

 via

THE BIG 5: FOUNDATIONAL HABITS FOR DISCIPLESHIP

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Foundational Habits for Discipleship

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Introduction

We have a limited time with each person that we disciple. How do we choose what truths and habits to instill in them?

I have chosen five spiritual disciplines that I emphasize to those I disciple. These habits can transform all who engage in them, but they must be practiced out of a desire to grow in love for Jesus and love for others.

“The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” - 1 Timothy 1:5

I think of one of our staff members named Cody Bryan who I started to disciple when he was 17 and have stayed with for seven years. Cody would tell you that I still check up on him with these “Big 5” regularly. They have influenced how Cody trains the students he discipled. When he invests in a young man, he doesn’t move from these foundational habits until they are deeply entrenched in his disciple’s life. He sees these habits not as lessons to take a person through, but training objectives to ingrain into a disciple’s life.

Where did I discover these habits? My mentor, Max Barnett. I am pretty sure he picked them up from Moses in the appendix of the stone tablets from Mount Sinai.

When you read what they are you may think “well duh” or “that’s old school.” You may be tempted to move on to something more exciting and innovative. I don’t believe you would think that if you actually did them on a daily basis. I believe any person who regularly practices these five spiritual disciplines would attest to their transforming power. There are many other essential spiritual disciplines you could argue are just as important such as serving, praying for missionaries, social justice, preaching the gospel to yourself, and many more. However, we have found that these foundational habits are particularly important for laying a groundwork that can be built on.

Read about these five habits below. Underline what stands out to you and write down your answers for the reflection questions.

A Disclaimer

If the “Big 5” are practiced out of legalism or taught to disciples as rules instead of tools then you will miss the tremendous benefit of practicing them. Spiritual disciplines are not practiced for the purpose of earning God’s favor. Jesus accomplished that through His death on the cross!

“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,” – Titus 3:5

We practice habits like these to obey the command to “Train yourself to be godly.” – 1 Timothy 4:7

You will never become the person God has called you to be without consistent spiritual discipline.

“Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” – 1 Corinthians 9:25-27

We chose to be very specific and clear in how we train people in these habits not because we believe they are the only way or even the best way to do these things. We train people in these specific methods to help them get started and it is easier to reproduce a specific method. The goal is that disciples will live these principles for the rest of their lives no matter what methods they choose to use long term.

Who do you want to be 10 years from now? Who do you want those that you disciple to be 10 years from now? These habits will be a great start for you and those you disciple as you train them to be “self-feeders” and “doers of the word.”

1. Actively learning from and contributing to our ministry and a local church.

This is possibly the most important habit of the five. If a believer is not actively engaged in biblical community, their growth will stagnate. They will develop bad habits and blind spots. We were not made to do life alone. Life and ministry is a team sport! I personally will not spend time discipling someone who doesn't make it a top priority to connect with and serve a local church, because I know they will always be limited in their potential.

Until a disciple has made an "all in" decision to commit to and contribute to a local church, they will never truly gain traction in their walk with God.

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." – Hebrews 10:24-25

Our ministry focuses on seven "heart attitudes" developed by Harold Bullock that describe someone who is fully committed to being a contributor in the context of biblical community. If someone is practicing these seven heart attitudes with a proper motivation they will be set up for success in their walk with God.

The first four heart attitudes deal with our personal relationships with one another and the last three deal with our relationship to the church as a body.

1. Put the goals and interests of others above your own.

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." – Philippians 2:3-4

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." – John 13:34-35

2. Live an honest, open life before others.

"Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body." – Ephesians 4:25

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." – 1 John 1:7

3. Give and receive scriptural correction.

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” – Hebrews 10:24-25

“But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” – Hebrews 3:13

4. Clear up relationships.

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.” – Matthew 5:23-24

“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” – Colossians 3:13

5. Participate in the ministry.

“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.” – 1 Peter 4:10

“From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” – Ephesians 4:16

6. Support the work financially.

“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.” – 1 Corinthians 16:2

“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” – 2 Corinthians 9:6-7

7. Follow spiritual leadership within scriptural limits.

“Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.” – Hebrews 13:17

“Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” – 1 Peter 5:5-7

Reflection Questions:

Which of these heart attitudes do you regularly practice? How did you develop that habit?

Which of the heart attitudes is the most challenging for you? How can you grow in this area?

