

# Using This Guide

This “Christmas Packet” contains three pages of questions and exercises intended to be used over the final weeks of 2020. You’ll find three different topics: Experiencing Joy in Jesus at Christmas, Reflecting on 2020, Making a Plan for Spiritual Growth in 2021.

You’ll notice these three weeks are based around Woodlands six priorities: Grounded, Grace-filled, Giving, Growing, Gathering, and Going. You’ll find those priorities spelled out in their entirety sprinkled throughout the guide.

## USE THIS GUIDE INDIVIDUALLY, IN TEAMS, OR IN YOUR LIFEGROUP:

**Individually:** Journal through the questions and ideas in some extra quiet time set aside throughout each week.

**For Spiritual Growth Teams:** Identify the person or two you plan to grow alongside this next year. Talk through the questions and make a plan together.

**For LifeGroups:** Use the questions as a discussion guide during your group meeting over the holidays.

## JOIN US FOR *A Joyful Journey* IN JANUARY

In January, we will begin a 12-week sermon series called “A Joyful Journey”. This series will walk through the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5 -7. How can you join the *Joyful Journey*?

1. Engage with the sermon series. Come and worship with us in person or engage virtually each Sunday at 8:30 am or 10:30 am.
2. Read through the gospels! Woodlands in the Word is designed to read through all four gospels in the 12 weeks of this series. Read with us.
3. Utilize the Spiritual Growth Resources! Each week, we’ll have resources for you to use to dive deeper into the message and the gospel readings with your Spiritual Growth Partners.
4. Don’t do this alone! Connect with others. Pursue growth in a Christ-centered transformational community in 2021. Find a friend, ally, or a few teammates to walk this journey with you!



#### GROUNDING IN THE WORD & PRAYER

Consider walking through the Christmas story through the eyes of these biblical authors or persons. What might their experience of Jesus' birth have been?

**Zechariah:** Luke 1:1-25; 57-80

**Isaiah:** Isaiah 9:6-7 + (Matt 11:1-6), 42:1-7 + (Matt 12:15-21); 52:13-53:12; 61 + (Luke 4:14-21)

**Eve:** Genensis 3:1-20

**Anna:** Luke 2:22-40

**Herod's Court Official:** Matt 2:1-18

#### GRACE-FILLED

Is there someone in your family that needs grace from you this Christmas?

Pray for an opportunity to show them grace.

#### GIVING

Make plans to bless a neighbor or friend with a random act of kindness this week.

#### GROWING

Find the lyrics of your favorite Christmas carol or album. What scripture texts ground the lyrics in truth?

Ideas:

*Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus*

*Christmas Stories: Repeat the Sounding Joy* by Jason Gray

*Behold the Lamb of God* by Andrew Peterson

#### GATHERING

Meeting family and friends this holiday season continues to be difficult and sometimes impossible. Make a list of those you'd normally see this Christmas season.

Pray for each person on your list.

Lean into praying for those difficult to love.

#### GOING

##### CHRISTMAS @ WOODLANDS!

**Reserve your in person spot online!**

Which service are you attending on Christmas Eve?  
(11am, 1pm, 3pm & 5pm)

##### Attending a Live Feed?

Do you have a friend or family member from far away that you could invite to watch with you?

### GROUNDED

Take some time to remember how you met with God in 2020 in his word & through prayer.

Spend time worshipping & thanking him for his faithful, steadfast, loving presence.

Were there disciplines that were lacking? Confess these & ask God to lead you in desire & dependence in 2021.

### GRACE-FILLED

**Woodlands Priority:** We aspire to be a community marked by grace. Grace is the foundation of our faith, and the essence of Biblical love. All people are made in the image of God, infinitely valuable to him, and yet in need of his grace. Therefore we will love all people and will continually proclaim the grace filled love that has come to the world in Jesus Christ. God is honored and people thrive when Biblical love is practiced, so we will express our differences with graciousness and pursue our mission with unity.

Revisit Titus 2:11-14 which grounds this priority.  
Why does the grace of God appear according to this passage?  
How has this grace shown up in your life in 2020?

### GIVING

**Woodlands Priority:** We aspire to practice faithful generosity in all areas of our lives, believing that the extent of our fruitfulness will be determined by our faithfulness with what he has entrusted to us. Jesus gave his life for us so we will give our time, talents, & treasures for his purposes. As stewards of everything & owners of nothing, we will seek to manage the resources entrusted to us with integrity & use the abilities he has equipped us with to serve faithfully.

Spend time thanking God for the things he has given you to steward.

### GROWING

The year of 2020 has undoubtedly brought some hardship into your life. God uses affliction for his good purposes, but in the midst of that hardship, grief, confusion & anger often reign. The Bible is full of lament, or passionate expressions of sorrow, & some passages teach us how to lament biblically. Read Psalm 13 & identify the steps of lament: **acknowledging** circumstances & feelings, **remembering** who God is, & **trusting** in who he is. Think back through some of your personal afflictions in 2020. What emotions & circumstances surrounded it? Express those honestly to God. He is willing to sit with you in them. What about God's character can provide hope & initiate trust in your heart?

### GOING

As you reflect on 2020, who (in your immediate world) needs you to "go to" them with the good news and love of Christ?

Name and pray for them.

