

**Important Dates****September 23:**
See You at the Pole Day**October 4:**
World
Communion Sunday**November 26:**
Thanksgiving Day**November 22:**
Christ the King Sunday
(Last Sunday in the Liturgical year)

Developing a Spiritual Life

I think of developing a spiritual life as permission and encouragement to ask questions. How am I invited to know the love and will of God? What do I discern to be the will of God? How will I follow God's will?

When we develop a spiritual life, we find a center for our lives. This means that first, I seek to sense my truest needs and try to separate them from my wants, whims, and the fads thrust upon me. To know what makes my heart sing, what affirms my abilities, and what makes me know I am one who resides in the kingdom of God is to find a deeper, enduring direction that carries me through to the end of a day or the end of my life.

The ancients kept the spiritual life simple. Reading Scripture, praying for their own struggles and the needs around them, practicing some form of community, and finding some opportunity to serve others were

the tools they sharpened to discern God's way. Consider the inner refreshment you could be gaining from these practices of faith.

TO READ SCRIPTURE means not only zeroing in on a text and swallowing it, but also taking time to digest it. It means giving myself permission to ask questions such as: What does the text actually say? What did it say to its original audience? What does the text mean for me today? What do I learn of God and of myself from this text?

TO PRAY means communicating requests, praise, and thanksgiving to God. This can include keeping a list of people and needs, then bringing them to God at specific times of day. It can also be bringing things to God whenever the Spirit brings something to mind. To pray is to remain open to talking to God throughout the day, even as we mark out specific times to lay our day before God.

TO BE IN A COMMUNITY takes us off any preoccupation with ourselves and our fulfillment. A small group, whether meeting to study, to support in crisis, or because of a particular interest, such as caring for those with particular handicaps, calls us to remember that God not only wishes for us to be transformed, but to intercede and to work for the transformation of those around us. Where is your community?

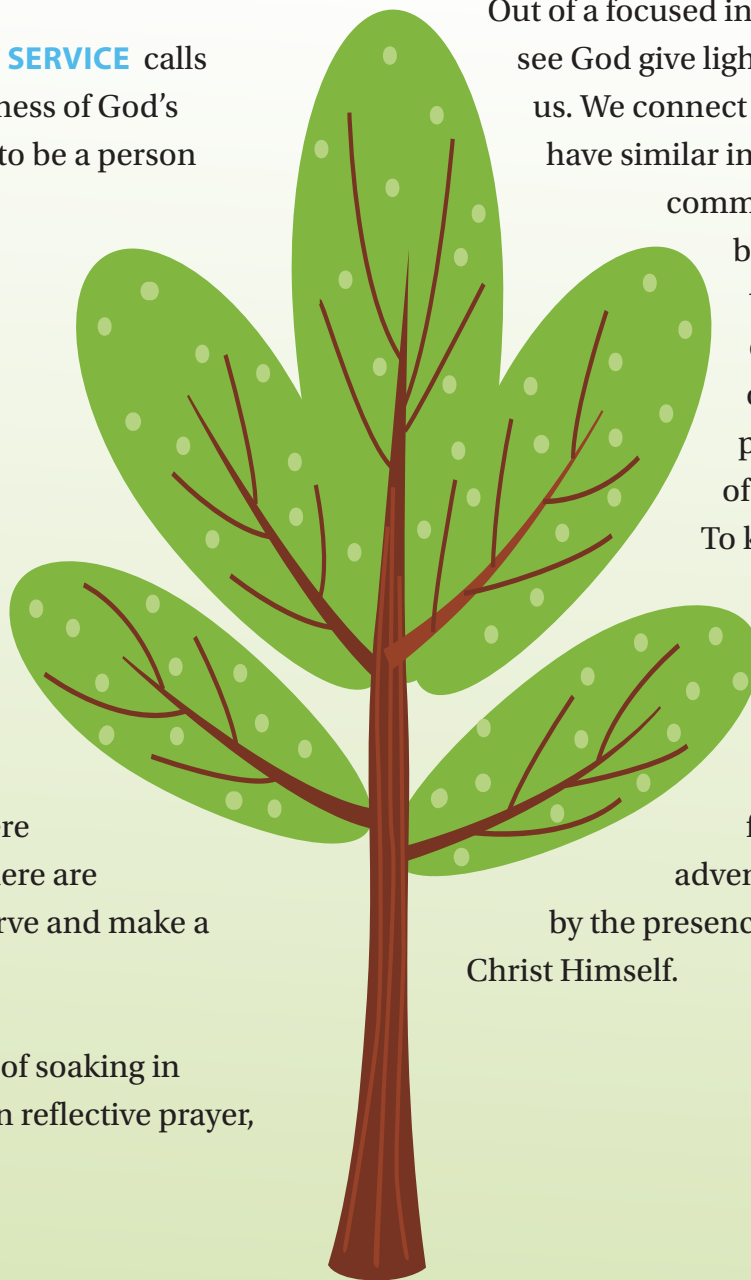
TO FIND A PLACE OF SERVICE calls us to a deeper awareness of God's world. We are called to be a person for and in Jesus, but also to do His works. To serve as a teacher, mentor, encourager, spokesperson, organizer, caregiver, helper, builder, or activist is to be among some avenue of people that God's Spirit beckons us toward. Where do you currently serve? Where have you served? Where are you now drawn to serve and make a difference?