2. Having daily time alone with God which involves consistent Bible reading, meditating on Scripture, and journaling reflections.

We train all our students using the S.O.A.P. method designed by Wayne Cordeiro. One thing I love about this method is that it is simple to teach anyone how to do it. It also insures that they are learning how to meditate and apply specific Scriptures to their lives. I personally do this every day. I have a rule that I don't get on social media until I do my S.O.A.P for the day. I also love this method because it's easy to keep someone accountable to it and to share what you learn because you write your thoughts in a journal. My journal entries are often short and simple while Cody often has in-depth outlines of his thoughts. I don't believe that the S.O.A.P method is the only way to have a daily time with God or even the best way, but it is a way that is effective and reproducible.

It is important for us to train students in proper ways to interpret Scripture and eventually teach them other methods of Bible study. Examples like Inductive Bible Study and others can be found in Rick Warren's excellent book Bible Study Methods. I always spend one of the first follow up meetings with a new believer simply doing a S.O.A.P. with them. I regularly ask my disciples how their S.O.A.P.s are going and spend time sharing from our journals. I do this until I am confident that it is a regular habit in their lives.

Here is how to have a S.O.A.P quiet time:

Scripture: Choose a book of the Bible to read. Then try and read one to three chapters a day. A daily Bible reading plan such as "The One Year Bible" can be very helpful. Look for a verse that particularly impressed you that day and write it in your journal.

Observation: What do you think God is saying to you from this Scripture? Write down why the passage stuck out to you. Simply write down your thoughts about the verse.

Application: How should I live differently? Make S.M.A.R.T applications! Make them Specific, Measurable, Action Oriented, Realistic, and Timely.

Prayer: Spend some time praying about what you learned from the passage and surrendering your life to follow Christ today. Write out a prayer in your journal.

George Muller in his autobiography spoke of the necessity of "getting my soul happy in the Lord" through Bible reading and meditation before moving on to anything else. If you approach your time alone with God with an open Bible, open heart, and pen and paper in hand you will be surprised how the Lord will speak to and empower you to live for Him.

"I saw more clearly than ever that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord.

The first thing to be concerned about was not how much I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished.

For I might seek to set the truth before the unconverted, I might seek to benefit believers, I might seek to relieve the distressed, I might in other ways seek to behave myself as it becomes a child of God in this world; and yet, not being happy in the Lord, and not being nourished and strengthened in my inner man day by day, all this might not be attended to in a right spirit.

Before this time my practice had been, at least for ten years previously, as an habitual thing to give myself to prayer, after having dressed myself in the morning. Now, I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the word of God, and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reproved, instructed; and that thus, by means of the word of God, whilst meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord. I began therefore to meditate on the New Testament from the beginning, early in the morning.

The first thing I did, after having asked in a few words the Lord's blessing upon his precious word, was, to begin to meditate on the word of God, searching as it were into every verse, to get blessing out of it; not for the sake of the public ministry of the word, not for the sake of preaching on what I had meditated upon, but for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul.

The result I have found to be almost invariably this, that after a very few minutes my soul has been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication; so that, though I did not, as it were, give myself to prayer, but to meditation it turned almost immediately more or less into prayer. When thus I have been for a while making confession, or intercession, or supplication, or have given thanks, I go on to the next words or verse, turning all, as I go on, into prayer for myself or others, as the word may lead to it, but still continually keeping before me that food for my own soul is the object of my meditation.

The result of this is, that there is always a good deal of confession, thanksgiving, supplication, or intercession mingled with my meditation, and that my inner man almost invariably is even sensibly nourished and strengthened, and that by breakfast time, with rare exceptions, I am in a peaceful if not happy state of heart. Thus also the Lord is pleased to communicate unto me that which, either very soon after or at a later time, I have found to become food for other believers, though it was not for the sake of the public ministry of the word that I gave myself to meditation, but for the profit of my own inner man." George Muller

Reflection Questions:

On an average week, how many days do you currently have a meaningful quiet time with God?

On a scale from 1-10, how meaningful is an average quiet time for you?

Why would the S.O.A.P method be helpful in training someone else how to have time alone with God?

What can we learn from George Muller about “getting your soul happy in the Lord”?

What are some practical ideas for teaching someone else how to have a meaningful time with the Lord?

