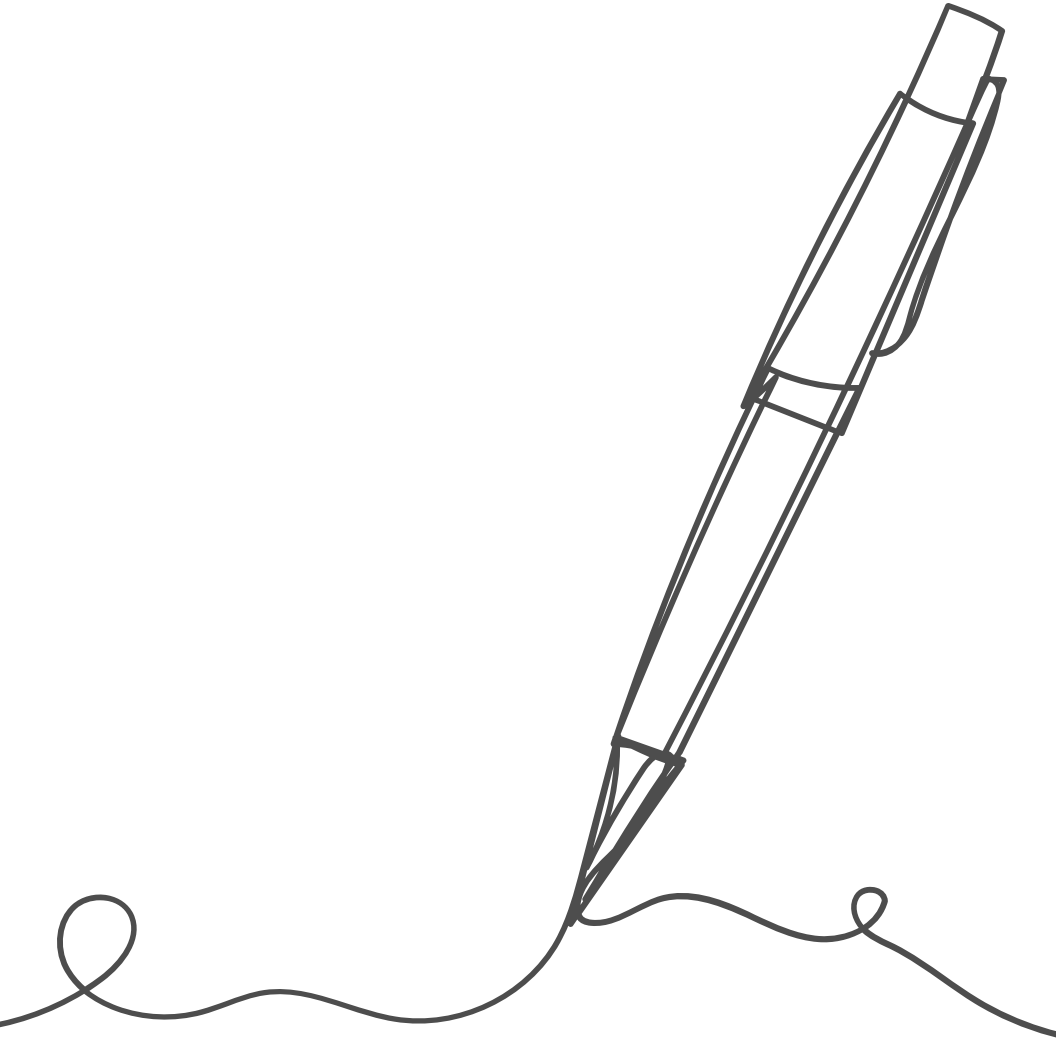


Align STUDY



Introduction

ALIGN

To “align” something means to draw it into balance - to organize it in accordance with other things. It’s a word of intentionality and choice.

It’s also a word of value - a properly aligned schedule should match our priorities and purposes. No one intends to align their life with bad habits or time wasters - no one wants to align their schedules with poor choices or unimportant activities. But we can easily and unintentionally slip that way.

It’s easy for many parts of our lives to be out of alignment. Time, busyness, and the pressures of so many activities may have caused us to drift away from our good priorities and values.

