



MCG
Study Guide
Core Practices
June 6 – 12th

Prayer Requests:

Introduction:

Over the Next two weeks, as we near the beginning of summer and MCG's take a break for July and August, we want to remind you of the shared practices that we are encouraged to engage:

1. Daily engage in reading Scripture and pray for God to bless NBBC in its missional calling.
2. Weekly purposely and intentionally bless another person.
3. Monthly practise table fellowship with someone in your Missional Community.
4. Respond to the Spirit's prompting as you sense Him leading and directing.
5. Share with others the stories of what God is doing in your life as opportunities arise.

We will be exploring these practices as MCGs even while the sermons will be on different topics.

Wednesday June 6th – Reading into Scripture

Reading 2 Timothy 3:14 – 17

“...Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”

The problem with the Bible, is not the Bible but the one who is reading it. The popular quip regarding Scripture is that “You can make the Bible say whatever you want it to say.” And this is true. But just because you can twist the Bible to make it say what you want, doesn’t mean that the Bible doesn’t have a true meaning and interpretation. The challenge is to come to Scripture without prejudice or with an agenda.

In his book *With*, Skye Jethani tells about a test that Scot McKnight gives every year to his incoming group of college students:

The test begins with a series of questions about what the students think Jesus is like. Is he moody? Does he get nervous? Is he the life of the party or an introvert? The twenty-four questions are then followed by a second set—with slightly altered language—in which the students answer questions about their own personalities.

McKnight is not the only one who has administered this exam; it has been field tested by other professionals as well. But the results are remarkably consistent—everyone thinks Jesus is just like them. McKnight added, “The test results also suggest that, even though we like to think we are becoming more like Jesus, the reverse is probably more the case: we try to make Jesus like ourselves.”

McKnight's personality questionnaire confirms what the French philosopher Voltaire said three centuries ago: “If God has made us in his image, we have returned him the favor.”¹

This is why Scripture reading is always best done in the context of prayer. We read Scripture but then we ask God that Scripture might

¹ Skye Jethani, *With* (Thomas Nelson, 2011), pp. 61-62

“read us” to make sure our motives are pure and our heart is not being self-deceptive.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

In what ways does the Bible do each of the following:

Teach:

Rebuke:

Correct:

Train:

Prayer Points:

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Pray for our students who are completed their school year
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal in us bias/blindness as we approach Scripture and to reveal truth even if it is difficult

Thursday June 7th – Meditation

Reading: Joshua 1:7 – 9

“...meditate on it day and night...”

I suspect that when most people think about meditating they have in mind the Eastern brand associated with Hinduism and Buddhism. In that form of meditation, the goal is to empty one’s mind, to create a blank slate which is void and empty.

Biblical mediation strives for the opposite the goal is not to empty the mind but to fill it with God’s thoughts.

To explain how Scripture meditation goes beyond hearing, reading, studying, and even memorizing as a means of taking in God's Word, author Donald Whitney provides the analogy of a cup of tea:

In this analogy your mind is the cup of hot water and the tea bag represents your intake of Scripture. Hearing God's Word is like one dip of the tea bag into the cup. Some of the tea's flavor is absorbed by the water, but not as much as would occur with a more thorough soaking of the bag. Reading, studying, and memorizing God's Word are like additional plunges of the tea bag into the cup. The more frequently the tea enters the water, the more permeating its effect.

Meditation, however, is like immersing the bag completely and letting it steep until all the rich tea flavor has been extracted and the hot water is thoroughly tintured reddish brown. Meditation on Scripture is letting the Bible brew in the brain. Thus, we might say that as the tea colors the water, meditation likewise "colors" our thinking. When we meditate on Scripture it colors our thinking about God, about God's ways and his world, and about ourselves.²

² Donald S. Whitney; "Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life (Navpress, 2014), page 47.