3. Engaging in a consistent, balanced, and passionate prayer life using Scripture and prayer lists.

It is such a joy to introduce your disciples to the power of prayer. Nothing sets a person on fire for the Lord more than watching God do the impossible in answer to prayer. One of the first things to do with a new believer is to share Scriptures with him on the promises related to the power of prayer. Promises like:

- “Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.” – John 16:24
- “And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” – John 14:13
- “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” – John 15:7

If you haven’t noticed, Jesus thought prayer was kind of a big deal. He taught about it often and modeled it more often. Jesus was a man of prayer. It makes sense that we as disciples of Jesus would seek to instill the value of persistent prayer in the lives of those we disciple.

So how do you get someone started in prayer? I have found it helpful for students to develop a prayer list. I personally try to pray over mine daily. It does not include everything that I pray for each day but it serves as a great “launch pad” for my prayer life for the day. I have seasons where I pray much more than simply praying over my list, but I feel responsible to labor in prayer for at least those basics each day.

I start my prayer time praying through the P.R.A.Y.E.R. acronym based on the Lord’s prayer in Matthew 6 to ensure that I am praying balanced and biblically:

Praise and Worship

Repent

Ask

Yield

Expect Results

Remember to Thank God

Let me give you a peek into what I currently have on my prayer list. First I have the P.R.A.Y.E.R. acronym on top of the list to remind myself to authentically approach God with humility and reality. The last thing I want to do is quickly mumble a list of words to myself and call that “prayer.” I want to actually communicate with the living God. It is important to take your time and rest in His presence.

“Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.” – Ecclesiastes 5:2

I am often guilty of trying to save the world with one prayer. I get all rushed and loud and stressed out. I need to be reminded often that “God’s got this.”

God says, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” – Psalm 46:10

It is also wise to pray over what is most on my mind that day. If you have something you are worried about in the back of your mind and don’t lift it up to the Lord first then you will be distracted the entire time. Obey 1 Peter 5:7: “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”

When my heart and perspectives are in the right place it is time for me to move into specific elements of my list. I pray daily for my wife and children. I have specific requests I pray for each of them. I pray specific things over those I disciple and those I am responsible to lead. I am challenged by 1 Samuel 12:23 about my responsibility to pray for those that I lead: “As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you.”

Other things on my prayer list include my “impact list” of lost friends and family, special urgent requests, and a list of “faith goals” that are so big that they make me a little nervous to ask God for. I also ask God for an opportunity to share about Jesus with someone every day. Sometimes I include an unreached people group from Joshuaproject.net or a country from “Operation World.” It is amazing how, as I am praying over my simple list, my heart will swell with faith and zeal. My love for those I pray for grows and I begin to get all kinds of kingdom building ideas as I pray over this list daily. One exciting benefit for me as I am praying over my list is that I constantly cross things off the list as they are answered! It is so faith-building to keep track of the many answers to prayer the Lord regularly gives me.

God has recently led me to pray daily for every person on our “Core Team” of 30 plus student leaders. This has been difficult, and I have not been perfect at it. I have noticed that to the extent that I am faithfully praying for them every day my love for them has grown and God is working in many of their lives in powerful ways! I have been amazed at how the Lord has used this simple habit in my life and the lives of these students. For whom should you be laboring in prayer daily?

Sometimes people push back from developing a prayer list. They may say, “I just want to pray as the Spirit leads.” I will sincerely ask, “So how much has the Holy Spirit been leading you to pray lately?” “What specific things are you persistently asking the Lord for?” “What are some answers to prayer you are seeing?” Often they look at me like a deer in the headlights. Just because some people misuse prayer lists as a dry and sterile form of prayer it should not stop us from being intentional and systematic in what we are asking the Lord to do in and through our lives. It is only as dry as you make it!

It is also very helpful to share some things from your prayer lists with your discipleship group to labor together in prayer and celebrate God’s work as a team!

Reflection Questions:

What stood out to you from this section?

On a scale from 1-10, how satisfied are you with the state of your prayer life? What are some ways you could grow deeper in your prayer life?

Do you have a prayer list? If not, why not create a simple list of some requests to consistently pray over? Test it out and see what God does!

With whom could you share what is on your prayer list so they can labor in prayer with you?