This two week study is an opportunity to pause, evaluate, and make some changes; it’s a chance to draw your schedule and attention back towards intentionality. Through verses, a short devotional, prayer, and journal, this is an time to make new choices.

This study is also an invitation to explore the current opportunities that Woodlands Church has for growth. As you reach the end of the study, look through the class and ministry options offered at Woodlands. Perhaps signing up for one of those opportunities will give you the intentionality you need.

As always, you can find all open classes, groups, and next steps at woodlandschurch.org/events.

Day 1

FIRST

Verse:

Matthew 6:33: But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Devotional:

The word “first” in this verse is a word of priority and valuation. There are simply things that are more important than others! And at the top of that list? The Kingdom of God. There is nothing more important, more valuable, or richer than seeking and deepening our walk with God and our pursuit of His Kingdom.

That’s a striking statement! And it gets even richer when you consider the first word in the verse - “But.” Jesus had just finished saying that we needn’t worry about physical needs or wants - “Your Father knows you need them!” (v 32). Rather, pursue the things that will last for eternity - your relationship with your Father.

Over the course of this study, you’ll be examining your priorities and your current life practices, and seeking to align them. But don’t miss this important starting place: there is nothing more worthwhile than the Kingdom of God.

Prayer Prompt:

Lord, give me the wisdom to prioritize what I should; to value what I must, and to avoid the things that will do me harm.

Section One

YOUR LIFE NOW

Over the next four days, we're going to patiently consider the state of your 'now.' The overarching question here is "Where are you now?" Where is your faith, what is your schedule, and how are you growing?

The goal in this section isn't to be negative or critical, nor is it to be flippant and dismissive. Instead, it's to find specific areas in your life where you feel you could use some intentional growth.

There are so many more areas we could consider - view these as starting points. Throughout the next few days, allow your mind to wrestle with the question, "Where in my life do I want to see growth?"

Don't worry about what that growth might look like quite yet.

As you go through the study, don't skip the prayer section. Before journaling, genuinely ask God to lead and guide your thoughts and processing.

A tool to use:

A simple tool to consider as you move through the next two sections is labeling areas in red, yellow, and green. Red is an area you need to full-stop and reconsider, a yellow area is functioning but could use some attention and intention, and green is going well, rejoice! Most likely, you won't have all of one color, but rather a variety.

Day 2

FAITH

Verse:

Luke 8:25: He said to them, "Where is your faith?"

Devotional:

This stark question was delivered to the disciples after a near-death experience, when these seasoned sailors were clinging to the rigging for their lives, sure they were going to sink and drown. Where is their faith? Overboard in the storm!

And then Jesus calms the storm, and turns to his frightened disciples. But don't hear a rebuke in Jesus' question. Don't hear, "You should have had more faith!" Instead, hear this gentle invitation: "Where is your faith placed?" Is it in your skills, knowledge, and ability to navigate the situation you're facing? Or is it fully and entirely in the person of Jesus?

What is the state of your relationship with Jesus? How is that modeled in your trust and dependence, habits and schedule? Is it dry and hurting, or rich and thriving?

Where is your faith?

Prayer Prompt:

Lord, deepen and renew my trust in you and my desire for you. Help me to place my trust in you and you alone.

Day 3

RELATIONSHIPS

Verse:

Hebrews 10:24-25: And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Devotional:

The phrasing, “stir up one another” has a distinct feeling of mutual encouragement, strengthening, and growth. It represents relationships where life is shared, hurts are revealed, pain is processed, and healing is found. There’s transparency, intentionality, and joyfulness. It’s a beautiful picture of relationships that are grounded in Christ, founded in hope, and desiring goodness.

Is it reflective of your life? Many of us might have friends - even friends we enjoy spending time with. Are they stirring you up to love and good works? Are you stirring them up? What of our families? Are they stirring us up?

This shouldn’t be read as an accusation or a condemnation - and it certainly shouldn’t produce guilt or frustration. Instead, this is an opportunity to process the gift of Christian relationships - the promise of healthy friendships that can give life and bring joy. What an opportunity!

Prayer Prompt:

Lord, help me to gain a vision for Christ-centered relationships that excites and encourages me. Don’t allow past hurts or past experiences to rob me of life-giving relationships in you.

