

Life with God  
A 20 session Study

**Section Three: Continuing Life with God**

Study Eight: Developing intimacy with Jesus

Study Nine: Capturing our thoughts

Study Ten: Understanding our feelings

Study Eleven: Cultivating our character

Study Twelve: Training our bodies

Study Thirteen: Restoring our souls

## Life With God

### Study Eight: Developing Intimacy with Jesus

Review from Study Seven:

The last study was about opposition. We noted the different obstacles and forces at work to oppose us in our pursuit of living life with God and for Him. Take some time as a group to share which exercise you experimented with, and what the Lord has been teaching you as we have been doing these studies.

#### **Practical Exercises from Study Seven:**

1. Memorize Ephesians 6: 10 – 19. As you encounter difficulty, consider if there is some spiritual force at work against you. Pray for God to work and fill your mind with the truths in this passage.
2. Ask the Lord to help you learn the practice of walking in the Spirit. (Galatians 5: 16) Approach each day this week with a prayer that God will help you hear Him and follow Him that day.
3. Pray for the difficult people in your life. Ask the Lord to bless them.

#### **Introduction to Study Eight:**

The point of this series has been to consider the different kind of life that comes from living our lives with God as opposed to separated from Him. In an earlier study we discussed the “I Am” statements of Jesus. These statements showed us that Jesus has done all that is necessary to restore our relationship with God. Another section in John, chapters 13 – 17, records one evening of instruction that Jesus gave his disciples just prior to His crucifixion and resurrection. He was preparing them for what they would experience when He was no longer physically present with them. We have already studied a portion of this section, those verses relating to the Holy Spirit. In this study we will consider what it means to develop intimacy with Jesus. As you discuss these questions be sure to look at the context for each of these passages. Looking at the verses before and after each of the verse(s) may help you with your understanding.

1. Read John 14: 6, 7 and answer these questions.

- a. What question has prompted Jesus to say He is the “way”?
  - b. Why does Jesus use three words, “way”, “truth” and “life” in this statement? What is communicated by each of these words?
  - c. Why does Jesus say that they “know” the Father?
2. Read John 14: 18 – 23 and answer these questions.
- a. Why does Jesus say they will see Him when the world can no longer see Him?
  - b. What is the proof of our love for Jesus according to this passage?
  - c. If we love Him, what does He promise?
  - d. What do you think it means that the Father and Jesus will make their “abode” with the person that loves Them?
3. Read John 15: 1 – 5
- a. What do you think it means to abide? (Try to describe this very practically in day to day language. Does it involve activities, thoughts, actions? Avoid using the word “abide” in your answers.)
  - b. What is the fruit that is mentioned in this chapter?
4. Read John 15: 12 – 16
- a. What is Jesus’ commandment to us?
  - b. What is His commitment to us?
5. Sometimes we speak of God’s love as unconditional. But this passage almost seems to suggest that God’s love is a response to our love. How would you reconcile this passage with your understanding of God’s love?

### **Summary:**

Jesus is teaching his disciples about how they are going to relate to him once He is gone physically. The Spirit was going to be present with them. In an earlier study we discussed the Spirit’s presence, but in this study we see that we are interacting with the other two members of the Trinity, Father and Son. This passage teaches us that obedience is a path to more understanding and knowledge of God. However, it does not teach that God stops loving us when we sin. John teaches us in 1 John 4: 19 that we love because He first loved us. So God always loves first. Our experience and knowledge of that love is vastly deepened by obedience. Paul asked the question “Should we sin that grace might increase? The clear answer was no. We will learn much more of God’s love by obedience than we ever will by disobedience.

Practical Exercises: Pick one or more exercises to experiment with this week, and be ready to talk about it next time.

1. Memorize a verse (or verses) from this study and reflect on it during the week before the next study.
2. Try to spend an hour in silence before the Lord. (What would this look like? Sitting quietly, reading, singing quietly, meditating are just a few examples. But the real challenge for some will be just “being” in the Lord’s presence instead of “doing”. Repeating a verse or phrase from the Bible as a short prayer may be a way to quiet your thoughts so that you can listen.) Find a quiet,

comfortable place where you won't be interrupted. After the hour write about your experience, describing your feelings and thoughts.