4. Memorizing relevant Scripture verses each week and developing a practical plan for reviewing old verses.

Scripture memory has made a greater impact in my walk with God and shaped my ministry more than any other spiritual discipline. Yes, even more than Bible reading and prayer. I am not sure if that is a good thing or not. I am just being honest. God has used the verses I have memorized to burn them into my soul, changing the very motivations of my heart. He has used the verses I have memorized right when I needed them most, saving me lots of pain and heartache. Some of the most clear and obvious times that I have perceived the Holy Spirit speaking to me was through a passage of Scripture that I wrote on a dorky little white card to put into my nerdy leather pouch in my pocket.

My freshman year Max Barnett met with my twin brother and me and asked us to memorize one verse each week and quote it at the next meeting. I didn't want to be the twin that didn't have his verse memorized. My motives were less than pure. A funny thing started happening. God started using those verses in my life all of the time. He gave me a hunger to memorize more and more verses to use in my life and ministry. It got addicting. He started using the verses I was memorizing to greatly encourage others and make disciples. It was weird. It literally transformed my life. Scripture memory was supposed to be just for kids. Turns out that I noticed that it was the "secret weapon" behind every godly disciple-maker that I met. I am so grateful that Max gave me that verse pack and cards and challenged me to start memorizing one verse a week. I will never be the same again.

If that didn't motivate you to start memorizing verses here are a just few more of the many reasons to engage in Scripture memory:

- It helps give victory over sin: Psalm 119:9-11, Matt 4:1-11
- It will grow your faith and help renew your mind: Rom 10:17, Rom 12:2
- It equips us for any opportunity to minister to others: 2 Tim 3:16-17, 1 Peter 3:15
- God uses it to speak to you and lead you: Proverbs 6:21-24, Psalm 119:105, John 14:25-27

I try and memorize one new verse every week and systematically review my old verses for about 5-10 minutes a day. I have a "daily pack" with verses I review every day. I keep around 30 verses in this daily pack. Currently I separate my old verses into Monday-Friday packs where I can review a verse I know at least once a week. Verses that are more familiar can be reviewed less often.

I have tried different methods of review over the years. There are many systems to review your verses once you have more than 100 memorized. The important thing is to have a system to review old verses. I know people who have over 1,000 verses of Scripture memorized that they can quote word perfectly and they are not geniuses! They have just memorized one verse at a time over the course of several years and made a simple plan to review them.

Imagine how your life would be changed if you had 1,000 Bible verses memorized. You can start today!

- 1 verse/week x 52 weeks = 52 verses per year
- 52 verses/year x 20 years = 1,040 verses
- 1040 verses/28 days = 38 verses to review per day.

With those I disciple, I try to encourage them to memorize at least one verse a week and stay sharp on their back review. Part of many of my discipleship meetings is spent reviewing verses from our “daily packs” to help us both stay fresh. I have used a leather verse pack I can take with me wherever I go and the “truth packer” app for my iPhone. I always have my phone with me so I never have an excuse not to review my verses. Next time you see me zoned out with my face glued to my phone please assume I am reviewing verses. (Or honestly I might be on Twitter.) There are many great apps and card systems for Scripture memory such as “The Topical Memory System,” but again the important thing is that you have a plan.

Reflection Questions:

How has memorizing Scripture helped you in your walk with Christ? If you have little experience with Scripture memory, how do you think that having a Scripture memory plan would help you in your walk with Christ?

What struggles do you think you would have with Scripture memory? Who could help you develop a plan to memorize new verses and review old ones?

5. Consistently practicing the “Three Habits for Everyday Evangelism.”

I have explored many resources and read a lot of books on the topic of evangelism. It is my passion. As I studied, I came across three habits that kept rising to the surface. They were so simple and practical that almost every evangelism training book had a version of them that they encouraged people to practice.

Evangelism is a spiritual discipline. Donald Whitney in the excellent book “Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life” said,

“I’m convinced that the main reason many of us don’t witness for Christ in ways that would be effective and relatively fear free is simply because we don’t discipline ourselves to do it.”

Evangelistic effectiveness does not primarily come from giftedness. It comes from obedience and intentionality.

I decided to give these habits a try and the Lord consistently brought opportunities for me to share Jesus in the workplace and everywhere I went. God worked in and through me in surprising and powerful ways! Guys at work were bringing up Jesus with me. People on my impact list were professing Christ and Christy and I developed meaningful trust-filled relationships with those without Christ. One lost couple that we spent just a little bit of time investing in a few times invited us to their wedding. We were introduced as their best friends and we felt like we were just getting to know them! God used our intentionality in exciting ways! Many lost people are hungry for real friendships. I believe God will use you in similar ways as you pursue gospel intentionality by practicing these three habits!