Journal:

Take some time to list your intentional relationships and people you meet with on a regular basis. Are they life-giving? Do they stir one another up? Is this an area that you're content in?

A large area of dotted lines for journaling, consisting of approximately 25 horizontal rows of small, evenly spaced dots.

Day 4

SERVICE

Verse:

1 Peter 4:10: "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace."

Devotional:

God has given us all gifts we are asked to *steward* - things that He invites us to take care of for the sake of His church. These gifts can include finances, abilities, strengths, and experiences. Stewarding our gifts well leads to loving God more deeply and experiencing the good fruit of life with Him - love, joy, and peace.

Just pause and consider all the areas you're already stewarding your gifts! Do not dismiss or take for granted the areas you're faithfully serving.

However, the busyness of life has a nasty way of crowding our schedules. Our time is taken away by activity after activity, and our finances are taken away by bills and free spending. Our passion is dried up in a constant stream of things we need to do - rather than making careful choices about what we *can* do. Let's fight that by slowing down and making an intentional choice to steward our gifts well.

Prayer Prompt:

Lord, help me see ways that my joy and my relationship with you can be fueled by giving - not out of necessity or need, but out of passion and opportunity.

Journal:

How would you describe your level of joy-filled giving?

There might be a lot of "pouring out" in your life - can you bring a level of intentionality into what you say "yes" to, "no" to or adjust your perspective toward joy-filled giving? Where could you be giving differently?

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Day 5

LEARNING

Verse:

Ephesians 4:12-13: "... for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Devotional:

Intentional growth is such a priority for Christ followers; it takes careful decisions and clear choices. Intentional growth is never something that just happens!

Growth comes from a lot of areas, like experiences, relationships, and community. But so much growth also comes from simply learning - new skills, deeper realities, and profound truth. Our verse today says that we're supposed to gain faith and knowledge - and then it goes on to say, "we are to grow up... into Christ" (v 15).

Learning is important in our jobs and in our homes, but it's also important in our walk with Jesus! How have you been growing, and what are you learning? What books are you reading, classes are you taking, and conversations are you having? Where are there areas of your relationship with Jesus you feel lacking or underdeveloped - learn! God will not cover under scrutiny - instead, His gospel and love will grow more and more profound the more it is studied and explored.

Prayer Prompt:

Lord, give me the desire to learn and grow in my knowledge of your Son. Help me to reach maturity in my understanding and in my faith.

Journal:

In your relationship with Jesus, what are some things you need to learn? What confuses you; where are you unclear? What are some things you do to help you fill in those gaps?

**You may not know where to look or what you need to fill in gaps or even where your gaps are. That's ok! Write out your questions and confusions and let it rest for now. This is where your church body and community comes into play + more resources are available to you. Keep going..*



Section Two

PRIORITIES

If we want to align our schedule or focuses to anything, we need to be clear about our priorities. That's what we'll be exploring over the next six days.

But to be clear, as Christ followers, we ultimately don't want to align our lives with *our* priorities, but rather with God's. As we faithfully follow Him and submit our lives to Him, His priorities will increasingly become our own as well; alignment becomes easier.

But that might not be the case in every aspect of our life right now. And so for the next six days, patiently consider your own priorities, compare them to His, and seek to submit your life to Scripture.

May we value what He values, and discard what He doesn't care for. And may our patterns, schedules, and habits reflect those values!

Day 6

TIME WITH GOD

Verse:

Psalm 1:1-2: Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

Devotional:

Psalm 1 goes on to relate this grounded man to a well-rooted tree, richly nourished and thriving in the place where it's planted. What is the nourishment that leads to thriving? A healthy spiritual diet of God's Word, contemplation of the things of God, and faithful prayer. This is where thriving takes place!

But the busyness and worries of the world eagerly choke out time and space for these patterns, which require time, space, quiet, and margin. It's easy to go through weeks, months, and years missing the simple pattern of sitting quietly in God's presence. Spend time thinking about the priority of seeking God.

Prayer Prompt:

Father, increase my desire to spend time and space with you. Ignite my heart for your presence, and allow your Word to speak to me.