From the disciplines of soaking in Scripture, engaging in reflective prayer,

affixing ourselves to some community, and finding a place to serve, we find that God is developing a spiritual life in us. We find our usefulness. Ministry does not depend primarily on degrees or certification. A spiritual life is not some other-worldly, isolated existence, though it does mean drawing away for periods of renewal and reflection.

Out of a focused inner life, we can see God give light to people around us. We connect with others who have similar interests and find a common affirmation of both God's grace and the encouragement of others. We find ourselves traveling as people in the kingdom of God. To know that life, and to continue to seek it amidst all the other distractions, and callings that bombard us is to find ourselves on the adventure of life guided by the presence and power of Jesus Christ Himself.

- By Tom Tyndall





Knowing God

Through the Eyes of Little Children

Adapt these activities for your toddlers, preschoolers, and early elementary students. Consider sending them home for families to use together.

JOY Prayer

Take the children through this simple prayer.

J . . . Pray to Jesus wiggle thumbs, say something to praise Jesus

O . . . Pray for others wiggle 3 fingers, pray for others

Y . . . Pray for yourself . . . wiggle pinkie, pray for yourself

**We can pray to God anytime, anywhere. God hears our prayers.
What will you say to God?**

A Visit from a Friend

Invite a leader from your church to join your class for one Sunday. Have him or her wear a Bible-time outfit and tell the children a story (*see story suggestions below*) about Jesus from the perspective of an eyewitness. Encourage your helper to keep it simple and be very animated (use big hand gestures, change their volume as they speak, and interact with the kids). After your helper leaves, ask the children what they learned about Jesus.

Story Suggestions:

Use the story that goes with the lesson for the week. You could also use one of these stories about things Jesus taught or did: Matthew 7:24–27 (the wise and foolish builders), Luke 15:1–10 (parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin), Luke 10: 25–37 (parable of the Good Samaritan), Luke 5:17–26 (healing of a man who could not walk), or any other story about Jesus.



Jump into Getting to Know God with Elementary Students

Adapt these activities for your elementary students. Consider sending the ideas home for families to use together.

Who is Jesus?

Pick a few Bible stories about Jesus and things He did or taught. You could use Matthew 7:24–27 (the wise and foolish builders), Luke 15:1–10 (parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin), Luke 10:25–37 (parable of the Good Samaritan), Luke 5:17–26 (healing of a man who could not walk), or any other story about Jesus. Split the class into groups and assign each group a different story. Have each group act out its story for the rest of the class. **God tells us about who He is using the Bible. These stories tell us things about Jesus.** After each group acts out its story, ask: **What does this story teach us about Jesus?**

Autumn Trees

Give each child a piece of paper. Ask the kids to trace their hand and forearm all the way up to their elbow. Make sure their fingers are spread apart. The tracing of their forearm will be the tree trunk and their fingers will be the branches. Have them color the tracing with brown crayons (or provide paint shirts and substitute washable paint or markers). Let your students tear yellow, red, brown, and orange paper to make leaves to tape or glue onto the branches. Have the kids write this memory verse at the top of their page: “Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name” (Psalm 29:2). **God is the creator of all things.** Talk about how we can give God the praise for the good things around us.

Note: Older or more artistically inclined children may prefer to draw their tree trunk and branches rather than trace them.



Knowing God: Youth Style

There are several ways to get to know God better, such as prayer and reading the Bible. Just like you get to know people by having conversations with them, we get to know God better by talking and communicating with Him through prayer. God also tells us about His character through the Bible. Spend time as a group getting to know God. Do a scavenger hunt in the Bible to see how God is described. To get started, try these verses: Psalm 86:5;

Psalm 139:7–12; Isaiah 30:18; Isaiah 40:28; 1 Corinthians 1:9; Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 John 4:8. Use a concordance to find other verses. Look up prayers from your church tradition and others throughout history. Write your own prayers together, telling God things that you want Him to know and asking Him to help you know Him better.

TEACHER'S DEVOTIONAL

Do you ever feel like you give so much of yourself that your own spiritual life suffers? In our busy lives, it can often be difficult to find time to be in the Word. We perform so many different roles that we can easily burn out. So, what can we do to guard against this? Two things will definitely make a difference: spend quality time with God and with other believers.