What we think upon shapes us as people. As the old saying goes, “When you sow a thought, you reap an action. When you sow that action, you reap a habit. When you sow that habit, you reap a character. When you sow that character, you reap a destiny.” The things we think upon shape us into the people we become. For many people the gateway to the mind is left unguarded. Hours of thoughtless viewing of television shapes their thinking, their worldview and ultimately the type of people they are.

Spending consistent daily time in God’s word, reading it, thinking about it and meditating on it will shape us to become more like the person of Jesus.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

One way of meditating on Scripture is to repeat a verse over and over, but emphasizing a different word each time you repeat it. As you do this think about what difference an emphasis upon that particular word makes to your understanding of that verse.

For example:

- “For **God** so loved the world...”
- “For God **so** loved the world...”
- “For God so **loved** the world...”
- “For God so loved the **world**...”

Use verse 8 from today’s reading and try this meditative technique.

Prayer Points:

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Pray for the election that happens today.

Friday June 8th – The Necessity

Reading: Luke 11:1 – 4

“Lord, teach us to pray...”

I suspect that many of us feel that we ought to pray more, but we find it difficult to make time. In our minds we think that 20 minutes spent praying is 20 minutes we have lost to being productive. This is, of course, a defective understanding of prayer. Prayer enables us to work more productively. Our work, if it is to be used by God and for God, needs to be prayed for.

The Christian human rights group International Justice Mission (IJM) – who spoke at NBBC September 15th 2013 - sets a powerful example of weaving habits of prayer into their daily practices. Every staff member spends the first 30 minutes of the workday in silence—for prayer, meditation, and spiritual reflection. IJM also gathers staff for 30 minutes of daily corporate prayer, in addition to hosting quarterly offsite spiritual retreats and providing employees with an annual day for private spiritual retreat.

This commitment may seem extravagant, especially in the non-profit sector. But IJM CEO Gary Haugen believes "prayerless striving" leads only to exhaustion. "I have learned just how crucial it is to settle my soul in the presence of Jesus every morning," said Haugen, who has worked for two decades to combat human trafficking and other forms of violence against the poor. "Even though it is tempting to hurry into our work, we intentionally still ourselves and connect with our maker: the God who delights in restoring and encouraging his children."

It is reported of the reformer, Martin Luther, that he said, "I have so much to do that if I didn't spend at least three hours a day in prayer I would never get it all done."³ Of course we often read of Jesus spending time alone in prayer. I would suspect that neither Luther nor Jesus could be said to have been unproductive. So how is it that we have bought

³ See <http://julianfreeman.ca/articles/martin-luther-prayer>

into this myth that prayer time is unproductive time. On the contrary prayer is the very thing needed if we want to have a productive day.

It seems that the request of the disciples ought to be our request also, "Lord teach us *to* pray!"

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Spend time walking through every part of your day in prayer. Do your best to anticipate your feelings and bring them to God. Offer to Him every aspect of your work as an offer of worship. Try not to be in a rush, trust that your prayer is actually *very* productive work.

Prayer Points:

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- Pray that this weekend you recognize an opportunity to be relationship makers (be intentional)
- Pray for one of your neighbours that comes to mind

Saturday June 9th – Persistence in Prayer

Reading: Luke 18:1 – 8

“Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.”

Persistence in prayer is intimately tied to faith. This is why, in today’s parable about persisting in prayer, Jesus concludes by asking the question, “when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” Without faith we will not persist in prayer and we will not see the great power that such persistent prayer has.

The 20th century Norwegian pastor [Ole] Hallesby likens prayer to mining as he knew it in Norway. Demolition to create mine shafts took two basic kinds of actions. There are long periods of time, he writes, "when the deep holes are being bored with great effort into the hard rock." To bore the holes deeply enough into the most strategic spots for removing the main body of rock was work that took patience, steadiness, and a great deal of skill. Once the holes were finished, however, the "shot" was inserted and connected to a fuse. "To light the fuse and fire the shot is not only easy but also very interesting One sees 'results.' ... Shots resound, and pieces fly in every direction." He concludes that while the more painstaking work takes both skill and patient strength of character, "anyone can light a fuse."