Journal:

Honestly gauge how much you value spending time with God. Why do you answer that way? Spend time reflecting on your contentment with your answer, and whether there are changes that need to be made.

Handwriting practice lines consisting of a series of horizontal dotted lines on a white background.

Day 7

NEEDS

Verse:

Ecc 5:18: He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.

Devotional:

Money is so easy to love! Oftentimes when we hear phrases like that, our hearts think about greed or a run after great riches. But money also lures with false promises of stability and simplicity: "If I just had a little more, the bills wouldn't be so tight and I could get a few things that would help so much!" That may be true, but it's also as likely that a little more would just create a greater desire for even more after that!

Instead, the Bible calls us to contentment with what we have. Not laziness or idleness, but a sure confidence that God is faithful - and that can fuel anxiety-free faithfulness in our life. Christ came to set us free - not just from sin, but also the worry and anxiety of "bigger, better, more!"

Prayer Prompt:

God, calm my heart and fears surrounding finances, and allow me to increasingly trust in you.

Journal:

Reflect on your anxieties and passions - both how you spend your time and how you 'spend' your worry. How much of it is related to finances? Are you in a good place with that?

A large area of dotted lines for journaling, consisting of approximately 25 horizontal rows of small, light grey dots spaced evenly across the page.

Day 8

SCHEDULE

Verse:

Ephesians 5:15-17: Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Devotional:

We spend our time easily and freely, and yet it's one of our most precious resources - a very limited resource! Once it's spent, it's spent. It's a sobering thought.

You'll likely agree you could spend your time much better. Ephesians 5 refers to the right use of our time as "wise," and contrasts it to foolishness. The verse invites us to consider how we spend our time carefully.

Is there space for leisure? Of course! Fun and casual activities? Yes! Relaxation and carefree activity? Certainly. But those times should be spent intentionally, with a careful counting of the cost and a clear ordering of what's most important.

Prayer Prompt:

Lord, give me the wisdom to use my time wisely. Help me to be discerning in my time use, and to use my time according to your will and good desire for my life.

Journal:

Where do you spend time during the days and weeks that you would like to refund? Get granular for a bit: looking back over the past two weeks, list your top three invaluable time-wasters. Now look ahead to the next week and subtract the wasters to add the life-giving.

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Day 9

FRIENDS

Verse:

1 Thessalonians 5:11: Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

Devotional:

We are relational people. There's a reason God immediately said to Adam that it wasn't good for him to be alone! There's a reason God brings His people together into communities, and invites them to do life together. The regular practice of gathering, building relationships, sharing your heart, joys, struggles, sins, and triumphs, and eagerly encouraging one another is life-giving and fulfilling.

It's also very hard! It takes intentionality: relationships very rarely form easily or organically. It takes risks: it's scary to put yourself out there! And it takes time - that precious commodity that we only have so much of. But the testimony of human history agrees: it is worth it. We need one another.

Prayer Prompt:

Father, lead me into friendships that will be good for my soul. Give me people and intentionality to grow in relationship with others!

Journal:

Are you happy with the friendships you have? If you were going to change something about them, what would you do to make that change?

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Day 10

FAMILY

Verse:

1 Tim 3:5 For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

Devotional:

This verse is written in the context of appointing elders - leaders in the church. A mark of a faithful leader is one who prioritizes and pours into the household - the immediate family. It's a profound challenge! It's a wise challenge for everyone.

And yet the home can quickly become the most draining and complicated part of your life. Whether it's parents who don't seem to get you, or children who simply seem to have an unending supply of energy but no discipline, or a spouse who is walking through a hard time, the home can become a place of easy indifference and neglect. It must not be. Instead, we must increasingly prioritize and value the household.

Prayer Prompt:

God, help me to see my family through your eyes - with grace, mercy, patience, and profound love. Give me the strength to value them as you value your people.

Journal:

Reflect on how you have intentionally interacted with your family in the last month. In what ways could you see that changing - what additions or subtractions do you need to make?

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Day 11

HEALTH

Verse:

Acts 27:34: "Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you."