God is our well. He fills us up. It is encouraging that we have this ultimate, unending source of strength and wisdom. Not only do we have God beside us to guide and encourage us, but we also have fellow teachers. We are not alone! Teachers share similar experiences—good and bad.

What better people to join for the journey? Try getting together with another teacher and working through the list of Scriptures below. We can support each other and learn from God as we start a new Sunday school year.

SUGGESTED READINGS:

- » Psalm 23
- » Psalm 62
- » 1 Thessalonians 5:11–14
- » Psalm 28:6–8
- » Zephaniah 3:17
- » Psalm 91:1–2
- » Proverbs 27:17



FAMILY ACTIVITY

Growing Together

This family activity reinforces what your child is learning in Sunday school class and brings you together as a family. Adapt this activity to fit your family.

Set aside time to talk to your children about what they have been learning in Sunday school. You may want to start your time by reading a story from a children's Bible or Bible storybook to refresh your child's memory and your own. (If they do

not remember what they learned about in Sunday school, pick a story to read and discuss.) Use the questions below to help guide your discussion.

Make this a consistent time, whether it be during a Sunday meal with the family or another regular time you gather as a family. Consider incorporating a game, a movie, or a time of prayer. Personalize it!

QUESTIONS:

- » Who did you learn about this week in Sunday school?
- » What happened in this story?
- » What did God do? What did people do?
- » What do you learn from this story?

Threads in the **ROYAL ROBE**

Scripture reveals to us who God is, what He requires of us, and how He shows His love to us in mighty saving acts of grace. We can never begin to know all there is to know of Him, but our gracious God is able to show us enough of Him in order to have life, health, and peace.

Through the written Word of God, the Holy Spirit teaches us all we need to know of the Triune God. We learn what He desires to make known to us.

The Bible does not teach us in neat theological categories. Rather, God makes Himself known through accounts of His work in the lives of real people, through prophecies and prayers, doctrinal teaching, and wise sayings.

When we follow all these threads of truth, we see a pattern emerging—a royal robe woven from the gathered truths of Scripture adorns our King and displays His love.

To see God more clearly, we express what we learn from Scripture in a coherent way, known as the essentials of faith. The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed both express the essentials of faith.

The great Reformation confessions of faith further laid out the teaching of Scripture in a

systematic way, weaving together the Golden Threads of Scripture, bringing forth the Royal Robe that glorifies Jesus our King. By studying them, we grow in our understanding of God. Such knowledge leads us to put on the robe of Christ by faith. This means that we take our place in union with Him, growing in love and obedience by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The essentials of faith are not all Scripture has to say about God, but represent the Golden Threads around which the whole royal robe is woven. Under the heading of “Teacher Devotionals,” every Bible lesson in this curriculum is keyed to the Golden Threads it expresses. The Stray Threads section picks up additional ideas, or notes the ways in which, the Golden Threads may get distorted.

Believers in the Reformed tradition are a people who celebrate that God can be known because He has graciously made Himself known. A crucial part of our faithfulness is learning and studying the essentials that have been revealed. So, we offer these in hopes of enriching every Bible lesson, enabling you as a teacher to trace the threads of Christ's Royal Robe in the teachings of Scripture.

1 ESSENTIAL NUMBER ONE: The One True God Is the Triune God of Grace—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—Whom Alone We Must Worship and Serve

In the Old Testament, we learn that the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is the creator of the entire world and the constant redeemer through the mighty acts of the people of Israel. In the New Testament, we see the LORD, Israel's God, actually is the Triune God, who reveals Himself to be the eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He has entered into covenant faithfulness with His people and will not leave us or forsake us.

3 ESSENTIAL NUMBER THREE: Holy Scripture Is the Word of God Written, Through Which, in the Power of the Holy Spirit, We Truly Meet the Triune God

One of the great achievements of the Reformation was the recovery of Scripture as our sole authoritative source for knowledge of God and its return to the ordinary people of God. The traditions of the church could be helpful in interpreting the Bible, but must always remain beneath the written Word of God. The Reformers affirmed at the same time that what needs to be known about God from Scriptures can be known by ordinary people who engage in a plain reading of the Bible. The Bible is clear enough in its essential teaching for all who read with prayerful reliance on the Holy Spirit to speak through the Word.

4 ESSENTIAL NUMBER FOUR: The Triune God Is Sovereign Over All

Our religion is not simply a human invention. Nor is it subject to human whims for change and supposed corrections. We do not have the freedom to decide who we would like the Lord to be. God is, and He has made Himself known to us, in Jesus Christ and the Scriptures. While what we may know of the Triune God is true and reliable, we always recognize that we never know all there is to know about Him. The Lord God is high and holy, completely other, beyond our grasp and control, and splendid in His glory. God is moving history toward its appointed end. The Triune God of grace is in control. He reigns. He alone is Judge. He alone is worthy of our praise. We never have dominion over Him. God alone reigns.

