalms in 30 days.

2. Memorizing Scripture (Meditating on Scripture)

Part of what makes praying the Bible so helpful is that we better remember what we are reading as we turn a verse into a prayer. Memorizing takes this one step deeper by imprinting a passage (or even a book of the Bible!) onto our memory so we can carry it with us wherever we go and into every situation. It allows us to meditate on God's word and speak it back to him, not just when we have a Bible in front of us, but at all times.

3. Fasting

There are many different things we can fast (or abstain) from such as TV, social media or certain types of food. But the kind of fasting that Jesus practiced was fasting from all food and only drinking water for a period of time. Jesus makes it clear that he expected his disciples to fast when he says during his sermon on the mount "When you fast...". It was not an optional "if" but an expected "when."

It can be helpful to fast during the same meal or day each week. For instance, choose to skip lunch on Mondays during the first month. You could also fast for two consecutive meals such as eating breakfast and then not eating again until the following morning. This will build your fasting capacity. While you are fasting, be intentional to take extra time with God when you would usually be eating. Let your physical hunger be an expression of your hunger for God.

Note: If you are sick, pregnant or nursing, we encourage you not to fast, but to join with us in prayer. People with eating disorders, diabetes, gout, liver disease, kidney disease, ulcers, hypoglycemia, cancer and blood diseases should not fast.

4. Listening Prayer

It is easy to think that prayer means only talking to God. We are right to express our hearts to God, but only *speaking to him* often leaves out the importance of slowly down our speech and quietly *listening to him* as well. This is not about hearing an audible voice from the clouds, but learning how to discern God's leading in your inner being. Jesus is the good shepherd who leads us and his sheep know his voice. However, distinguishing between the Spirit's voice and our own inner critic (or the lies of the enemy!) is difficult. We encourage you to sit down with a journal and jot down what thoughts you think might be stemming from God. Then walk back through and see if any of those statements can be confirmed or checked by a passage of Scripture.

For instance, if I sat quietly and asked God to speak to me, I might hear: "Take a day to get away and be with me in prayer." I would jot down that thought and then consider, "Does

the Bible support this kind of thought?" The answer is: Yes! Jesus himself often withdrew away from the crowds to be alone with God. This thought could be God's encouragement for me to similarly be in solitude with him. Or again, while I sit listening to the Lord, the name of a friend might come to mind with a desire to pray for them or to reach out to them? I would ask myself: "Does the Bible support this kind of thought?" Yes! We should pray for one another and carry one another's burdens, so this might be the Lord leading me to reach out to someone who is hurting.

Our minds, however, are fallible and not every thought is from the Lord. Check what you hear against what we hear in the Bible. If what comes to your mind does not match what we hear God speaking in the Scriptures, then cross it out. Or better yet, pray against the enemy and your sinful flesh from speaking lies to you.

5. Solitude

Jesus often withdrew to lonely places to be alone with God. It wasn't just a break from people or sitting down with a TV show. Jesus was in solitude so he could more deeply focus on the face of God. Solitude means we also step out of our ordinary places with their easy distractions and get into a quiet, secluded space to be alone with God and to listen to him.

Get out your calendar and schedule when you get away (preferably out of your house or place of work!) and be with God alone. While it may be tempting to bring a friend, you should be entirely alone with God so that he is the only person you interact with during this time. You can pray the Scriptures or listen in prayer, but don't allow yourself to hurry the time with other practices such as journaling or reading. Sit in the solitude and quiet with God. Going on a walk can also be helpful to keep your mind focused.

6. Love Your Neighbor

Spiritual disciplines have a tendency to be very inward, which is all fine and good. But if we aren't careful we can neglect Jesus' other good commands like loving our neighbor. This growth challenge will include several actions we will ask you to take to get to know the people around you in everyday life more.

7. Share Your Story

The Psalmist often speaks about sharing and proclaiming what God has done for him. In the same way, we want to step out of our comfort zone and share with others how God has worked in our lives. Sometimes we call this sharing our testimony or evangelism, but in all simplicity it is simply letting your gratitude for God overflow into your everyday conversations.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

We will engage in each practice during each month of the summer, but not all of them will happen as frequently. For instance, we will aim to pray the Bible *every day*, but we will only schedule a time to be alone or in solitude with God just *once a month*. As mentioned above, these practices will also increase in depth and time each month so that we grow into them more and more. Here is the schedule for each month below:

JUNE

1. **Praying the Scriptures** - Choose **one Psalm** a day to pray through.
2. **Memorizing the Scriptures** - Memorize **one of the following passages** during this month.

Option A: Psalm 1 - The iconic entry Psalm inviting us to flourish like a tree.
Option B: Romans 8:1-8 - The declaration of freedom in Christ
Option C: 1 Peter 2:9-10 - Statement of the new identity of the people of God.
Option D: John 14:15-21 - John promises the Holy Spirit
3. **Fasting** - Abstain from eating any food for **two meals** through the month.
4. **Listening Prayer** - Listen to God for **five minutes** each day. (Note: Don't forget to journal and check what you hear against Scripture!)
5. **Solitude** - Get alone with God for **one hour** once this month.
6. **Love Your Neighbor** - Learn **the name of every neighbor** around your home and **make a neighbor map** with their names on each home. (Note: for those living out in the country this may mean the farm families who live within a mile around you.)
7. **Share Your Story** - Encourage **one friend or family member** with a story of how God has encouraged, rescued or saved you.

JULY

1. **Praying the Scriptures** - Choose **two Psalms** a day to pray through.
2. **Memorizing the Scriptures** - Memorize **one of the following passages** during this month.

Option A: Psalm 23 - Classic prayer of the Lord as our shepherd
Option B: Romans 8:9-17 - Paul's teaching on the spirit of adoption

Option C: **2 Peter 2:3-10** - A call to not be unproductive in our faith.

Option D: **John 15:1-11** - Jesus' teaching on abiding, love and obedience.

3. **Fasting** - Abstain from eating any food for **two consecutive meals**.
4. **Listening Prayer** - Listen to God for **ten minutes** each day. (Note: Don't forget to journal and check what you hear against Scripture!)
5. **Solitude** - Get alone with God for **two consecutive hours** once this month.
6. **Love Your Neighbor** - Lend a tool or drop off a gift to **one neighbor**.
7. **Share Your Story** - Encourage **two friends or co-workers** with a story of how God has encouraged, rescued or saved you.

AUGUST

8. **Praying the Scriptures** - Choose **three Psalms** a day to pray through.
9. **Memorizing the Scriptures** - Memorize **one of the following passages** during this month.

Option A: **Psalms 103**- Meditation on the forgiveness and love of God

Option B: **Romans 8:26-39** - More than conquerors through Christ

Option C: **1 Peter 1:13-25** - Call to holiness and the blood of Christ

Option D: **John 17:20-26**- Jesus' prayer for all believers

10. **Fasting** - Abstain from any food for **five meals** (or one whole day) during the month.
11. **Listening Prayer** - Listen to God for **15 minutes** each day. (Note: Don't forget to journal and check what you hear against Scripture!)
12. **Solitude** - Get alone with God for **three consecutive hours** once this month.
13. **Love Your Neighbor** - Invite **one neighbor or family** over for dinner at your house..
14. **Share Your Story** - Encourage **three friends or co-workers** with a story of how God has encouraged, rescued or saved you.