What tangible ways can you go to them?

### GATHERING

Who have you connected with in 2020 that has encouraged you in your faith? This person or group of people would be great to get on your "spiritual growth team" for 2021. Who is on your potential teammate list?

Ask God to show you who should be on your team and also someone whose team you should be on.

### GROUNDING IN THE WORD & PRAYER

**Woodlands Priority:** We aspire to be a Christ-centered community grounded in the Bible & prayer. The Bible is God's Word, our ultimate authority, & we seek to study it, understand it, & be transformed by it. Therefore it will be the basis of our teaching, shape our ministries, guide our decisions, & govern our conduct. Prayer is powerful & essential in the pursuit of God and his purposes. Therefore we will engage in widespread consistent prayer at all levels of church life.

Reflect on Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and John 15:4-5. What do these texts emphasize about staying connected to God in his word & through prayer? How will you make certain you stay grounded in these areas throughout 2021?

### GRACE-FILLED

Talk through this priority with your transformational community & family. (see page 3)

Discuss how you can be a community marked by grace. What will this require of you?

### GIVING

What's the most helpful way you can strengthen the Woodlands Church community in 2021?

[Time, Talents & Treasure]

### GROWING

**Woodlands Priority:** We aspire to be a community where everyone is growing in their knowledge of, trust in, dependence on, and obedience to Jesus. He is Lord, and calls us to live surrendered to him, so we will help people pursue spiritual growth in all of life, for all of life. To facilitate spiritual growth in our community we will coach people to walk with Jesus, equip them for service and witness, and develop leaders.

#### Design your spiritual growth plan.

The last page of this document provides a template.

Consider: What spiritual discipline do you want to grow in this year? When & where will you meet with God? What will those times look like?

### GATHERING

**Woodlands Priority:** We aspire to pursue life in Christ together; therefore we commit to gather consistently in two ways. Every Sunday morning, we gather for corporate worship, prayer, & the teaching of God's Word. We also meet together in smaller groups as transformational communities to support, challenge, & encourage one another to be Christ-centered. In our times together the Holy Spirit shapes us to be like Jesus & sends us to be Jesus in our community & the world.

Two passages in Hebrews talk about the importance of gathering & encouraging one another. Read Hebrews 3:12-13 and 10:23-25. How do these texts anchor this priority?

**Connect with your spiritual growth plan teammates & share your plan for spiritual growth in 2021.**

### GOING

**Woodlands Priority:** We aspire to be a church that goes intentionally into our local community & world with the Gospel. Jesus is the hope of the world, so we will strategically & creatively share the good news & love of Christ in relevant ways. We will seek to bless & impact others by doing good works to meet pressing needs.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:20-21. How is God making you "God's righteousness" in him? Who is he asking you to share that righteousness with?

# Dive Deeper **SPIRITUAL GROWTH PLAN TEMPLATE**

## **FOUR ELEMENTS OF A SPIRITUAL GROWTH PLAN**

### **Connecting to God**

By far the two things that God will use most powerfully and frequently in our lives to grow us and ground us in him are his Word and prayer. At the most basic level, he speaks to us through his Word and we respond through prayer. This is how our relationship with him is nurtured and sustained. So the most significant thing that we can and should include in a spiritual growth plan is how we will read the Word devotionally (thoughtfully and responsively). We recommend as a starting point 30 minutes for such devotional reading of the Bible. Twenty minutes to read and reflect on what we read and ten minutes to respond in prayer to what He has shown us in His Word and speak with Him about other concerns we may have. In a plan, include when you will do this, where, for how long, and what portion(s) of the Bible you will read.

**OUR 2021 RECOMMENDATION: USE WOODLANDS IN THE WORD AS A BIBLE READING PLAN.  
We will be reading through all 4 gospels before Easter.**

### **Conforming to Scripture**

As you think through a spiritual growth plan ask God to guide you regarding any changes he may want to make in your life. Jesus said that if we love him we will keep His commandments. He has spoken to us in his Word about virtually every area of life. Jesus also said that the goal of the church is to make disciples “teaching them to observe all I have commanded you” To be a follower of Christ is to continually seek to grow in obedience to His will. We all have “growing edges”. Ask God to show you those. It may be harmful patterns to stop, or helpful ones to begin. He will show you and He will enable you if you ask him. Write them down as part of your plan to grow.

### **Inputs**

In addition to reading the word devotionally, God uses such things as books, involvement in groups, conferences, the regular practice of spending extended time alone with him, Scripture memory, rest and retreats, to grow us. These are some of the time tested “means of grace” that have been recognized for centuries. Ask God to show you what elements might help you most at this stage of your life and in light of the areas where you would like to grow.

**OUR 2021 RECOMMENDATION: PUT TOGETHER A SPIRITUAL GROWTH TEAM  
(1-2 people to meet with regularly to support one another)**

### **Outputs**

Often when we give to and serve others, we receive far more blessing than we pass on. Serving is also one of those “means of grace” that God has ordained to nurture our relationship with Him. Serving and giving to others and to God’s work helps break the human tendency toward selfishness, and God uses it, by His Spirit to free us. All of us have been blessed with talents and resources that are not just given to us for us. God wants us to be channels. So the final step in any good SGP is to think through and write down how you will serve and give to God and others.