3. Meditate on the word *abide*. Experiment with repeating Jesus' command... "Abide in me".. to yourself periodically throughout the day. Reflect on your experience that day before you go to bed.

# Life With God

## Study Nine: Capturing our Thoughts

### Review from Study Eight

Jesus taught His disciples that they were to abide in Him when He would no longer be physically present with them. This is one of the major themes in John 13 – 17. Abiding takes time and focus. Share what you learned about *abiding* from these practical exercises or your own application from the last study.

### Practical Exercises from Study Eight:

4. Memorize a verse (or verses) from this study and reflect on it during the week before the next study.
5. Try to spend an hour in silence before the Lord. (What would this look like? Sitting quietly, reading, singing quietly, meditating are just a few examples. But the real challenge for some will be just “being” in the Lord’s presence instead of “doing”. Repeating a verse or phrase from the Bible as a short prayer may be a way to quiet your thoughts so that you can listen.) Find a quiet, comfortable place where you won’t be interrupted. After the hour write about your experience, describing your feelings and thoughts.
6. Meditate on the word *abide*. Experiment with repeating Jesus’ command... “Abide in me”.. to yourself periodically throughout the day. Reflect on your experience that day before you go to bed.

### Introduction to Study Nine:

Our thought life is important. What we think shapes what we do, how we feel, how we react. The Bible uses different words to reflect aspects of our “inner” life, words like *heart*, *mind*, and *intent* in addition to *thoughts*. This study will examine the power of our thoughts and get us “thinking” about our responsibility to influence our thought process. Take a moment to ask the Lord to guide your thoughts before you begin the study.

1. Read each of these passages and reflect on the “power” of thoughts in each situation.  
Genesis 20:11 – What did Abraham’s thought lead him to do?  
2 Kings 5: 11 – What did Naaman expect (think) would happen? How did he react when it didn’t?  
Psalm 49: 11 – 13 – What thoughts do these people have? What does it lead them to do? What are they called and why? (You may need to read the larger context to fully understand this.)  
Proverbs 23: 4, 5 – What does this passage tell us to avoid and why?
2. Read Proverbs 23: 6, 7. The instruction here is to avoid eating the bread of a selfish man. What is the reason given for this? According to this passage what is more important... our words or our thoughts? Why?
3. Read Proverbs 4: 23. Why do you think it tells us to watch over our hearts with all diligence? What can happen if we don’t do this?

4. Before moving on to the next few verses... discuss this question. What role do our thoughts play in our lives?
5. Reflect on Matthew 15: 17 – 19. What is Jesus saying about the heart in this passage?
6. Read 2 Corinthians 10: 3 -5. What kind of warfare is being described here? Where does this battle take place? What should our goal be?
7. Look at each of these passages. What positive, active thoughts do they tell us to have? What do these passages tell us to avoid? Try to be as concrete and specific about how you would actually do this.

Colossians 3: 1-3

Ephesians 4: 17 – 23

Romans 12: 1 -2

Philippians 2: 1 – 4

Philippians 4: 6 -8

Summary: A common saying is “Actions speak louder than words.” Certainly, there is often a disparity between what we say and what we do. Our actions say significant things about who we really are. But our thoughts go much further. We can entertain thoughts that we do not put into action. In that sense, our actions are limited by our circumstances and opportunities, while our imagination is not. We may not sense that we are making a choice about our focus, even though we are. What we focus on will dominate our mood and our actions. It is especially important that we make sure we are not repeating lies to ourselves. Therefore, setting a guard on our hearts and thoughts should be a high priority for us. Give some thought this week to how you can best do this in your life as you experiment with these application ideas.

**Practical Exercises: Pick one or more exercises to experiment with this week, or make up your own to share with the group.**

1. Meditate on Philippians 4: 8. Make a list of good things you can think about. Carry this list with you throughout the day as a reminder when you have free moments and you find your mind wandering.
2. Memorize a portion of Colossians 3 to give you something to meditate on.
3. For one day try to think of at least one positive thing to say about every person you meet. (You may choose not to actually say it, but still form that thought in your mind.)
4. When anxious thoughts multiply, choose to praise God for some of His qualities. (You may want to carry a list with you on a 3x5 card as a reminder.)