Pastor Tim Keller comments:

This helpful illustration warns us against doing only "fuse-lighting" prayers, the kind that we soon drop if we do not get immediate results. If we believe both in the power of prayer and in the wisdom of God, we will have a patient prayer life of "hole-boring." Mature believers know that handling the tedium is part of what makes for effective prayers. We must avoid extremes—of either not asking God for things or of thinking we can bend God's will to ours. We must combine tenacious importunity, a "striving with God," with deep acceptance of God's wise will, whatever it is.

Think how patiently and persistently a person fishing will wait in anticipation. It is faith that sustains such dedicated perseverance. So too when we pray we must anticipate that our perseverance will be rewarded. What, within God's will, are you praying for? Keep praying God knows how deep you must drill until you are finally permitted to pray the prayer that lights the fuse to a powerful answer.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Is there really any question as to what today's application ought to be? Spend time praying for that which perhaps you have given up on. Ask God to strengthen your faith to persist in prayer.

Prayer Points:

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer requests:

- *Think of a story of where you saw God's character in someone. Was this something you expected? Why or why not? Give thanks to God for revealing himself.*
- *Don & Elizabeth Beveridge for recovery from surgery and other health related issues*

Sunday June 10th –

Reading

Sermon Notes:

Meditation/Application/Reflection

As you think about today's sermon what is one action point that you are taking away?

Monday June 11th – Bless others**Reading: Luke 6:27 – 31**

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

I wonder if we don't sometimes think that blessing others is kind of like spending money. There is only so much to go around and if we aren't frugal and careful with the spending of our blessings then we'll run out. Of course, we would never admit this to ourselves because if we did we would see how foolish such thinking is.

Pastor Vernal E. Simms tells the following story regarding blessings in his life:

I grew up in a rough Boston housing project called Columbia Point in a family of nine children. Although I'd been a hardworking student, paying for college seemed impossible. But my mother's favorite expression was "Pray, and the Lord will make a way somehow." I viewed that as good advice for other people. But when I decided to go to college and seminary because I believed the Lord had a call on my life, I had no other choice!

I packed for college and even went to orientation, but still didn't have any money. I'd have to pack up my belongings and make the 100-mile trip back home. But an heir to a corporate fortune heard about my plight and paid for my college and seminary education. After I graduated, I went to my benefactor's office to thank him for all he had done for me and asked him what I could do to pay him back.

Imagine my saying to a multimillionaire, "What can I do to repay you?" The man responded, "Help somebody." I've spent the last 20 years in the ministry with that goal in mind. I've pastored in the drug-ridden, crime-infested inner city as well as well-manicured suburbs. And I've

learned that the blessing of God is like a boomerang. As I've tried to help somebody, the Lord has blessed me.⁴

God is a being who blesses richly, spontaneously, generously and freely. If we want others to know this God we must allow them to experience that same kind of blessing through us. This is why we encourage one another to purposely and intentionally bless another person each week.

Meditation/Application/Reflection

Take time to pray and think about how you might bless another person whom God puts on your heart. Then make a plan for when and how you will accomplish this act of blessing. Then do it and come prepared to share your story of blessing with your MCG*.

*Some of you may not be able to do what you plan on before the next MCG gathering, come prepared to share what you plan on doing and invite your group to pray for you.

Prayer Points:

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer request:

- **Charles Best Public School hosts a BBQ at Fortinos today.**
- **Pray for God's blessing for your efforts and NBBC community efforts in being neighbourhood missionaries (consider mid-week sports night, fall fair volunteering, leading or supporting a street or neighbourhood initiative)**

⁴ Vernal E. Simms, senior pastor of Morris Brown A.M.E. Church in Philadelphia, *From One Brother to Another*, eds. William J. Key and Robert Johnson-Smith II (Judson, 1996)

Tuesday June 12th – Bless your enemies**Reading: Matthew 5:43 – 48**

"...love your enemies..."