Devotional:

This is a fascinating verse. Paul is encouraging his shipmates, who were weathering a brutal storm. Paul's statement is twofold - "God is protecting you," but also, "eating well will be beneficial." Making healthy choices regarding diet and exercise don't stand in opposition to God, but rather go hand in hand with trusting Him.

It's easy to neglect our health. We see needs, but we choose to address them, "in the future." It's probably easy to think of a list of health-improvements you've put off for later or because of a lack of time. The truth is that adding them into our schedule and lives will never be convenient, easy, or simple. It will also require saying no to things we'd rather not give up. But, how long will we allow that to keep us from making healthy choices?

Prayer Prompt:

God, remind my heart that my body and my health are gifts from you, that I am to faithfully steward. Give me discipline and wisdom to make good choices.

Journal:

What is one habit, pattern, or change that you should make in regards to your health to steward your body well?

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing, providing a guide for the student's response.

Section Three

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Over the past week and half, you've spent time asking broad questions about your priorities, and about where you are right now. Wouldn't it be amazing if exactly where you are right now matched your priorities? Wouldn't it be wonderful if you could point to an intentional choice or reason for everything that fills your time, passions, and energy?

Perhaps you can! And even if you can't entirely - give yourself some credit. You've spent some intentional time over the past few days exploring, asking questions, and processing. That level of intentionality is valuable and worthwhile. Often, the first step in growth is a choice to figure out how to grow.

But the next few days are important! Rather than just taking a look at where you are and where you might value being - let's spend some time asking that really important question: "How?" How will you grow?

Ultimately, the question is simple: How will you better align your life with God's priorities? That might take some intentionality - it might take some time - and it will likely require some sacrifice - but it will be worth it!

Day 12

CONSIDER

Verse:

Hebrews 12:1-2a: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. "

Devotional:

Hebrews 12 challenges believers to take an intentional approach to how they live their lives, throwing off anything that might hinder them and running intentionally towards Jesus. But it starts by pointing backward - "Therefore, after considering the example of all the amazing people listed in Hebrew 11..."

Faithful living flows from carefully considering the type of life that we would like to live, and then deciding how we're going to get there. There's a flow - "consider" → "chose" → "persevere."

So, start by considering what you've written over the past few days. Where have your priorities felt out of line with your life and what you're currently doing? Did you find yourself seeing a need for friendships, or a lack of spiritual depth? Do you want to focus on your family in a renewed way, or do you have personal health goals you need to set?

And then, brainstorm ways you could align your life and priorities. Consider the list of classes and groups at Woodlands - will any of those help?

Prayer Prompt:

God, give me wisdom to align my life with your priorities. Help me to see areas I can grow in, and give me the passion to set clear goals to move towards increasing health.

Journal:

Reflect on your level of alignment between biblical priorities and your day to day grind. What could you begin to change to bring about more alignment?

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Day 13

SURRENDER

Verse:

Romans 12:1-2, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Devotional:

At the end of Romans, Paul lays his cards down. "Give it all to God," he says. Let nothing keep you from fully surrendering to God's mission and purpose for you - don't conform, but be transformed.

This is a charge to you as much as it was a charge to the Roman church! And yet that change rarely happens easily, and almost never by accident. It happens through intentional decision - choosing the things and priorities of God over the things of his world.

Today, begin to set clear goals for how you can bring your life better into clear alignment with God's priorities. On pages 38 and 39 of this study are a list of intentional questions you can ask and consider. Begin to set some intentional goals for growth.

Prayer Prompt:

God, help me to discern. Help me to discern how I can best use my time, talents, and treasure for your Kingdom. Give me a desire to chase you with my whole life.

Journal:

You can never add anything into your life without subtracting something as well. As you consider what you might want to add - also 'count the cost.' Spend some time journaling about where you might find time or finances or margin to pursue the goals you're setting.

A large area of dotted lines for journaling, consisting of approximately 25 horizontal rows of small, evenly spaced dots.

Day 14

SHARE

Verse:

2 Corinthians 13:11 Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

Devotional:

As Paul wraps up his letter to the Corinthians, he reminds them that a constant goal of their Christian walk should be *doing life together*. He encourages them, "Don't walk alone!" The same is true for goals and life change.