# Life With God

## Study Ten: Understanding our Feelings

**Introduction:** In the last study, we examined the importance of our thoughts. Our actions flow from our thoughts. Paul even said that thoughts were a battleground and could be raised up against the knowledge of God. When we “think” thoughts that are not true we have an inaccurate basis for our decisions. This study will examine our feelings. It is important to consider our thought life first, because feelings flow from our thoughts. Our goal is to understand the right place that our feelings should play in our lives so that we are able to live life with God.

Begin by reviewing what you learned from the last studies exercises.

### **Exercises from Study Nine:**

5. Meditate on Philippians 4: 8.
  6. Memorize a portion of Colossians 3 to give you something to meditate on.
  7. For one day try to think of at least one positive thing to say about every person you meet.
  8. When anxious thoughts multiply, choose to praise God for some of His qualities.
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1. Begin this study by listing all the different kinds of emotions that people can have. (Don't just focus on the negative ones; try to describe positive ones as well.)
  2. Consider the Life of Jesus. What emotions do you see Jesus displaying in these verses? How do these emotions get expressed? What influence do they seem to have on his behavior?
    - a. Matthew 9: 36 – 38
    - b. Matthew 20: 30 – 34
    - c. Mark 3: 1 – 5
    - d. John 2: 13 – 17
    - e. John 11: 33 – 36
  3. In each of these situations, Jesus' emotions were in response to a set of circumstances. However, it is not accurate to say that our circumstances CAUSE our feelings. It is our beliefs or thoughts about those circumstances that generate the emotions. Think of a time when you had a strong emotion and the feeling changed when you received additional information that changed your thoughts.
  4. Emotions, then, can be helpful in understanding two things. Our feelings show us our reaction AND our thoughts about the circumstances. Consider this example. Someone calls you a “brick”. How would you react? (Discuss this before moving on.) Your reaction would depend on whether you thought the term was meant as a compliment or an insult. If you thought it was an insult you might feel angry. If you thought it was a compliment you might feel pleased. If you thought it was an insult, but you didn't care, than it might show your attitude toward the speaker. Here is the point.... Emotions are like a warning light on a dash board. They are indicators. They are not the problem in themselves, but they often can show us where the trouble is.
  5. One strong emotion that can lead to all kinds of difficulty is anger. Read Ephesians 4: 26, 27 and answer these questions.

- a. What does this look like in our daily lives?
  - b. What pattern is suggested in this passage as a way of dealing with all of our emotions?
6. Is there a danger in allowing our emotions to control us? If so, what is that danger?
  7. Is there a danger in ignoring our emotions? If so, what is that danger?
  8. Read Philippians 4: 6 – 8. Do you see anything in this passage about how to deal with emotions?

Summary: Our thoughts and our feelings are a big part of how we process life. They influence our behavior in both subtle and powerful ways. (There are other factors that shape our behavior beyond these two which will be addressed in later studies.) It is therefore important that we learn to live responsibly with them. We need to take our thoughts captive according to Paul. So we also should be responsible to understand our emotions and not let them run away with us. Consider these experiments with your feelings this week.

#### Practical Exercises:

1. Journal two or three emotions a day for a week. Be specific. “I am feeling sad because....” Note the thoughts behind the emotions. What exactly are you reacting to? What is your preferred set of circumstances?
2. If anger is a common emotion for you, you may want to do the longer anger study available at the welcome table. It goes into more depth on that particular emotion.
3. Pray a short prayer of examen each day for a week. Sit for a few moments of silence after praying it.

“Lord, show me any falsehood I have believed that is keeping me from You. Show me any harmful attitude I have maintained today. Lord lead me into Your truth. Please give me the next step to follow You about these matters.”

#### For Additional Reading:

*Telling Yourself the Truth* by William Backus and Marie Chapman

*Healing for Damaged Emotions* by David A. Seamands

# Life With God

## Study Eleven: Cultivating our Character

**Introduction:** We have discussed the powerful influence our thoughts and feelings have on our actions. But our thoughts and feelings cannot explain all of our actions. Have you ever said “I wasn’t thinking?” Our choices flow from more than a combination of those two aspects alone. In this study we are going to consider the issue of our character.

