



New You, Part 1 Discussion Guide

Face the Issue:

Happy New Year!

This past Sunday we began a new series called “New You”. Each new year we have the opportunity for new beginnings but, as Jeremy reminded us, each new start requires an honest assessment of where we currently find ourselves.

Once we decide what we want to do, there is a dangerous trap that we need to avoid. Too often when we decide to take on a spiritual renewal, the process turns into a checklist of things to do. When we fail to meet the checklist, we get discouraged and many times give up. A checklist of deeds is not what God desires from us. He desires a relationship. He wants us to know Him and to grow in that knowledge. If we try to break that down into a checklist of tasks to do each day, we will get overwhelmed and miss the beauty.

What standard practices are often suggested for spiritual growth? Which of these are biblical mandates and which are based more on tradition?

What has contributed to your spiritual growth?

Is there a set plan that we can rely on to ensure spiritual maturity? Why or why not?

What characteristics of spiritual maturity do you observe in people who you believe walk closely with God?

Into the Word:

Read Psalm 119:1–18, 54, and Matthew 14:6–23.

One of the guidelines that Jeremy shared was to prioritize spending time with God. This is not a checklist item like “I will get up at 5:30 every morning and read a chapter of the Bible”. Instead this is a lifestyle choice that we can incorporate in our lives. This can be difficult but not impossible and as we do it more and more it becomes easier.

The writer of Psalm 119 outlined a variety of creative ways to focus on the Word of God, including asking the Holy Spirit to open his eyes to the truth of Scripture, memorization, speaking the Word out loud, meditation, and musical lyrics based on Scripture. Figuring out how best to hide God’s Word in our hearts is an individual process. The key is to resolve not to neglect the Word of God, which is essential to obedience and intimacy with God.

Finding time to spend alone with God was even difficult for Jesus at times. After John the Baptist’s death, Jesus withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place, only to be met on the shore by crowds who had arrived on foot. Jesus allowed the interruption so that he could heal the sick and feed the crowd of

over 5,000 people. Jesus was resolved, however, to spend time with the Father, and he eventually sent the crowd and his disciples away and went to a mountainside to pray alone.

How should we handle interruptions to our time with God?

Psalm 119 outlines a variety of ways to study God's Word. Which of these methods do you find effective? Are any of these methods difficult for you?

In what other ways might we focus on Scripture throughout the day?

Scripture tells us to pray continually (1 Thessalonians 5:17). What does it look like to pray throughout the day? In what creative ways can we carve out time for prayer?

Apply The Word

In our well-meaning intentions to grow, we must be careful not to focus on what others say we "should" be doing. Rather than focus on the "arrival" of spiritual maturity, let's focus on the journey to an intimacy with God.

Consider the following scenario and help Betsy determine some next steps for growth:

Betsy is a 26-year-old mother of three children ranging from 3 months to 8 years in age. She and her husband became Christians while in college. They are still young in their faith. Their extended families are not believers. Betsy says she does not have time to read the Bible nor spend much time in prayer. She also reveals that she is lonely as a stay-at-home mom and misses the adult conversation and friendship that she had at work. She is a talented musician and has been asked to participate in the worship team, but she does not feel she can make the time commitment that this would require.

What might you suggest to Betsy to help her plan some next steps for spiritual growth?