Private goals are easy places to cheat and not fully put into practice! As you continue to think about changes and adjustments you'll make to your schedule - including classes or groups you might sign up for and take - pray about who you'll tell about these new goals. Perhaps it's someone you want to invite along! Perhaps it's someone you'll ask to keep you accountable. Or maybe it's just someone you'll bring into your journey.

Whatever the goal, telling someone else is important. Choose to grow this year, and grow alongside others!

Prayer Prompt:

Father, I want this year to be a year I deepen in my knowledge of you and my relationship with you. Help me to grow!

Journal:

Who will you tell about your goals and plans? Why will you tell them, and how do you hope they'll help you?

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Conclusion

A PLAN FOR GROWTH

You've spent time considering where you are, and your personal priorities. Through prayer, journaling, and God's Word, you've compared your priorities to God's - hopefully you've had opportunities to lay down your own wants or desires in exchange for God's.

All this should translate into **A Spiritual Growth Plan**. This is an intentional plan to pursue spiritual growth in the coming weeks and months. The past two weeks will be instrumental in helping you form goals, habits, and patterns that can shape your spiritual growth plan. But don't wait!

Take a few minutes right now and read through the processing questions on the final few pages. Pick a goal, priority, or direction for the next while. You don't need to reshape your world or change everything at once - but what's one or two intentional steps you can plan to take in order to grow?

Critically, consider the list of classes, groups, and ministries that Woodlands has available in the next semester. All of our programming is designed to help you grow in your faithfulness to King Jesus. And, ultimately, that's the goal. Today, tomorrow, and forever.

Spiritual Growth Plan Questions

HOW WILL YOU ASPIRE TO BE GROUNDED IN THE BIBLE AND PRAYER?

- What will you read in Scripture this year? What reading plan will you use? If you don't know where to start, take our simple, Woodlands in the Word reading plan (<https://woodlandschurch.org/bible/>)!
- Will you memorize Scripture this year?
- Think about spending extended time in prayer.
- How will you keep track of your prayer requests and prayer plans?
- How can you pray in a group or in community this year?

HOW WILL YOU ASPIRE TO BE GRACE-FILLED?

- What can you do with regularity to remind yourself of the gospel and the incredible grace that has been shown to us?
- Do you express differences graciously? How can you grow in this area? Who can hold you accountable?
- Is there a forgiveness or grace you need to extend to someone? How might you rebuild particular relationships in 2023?
- How can you show love towards those around you this year?

HOW WILL YOU ASPIRE TO GO WITH THE GOSPEL?

- Do you know how to share your faith? What steps can you take – books, classes, etc – to learn how to share your faith better?
- Who do you know who doesn't know Jesus? Who are you praying for that they would meet Jesus? How can you be intentional about sharing your faith with them this year?
- How are you praying for our missionaries? Pick up a guide of our supported missionaries at the Info Center on Sunday.
- Would you consider a missions trip in 2024? Start planning today about whether you'll go!

Spiritual Growth Plan Questions

HOW WILL YOU ASPIRE TO GROW IN CHRIST LIKENESS?

- What areas in your walk with Jesus do you most need to grow? Pick a book or podcast or online class that can help!
- Is there someone you could ask to mentor you? Who do you look up to spiritually – perhaps you could meet with them intentionally throughout this coming year?
- Do you have sins or habits that need to be changed? How can you structure your spiritual growth around confession and repentance?
- How can you be helping others around you grow? Can you coach or teach or mentor?

HOW WILL YOU ASPIRE TO PURSUE LIFE TOGETHER?

- How often will you attend church this year? Make a plan to gather consistently on Sunday mornings!
- Consider where you sit in the Auditorium. Are there people around you you can connect with? How will you get to know them?
- Will you join or continue in a Life Group this year?
- How will you use the fantastic sermon resources put together each week to deepen your faith in community?

HOW WILL YOU ASPIRE TO GIVE GENEROUSLY?

- Do you tithe? Consider how you'll use financial giving this year to conform your heart to Christ. Plan where to give, and plan to give generously. Don't forget your local church!
- Where might you serve in 2024? Do you have gifts or talents you want to put to use in the church or the community?
- Who are you needs to be cared for in a specific or generous way? How can you give to them?

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