Begin by sharing your responses to the exercises from the last study:

### Exercises from Study 10

4. Journal two or three emotions a day for a week. Be specific.
  5. If anger is a common emotion for you, you may want to do the longer anger study available at the Welcome Table. It goes into more depth on that particular emotion.
  6. Pray a short prayer of examen each day for a week. Sit for a few moments of silence after praying it.
1. In Martin Luther King's famous “I have a dream” speech, he spoke of a time when his children would be judged by the content of their character rather than the color of their skin. In the context of this speech, what do you think “character” means?
  2. In the NASB version Hebrews 13:5 reads:

Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,"

What do you think character means in this context? What would this look like in your life?

3. Read Ephesians 4: 1. What is our calling? What does it mean to walk in a manner “worthy” of our calling?
4. Read Hebrews 12: 1-2. What are the encumbrances that keep us from running the race? What does it mean to “fix our eyes on Jesus”?
5. Read Luke 6: 43 – 45. What does it mean to be a “good tree?” How does one become a “good tree?”
6. Read this quote from an article by Dallas Willard. How does he define character? How does he connect the ideas in the verses used in the previous three questions?

*To fulfill the high calling which God has placed upon us in creating us and redeeming us, we must have the right inner substance or character. We must come to grips with who we really are, inside and out. For we will do what we are. So we will need to become the kind of people who routinely and easily walk in the goodness and power of Jesus our Master. For this, a process of "spiritual formation"—really, transformation—is required.*

Quoted from <<http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=119>>

7. What do you think Willard means by the statement “For we will do what we are.”
8. What produces change in our lives according to these verses?

Romans 5: 3, 4

James 1: 3, 4

Romans 12: 2

What additional verses would you add to these?

9. Consider this definition of character. Would you agree with it? If not, how would you change it? Experiment with your own definitions.

Character is what you “will” to do without much thought or effort.

(Explanation: If you have to try really, really hard not to do something then doing that “something” is probably in your character, and not doing it is probably not in your character yet. The opposite is true: if you have to expend a lot of effort to be willing to do something, it isn't completely in your character yet. Example: If you will lie without thinking much about it, then truthfulness is not a character trait. If you almost never lie, and break out in a sweat if you try to lie, than truthfulness is probably a part of your character.)

**Summary:** Character is really about a track record. Our character is the result of the kinds of choices we have made over our lifetime. As Christians the presence of God’s Spirit adds another huge aspect. Every person, even those who don’t know Jesus, has some type of character. It is formed in us. It is clear that we are to be concerned about what kind of character is formed. The New Testament writers referred to it with different terms: way of life, manner of life and character. It isn’t so much about changing our behavior but the pattern of our behavior that flows from who we are. This is obviously not a weekend project. Nor is it something we can do without God’s work in us. Over the rest of the series we will be considering different aspects of our lives. But as we think about them, our ultimate goal will be heart change or character change, not just changing a few actions.

Practical Exercises:

1. Read this article by Dallas Willard.  
<http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=105>
2. Meditate on a few of the verses from this study. Journal your thoughts about them.
3. Review the previous three studies. (Intimacy with Jesus, Thoughts, Feelings) What is the Lord leading you to do from these studies?

# Life With God

## Study Twelve: Training our bodies

Introduction: In our last study we focused on the importance of our character. Our lives are formed by a number of influences, which include our own intentional choices. In this study we are going to concentrate on the role our bodies play in our spiritual formation. Begin by sharing the results of what you did from the previous exercises.

Exercises from Study Eleven.

4. Read this article by Dallas Willard.  
<http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=105>
5. Meditate on a few of the verses from this study. Journal your thoughts about them.
6. Review the previous three studies. (Intimacy with Jesus, Thoughts, Feelings) What is the Lord leading you to do from these studies?