In his book *Hidden in Plain Sight*, author and pastor Mark Buchanan writes about a woman named Regine. Originally from Rwanda, Regine came to Christ while reading her sister's Bible during the genocide that ravaged her country. When she fled to Canada for refuge, she met her husband, Gordon. They decided to return to Rwanda to show the love of Christ to the people who had once been her enemies. Regine told Mark Buchanan this story of agape love:

A woman's only son was killed. She was consumed with grief and hate and bitterness. "God," she prayed, "reveal my son's killer."

One night she dreamed she was going to heaven. But there was a complication: in order to get to heaven she had to pass through a certain house. She had to walk down the street, enter the house through the front door, go through its rooms, up the stairs, and exit through the back door.

She asked God whose house this was.

"It's the house," he told her, "of your son's killer."

The road to heaven passed through the house of her enemy.

Two nights later, there was a knock at her door. She opened it, and there stood a young man. He was about her son's age.

"Yes?"

He hesitated. Then he said, "I am the one who killed your son. Since that day, I have had no life. No peace. So here I am. I am placing my life in your hands. Kill me. I am dead already. Throw me in jail. I am in prison already. Torture me. I am in torment already. Do with me as you wish."

The woman had prayed for this day. Now it had arrived, and she didn't know what to do. She found, to her own surprise, that she did not want to kill him. Or throw him in jail. Or torture him. In that moment of reckoning, she found she only wanted one thing: a son.

"I ask this of you. Come into my home and live with me. Eat the food I would have prepared for my son. Wear the clothes I would have made for my son. Become the son I lost."

And so he did.

Agape lovers do what God himself has done, making sons and daughters out of bitter enemies, feeding and clothing them, blazing a trail to heaven straight through their houses.⁵

In Luke Jesus says, "bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." Unconditional, extravagant love is one of the greatest ways we can bless others.

Preparing for your MCG

As you come for you MCG be prepared to share:

- **POTLUCK:** Be mindful about a story you might share regarding the importance of MCG regular group meeting together. (ie. What it means to you, or how the group has seen God work through them or in them)
- **STUDY:** Share from your time of Meditation/Application from each day study. What from this Study Guide has made an impression on you or what confused you.
- **PRAYER WALK/ACTIVITY:** be creative and intentional as you pray/work together.

⁵ Mark Buchanan, *Hidden in Plain Sight* (Thomas Nelson, 2007), pp. 187-189

Missional Community Group (MCG) Covenant

We desire to grow as followers of Jesus who represent Him and His Kingdom well in all of our life. We recognize that God's plan is for us to grow in and through relationships with other like-minded disciples. As those who identify as neighbourhood missionaries we enter into this covenant so that we might be transformed by God's grace and that together we might be transforming agents in our neighbourhood.

To this end, this year, we therefore covenant to:

- Meet regularly for weekly encouragement, accountability, and fellowship in our Missional Community Group and corporately with all of NBBC.
- Seek to grow in likeness to Jesus by engaging in NBBC MCG's shared practices.
- Nurture loving relationships within our Missional Community, accepting others as Christ has accepted us.
- Faithfully steward the resources that God has given us: time, abilities, resources and energy.
- Together discern where God is at work and join Him in His mission to bring the Kingdom of God to our neighbourhood.

In all that we covenant, we recognize that we are dependant upon the grace of God to enable us and so we joyfully enter this covenant in hope of what He might do in and through us.

Missional Community Group Shared Practices

6. Daily engage in reading Scripture and pray for God to bless NBBC in its missional calling.
7. Weekly purposely and intentionally bless another person.
8. Monthly practise table fellowship with someone in your Missional Community.
9. Respond to the Spirit's prompting as you sense Him leading and directing.
10. Share with others the stories of what God is doing in your life as opportunities arise.