The Three Habits for Everyday Evangelism:

1. Pray daily for open doors to share Jesus and take advantage of them.
2. Develop an “Impact List” of 5-10 people. Use the Prayer, Care, Share strategy.
3. Plan regularly to spend time with your non-Christian friends.

For more in-depth information about these habits check out [this tool](#) on the Three Habits.

These simple habits were largely inspired by applications from Colossians 4:2-6:

“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” – Colossians 4:2-6

It has been incredible to watch God work in the lives of lost people and those practicing these habits. Evangelism is one of the greatest ways for a believer to grow.

“I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.” - Philemon 1:6

You will be surprised at how your disciples grow as they share the gospel and begin discipling those they lead to Christ! The fact that they are now helping others will inspire them to continue learning and growing as they help others process faith.

Reflection Questions:

In the past have you considered evangelism as a spiritual discipline?

How might these three habits help you develop consistency in the area of evangelism?

Which of these evangelistic habits would be most difficult for you to practice?

Small Group Discussion

Go back through the five habits with your small group and take your time discussing your answers to the reflection questions. Then if time allows, discuss the following questions:

1. Which of the “Big 5” has made the greatest impact in your life so far? Which one of these habits do you struggle with the most?
2. What is the difference between discipline and legalism? How can you be disciplined with these habits without becoming legalistic?
3. What experience do you have with the S.O.A.P method? What questions do you have about it? What tips can we share with each other about doing them?
4. What are some benefits to using a prayer list?
5. How has Scripture memory made a difference in your life? Do you have a verse pack? Does anyone have a good app they use for memorizing verses?
6. What are some tips that you can share with the group about staying consistent in Scripture memory?
7. Why do you think it is so important to make evangelism a spiritual discipline?

8. Look up and read Colossians 4:2-6. What principles can we apply to our efforts in everyday evangelism?

Read the quotes, answer the question, and follow the directions below:

“After extended observation we have concluded that effective, lifestyle evangelism takes place when a Christian specifically prays each morning asking for opportunities to witness... Do you know why Christians aren’t leading more people to the Savior? We aren’t asking daily for opportunities to share our faith!” – Billy Hanks, *Operation Multiplication*

“You would not believe the corresponding ratio between the number of times I pray for an open door and the number of times God swings one loose. Uncanny... Imagine what would happen if every single morning every one of us prayed fervently that God would open doors for us that day!” – Bill Hybels, *Just Walk Across the Room*

How would praying every day for open doors help you take advantage of more opportunities?

Take five minutes to think about and write down 5-10 friends who you would like to pray for daily, spend time hanging out with, and showing that you care for them. (If you can’t think of that many, add some people from a group member’s impact list to pray for daily. Ask God to give you more relationships with those without Christ)

Share with your group those who are on your impact list. After each person shares, if time allows, take time to pray for those people together.

Assignment:

1. Pick a book of the Bible to read and try to read about a chapter a day. Try and do one S.O.A.P. a day.

2. Finish writing your prayer list and try to pray over it every day. Keep track of any answers to prayer.
3. Start a “daily pack” of verses that you know and the other verses you are memorizing. Test yourself on this pack daily. Be ready to be tested on these verses next week.
4. Start practicing “The Three Habits of Everyday Evangelism” and be ready to share about the questions below.

Weekly Discipleship Accountability Questions:

1. What is one thing that God has been teaching you this week? What has been the most helpful thing you learned this week?
2. Did you have any opportunities to practice one of the heart attitudes this week? What happened and how did you respond?
3. How were your quiet times this week? How many S.O.A.P.s were you able to do? Share one that stood out to you with the group.
4. Turn to someone and test each other on the memory verses from this week. Test each other on three random verses from your current daily pack.
5. How was your prayer life this week? How many days did you pray over your prayer list? Did you see any answers to prayer?

6. Have you been praying daily for opportunities to share your faith? What opportunities did you see? What opportunities did you take? What opportunities did you miss?

7. Have you been praying every day for the people on your impact list? What steps have you been taking to get to know them better or share the gospel with them? Pray together for your impact lists if time allows.

8. What is one thing you are struggling with? How can we pray for you this week?