### Study Twelve:

1. As human beings we are more than just our physical bodies. There are different ways to describe the immaterial aspects of our life. For example we can speak of our will, (intention), our thoughts, our feelings etc. The scriptures speak of our souls. It also uses the word spirit. Where do our bodies fit into this understanding? Read 1 Corinthians 9: 24 – 27. How does Paul treat his body? What reason does he give for this?
2. What does Romans 6: 12, 13 say about sin and our bodies? (If your translation does not include the word body in this passage, find one that does. There is an important truth that is lost without an almost literal translation of this passage.) What does it mean to “submit” the members of our body to sin?
3. Read Romans 7: 22 – 24. Where does this passage say sin (the law of sin) is operating?
4. It seems if we combine Romans 6 and Romans 7 we see this principle. Our bodies have an “automatic pilot” aspect to them. They follow habitual patterns. Think of trying to tie your shoes. It was difficult at first. Now you do it “automatically.” In Romans 7 our condition of being “habituated” to sin is described. We sin without thinking. But Romans 6 tells us we don’t have to live this way. We should not let it reign. The principle here is not that our bodies are evil in themselves, but that they are used to doing evil until we surrender them to something else. With these thoughts as a back drop, now read these two passages. Romans 8: 12 – 14; 1 Corinthians 9: 24-27 (again). What do you observe in them? Do they confirm this kind of understanding, or do they suggest something else?
5. Read Colossians 2: 20- 23. This passage suggests harsh treatment of the body does little to deal with fleshly indulgence. What is the difference between what is described in this verse and what Paul describes as his own treatment of his body?
6. This is how Proverbs 31: 26 reads in the King James version.

“She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.”

What do you think it means that the law of kindness is IN her tongue? How would this compare to sin being in our members as in Romans 7? How would you go about getting kindness “in” our tongue?

7. Spiritual formation, then, must consider the role our bodies play in our life. To ignore the “automatic nature” of our bodies would be to neglect an important part of who we are. Many of the spiritual disciplines are meant to help us retrain our bodies to yield to God’s Spirit rather than being submitted to sin.

Example: Fasting. Fasting teaches us how to run off of spiritual energy rather than physical energy. It breaks down our automatic impulses to give into a craving for food. Jesus said that God’s word is food. So it is a way of reorienting our bodies’ focus to spiritual matters. This is just to get you started. Discuss what kind of impact each of these spiritual disciplines could have on your body.

Fasting  
Silence  
Solitude  
Praise and Worship  
Service (physical labor)

8. Romans 8: 12- 14 speaks specifically of doing this by the Spirit. What is the danger of trying any spiritual discipline in our own effort? What is different when we are doing it by the Spirit?

Conclusion: Our bodies are a wonderful gift from God. They enable us to act. They are an important part of who we are. But one of their features is that they can be “habituated”. In other words they can take on automatic response to situations. Swearing would be a good example of the tongue being habituated to react to negative things. Retraining our body parts to surrender to the Spirit can be done with various spiritual disciplines. It is not a self improvement plan, though. We are not doing this on our own, bereft of the Spirit. We take practical steps to allow the Spirit to work in us. We do it understanding that we are not trying to earn God’s love. But because He loves us, we want to remove any obstacle that keeps us from living for him.

Practical Exercises:

1. Pick a spiritual discipline you have never done before. Experiment with it this week. Journal about your experience. (Remember that the effect of a new discipline often takes time to be realized.)
2. Read about the spiritual disciplines. Here are some great resources.  
Embracing the Love of God by James Bryant Smith – (the end chapters.)  
Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster  
Spirit of the Disciplines by Dallas Willard
3. Make a list of spiritual disciplines you would like to experiment with in the future. Devise a plan to do this and then implement the plan.

# Life With God

## Study Thirteen: Restoring our souls

**Introduction:** There is more to us than meets the eye. In our last study we considered the important role our bodies play in who we are as individuals. As we seek to grow in our relationship with God we need to understand the proper place the body has in who we are. We can take advantage of the way our bodies are designed, or we can be overcome by its impulses. Review what you learned from the exercises from that study. Here they are as a reminder.