2 ESSENTIAL NUMBER TWO: The Eternal Son of God Came to Us as a Human Being in Jesus Christ

In the fullness of time, God the Son took up our humanity as He came to us as Jesus, the man from Nazareth. Jesus is both fully God and fully human. He is all that God has to say to us, in word and deed, about who He is and how He loves us. And Jesus is all we have to say to God, as the one man who lived a life of perfect obedience to Him, on our behalf. In Jesus' relationship with His Father, and in His promise of the Holy Spirit to dwell in us, we come to know that the one God is triune: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

5 ESSENTIAL NUMBER FIVE: Humanity Has Fallen Into Sin

The Scriptures teach us that, although God created us good, through our own willful choices, humanity sinned against Him. The sin of our first parents rocked and wracked the world with terrible consequences. Now, by nature, we are prone to suppress the truth and to choose against our God and our neighbors again and again. There is nothing we human beings do in this world that is not without the taint of our sin. We are helplessly lost in our sin. This means the death of ever hoping to get to the Father on our own. Such a realization is the beginning of crying out in repentance and faith for the rightness and goodness that can only come from the Lord Himself. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, comes to us as a man and has enacted perfect obedience, free from sin, on our behalf.

6

ESSENTIAL NUMBER SIX: We Are Made Right with God by Grace Alone Through Faith Alone

Our salvation from our sins and our sinfulness is all from Christ Jesus. We can never earn our way into God's favor, whether by our good works, zealous worship, or many prayers. The Father forgives our sins by the work of Jesus Christ alone. Christ's death alone takes away the guilt of our sin. Christ's faith and obedience alone, the living sign of His covenant faithfulness, comprise our reconciliation with God. He gives us Christ's righteousness. Our record before God is replaced with Jesus' record! When this happens, we believe in who Christ Jesus is and what He has accomplished. We confess that He is our Lord and Savior. But even this belief and confession is a gift of God, the result of the Holy Spirit's work inside us. Salvation is all of God. We simply rest in what He has done for us.

7

ESSENTIAL NUMBER SEVEN: Election: God Chose Us to Be His Children and Servants

God chose us to believe in Him now that we might spend the rest of our lives serving Him and telling others about Jesus. The essential teaching of election is the awareness that we do not make our way to the Father; He has come all the way down to where we are to claim us. Election, then, is not to a life of ease but to one of service. Those whom He calls, He sends to bring His message to a lost world. If we know Him, it is because He chose us. If He chose us, He sends us to tell others, "Believe the good news and discover your chosenness!"

8

ESSENTIAL NUMBER EIGHT: The Holy Spirit Makes Us More and More Like Jesus

Sanctification means "to make holy," and it refers to the work of the Holy Spirit to form Christ in us. For we not only receive a new record of righteousness in Christ, we also receive a new nature. God places His own Spirit within us and a wonderful series of benefits begins:

- ▶ The Holy Spirit unites to Jesus Christ so that all that belongs to Him comes to belong to us (John 16:13-15).
- ▶ The Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside us, fashioning us more and more in the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29).
- ▶ The Holy Spirit opens our hearts and minds to the Scriptures so that we might be transformed by hearing the Word (John 14:26).
- ▶ The Holy Spirit prays within us, crying out to the Father for us and through us (Gal. 4:6).
- ▶ The Holy Spirit assures us that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16), and His presence is the guarantee of our salvation (Eph. 1:13).
- ▶ The Holy Spirit gives us the power to be faithful witnesses to Christ (Acts 1:8) and enables us to do the ministry and works of Jesus (see Matt. 10:1 and John 14:12).

Of course, the old, sinful nature still remains in us and, thus, the new and the old are in conflict. Christian growth involves a hard struggle. We can never do it on our own. We live in constant need of "the sanctifying work of the Spirit" (1 Pet. 1:2). The person of the Holy Spirit then moves us to live in obedience and empowers us to keep going even after we fail or when the way is difficult. His work will continue until we meet Jesus in heaven at last.

9

ESSENTIAL NUMBER NINE: A Life of Obedience

The people of God, Christ's Church, bring His Word and His love to a broken world. We are in the world, even though we do not belong to this world (John 17:16). We serve the world even though we are aliens and strangers here, passing through on our way to our heavenly homeland. Psalm 84 notes that those "whose hearts are set on pilgrimage" to the city of God cause the dry, desert lands to become a place of springs as they pass through. With the Holy Spirit prompting us and empowering us, with the grace of Jesus cleansing us, with the love of the Father beckoning us, we both gather for worship and move out in service to God. So, even though the Church does not belong to the world, it strives to love the world as Christ did.