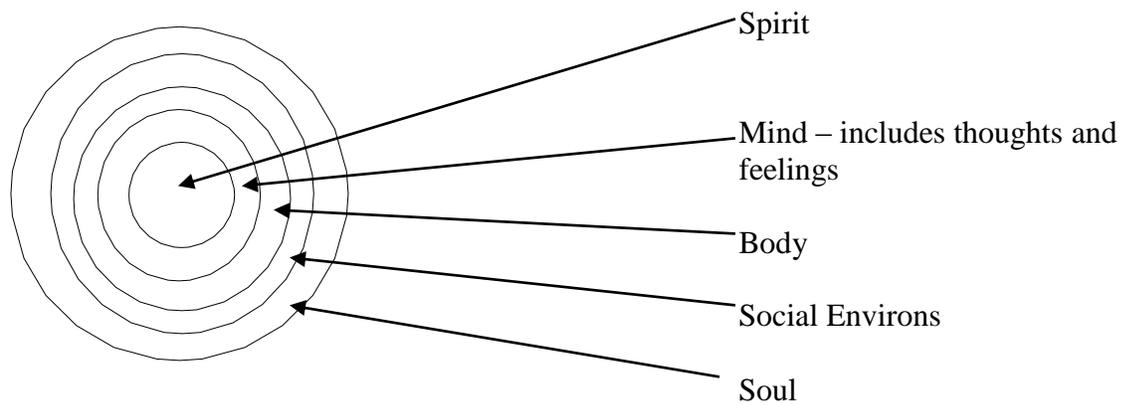
### Exercises from Study 12 for review:

4. Pick a spiritual discipline you have never done before. Experiment with it this week. Journal about your experience. (Remember that the effect of a new discipline often takes time to be realized.)
5. Read about the spiritual disciplines. Here are some great resources.  
Embracing the Love of God by James Bryant Smith – (the end chapters.)  
Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster  
Spirit of the Disciplines by Dallas Willard
6. Make a list of spiritual disciplines you would like to experiment with in the future. Devise a plan to do this and then implement the plan.

### Study Thirteen

Another term used in the scripture is the word “soul.” The psalmist often speaks of his own soul. Understanding what our “souls” are is important to understanding the nature of our lives with God. Work through the following questions before reviewing the diagram.

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23. What three words are used in this passage about people? Try to describe what each means.
2. Read 3 John 2. He speaks of the person’s soul prospering and he wants them to prosper in the same way. Is there a difference between your soul prospering and everything else? Try to describe what that difference is.
3. Read 1 Peter 2: 11. What are fleshly lusts? How do they wage war against the soul?
4. Review this diagram from Renovation of the Heart by Dallas Willard. How does this diagram explain what we are as people? How does this explain the role of our souls in our lives?



### **Brief Definitions:**

**Spirit** – The scripture also calls this the heart. This is the will, our intentions, our purposes. This is an “executive center” as Willard describes it. This is the decision making part of us.

**Mind** – This includes our thoughts and feelings. Obviously it is bigger than our spirit in the sense that there are a lot of things we think about that aren’t decisions we are making. But our thoughts and feelings influence our decisions.

**Body** – This is our physical make up, the physical part of us that can be trained or neglected.

**Social** – This is the context in which we live... including families, culture, history. We are shaped and influenced by these different factors.

**Soul** – This is the non-material part of us that makes a unity of everything else. Our physical health can affect our attitudes. Our thoughts can affect our physical well-being. We are not just a body. But we can’t neglect our body. We are a unity. It is our soul that makes a unity of all these different aspects. It is immaterial, in that it can’t be located in a specific part of our body, for example. It is eternal as it will not cease to exist. It is what allows us to interact with God, as He is Spirit. In this sense it is not some small thing “inside” us, but something quite large and changing.

(This chart and accompanying definitions are adapted from Renovation of the Heart, by Dallas Willard. Please read this great book for more clarity on this topic.)

5. The previous scriptures point out that we actually have a soul. Please look up the following verses. Thinking about the chart, what additional thoughts do these verses suggest about the nature of the soul? How do we care for our souls? (You may have to look at the context to understand the specific verse.)

Psalm 23: 1-3

Psalm 19: 7

Psalm 41: 3-4

Psalm 107: 5 – 9

Psalm 30: 11 – 12

Psalm 33: 20 – 22

Psalm 62: 1

Psalm 63: 1

Psalm 130: 6 - 8

John 12: 27 - 28

**Summary:** We are more than body parts. Our souls make a unity of our lives. Sin hurts them, either the sin we commit, or those sins committed against us. The good news is that there is healing and restoration available in God's presence. Abiding and waiting on the Lord are key to experiencing this healing.

**Practical Exercises:**

This week reflect on the specific verse that spoke to you most in Question 5. What can you do with that thought this week? Does it lead you to a specific type of prayer? Does it lead you to a time of silence before the Lord? Craft your own response to that verse. Share what you did and what you learned with your group next time you meet.