

# **GODSPACE**

Study Guide

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Recall, if you can, the seasons of greatest growth in your life—times where you became, slowly, a little better version of yourself. Times in which you somehow learned patience, perseverance, or how to love less selfishly. I'd guess that those might have been times of struggle—but also times where fellow travelers walked beside you.

We grow through challenges, and we change for the better in the context of relationship. When we open our life to friends who love us, encourage us, challenge us, pray for us and, when necessary, told us hard truth—those are the times we look back on as transformational.

So, welcome to what I hope is a season of transformation and progress toward God. You've got what you need for the journey: a guide (this book) and fellow travelers. You've chosen to gather with a group of people to not only encourage and pray for one another, but to read a book that will guide you, together, toward deeper intimacy with God.

The way is not always easy. It may require you to realign priorities, to inconvenience yourself a bit—to put your faith into action, to engage in “embodied spirituality.” This idea, rooted in our faith tradition, has been hijacked in recent years by other belief systems. But at its heart, it is fully Christian. The Bible has always taught that our soul, housed in our body, is transformed in part by our actions and practices, what we do with our body. Faith and action are inseparable. Our daily lives can draw us closer to God—or not. It depends, in part, in how we see our everyday routines and interactions.

This study will allow you to experience intimacy with God by engaging in spiritual practices, by slowing the pace of your life (and your racing thoughts). But these are not practices compartmentalized into some hobby you call your spiritual life. They are, by their very nature, integrated into your daily, ordinary life.

This study can be used individually. However, I recommend joining even with one other person to study together. The very act of gathering to pray, learn and discuss will form you as much as the material you study. The format is simple: a few questions to ponder and discuss, and an action step to try, allowing you to live out the practice between meetings. (Each time you meet, spend a few minutes checking in with one another on how your action step experience impacted you.)

Welcome to the inconvenient adventure of intimacy with God.

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### In our crowded life, where does God fit?

- As you read through this introductory chapter, which ideas resonated most deeply with you?
- Where did you find yourself feeling resistance, skepticism, disagreement with the author?
- What, specifically, crowds and clutters your life? What keeps you busy? What distractions take up more time than you wish they did?
- When you hear the phrase “spiritual formation” what comes to mind?
- What do you think “embodied spirituality” means? What appeals to you about this idea?
- Describe one spiritual practice or discipline that has been helpful to you in the past.

### Action Step:

As you go through your week, cultivate an awareness of your own pace of life. How busy are you? Do you feel rushed and overwhelmed? What fills up your schedule? Occasionally stop, breathe, and move deliberately and slowly, if only for a few minutes. Notice how this feels, and tell the group about it next time you meet.

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### Sabbath: Space in my Calendar

What were Sundays like in the home you grew up in? How did your family (even if unintentionally) make that day different from the rest of the week, if at all?

Do you currently take one day a week to rest, or does that feel like an impossible goal?

The chapter quotes Walter Bruggemann as saying that the culture of ancient Egypt “said there was never enough, and rest was not an option.”

How does a culture “say” something about scarcity and rest? What do you think our culture says to us?

How are Sabbath and loving your neighbor related to one another?

To begin crafting a Sabbath practice, the author suggests asking what you would like to engage in, and what you would like to be free from. How would you answer those two questions? What desires drive your journey toward Sabbath?

### Action Step:

This week, choose one thing to engage in, and one thing to refrain from, on Sabbath. For example, you might engage in spending time outdoors, and refrain from social media interaction. Don’t try to craft a “perfect” Sabbath, just experiment. Pay attention to how you respond—does resting make you anxious, or relaxed? Where do you find freedom?

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### Hospitality: Space in my home

What is your initial reaction to the idea of welcoming strangers?

How does our culture define “hospitality”? How does that definition differ from what the Bible says about it?

Look at this Scripture passage, which is quoted in the chapter: Jesus once told his followers: “To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance....For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.” (Matthew 25:29, 35-36, NLT) What invitation do you find in Jesus’ words? What is one small step you could take to respond to that invitation?

This chapter says this about hospitality: “Rather than seeking to impress people, it aims to welcome Jesus, disguised as an ordinary person.” Tell about a time you interacted with Jesus, disguised as an ordinary person. Was it something they did or said, or your attitude toward them, that helped you to recognize Jesus in them?

What do “family meals” look like at your home? Are they a regular occurrence, or something you wish you had time for but never do? What’s your next step on gathering your family or friends around the table?

What is your response to the author’s assertion that hospitality is not a spiritual gift but something all Jesus followers are asked to do?

### Action Step:

In the next week, plan one meal with your family or with friends. Keep it simple (frozen pizza or carry-out is perfectly fine). Focus on conversation (no phones or TV) and making people feel welcomed, listened to, and loved. Use simple conversation starters like “What was the highlight and lowlight of your day?” or “What are you grateful for today?”

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### **Worship: Space in the World**

Describe a time when you deliberately put yourself into situations where you will feel awe. If you've not tried this, what appeals to you about this idea?

This chapter talked about “enjoying God.” Do you enjoy God? What does that look like? What is one thing you could engage in to enjoy God more? In the section about Moses and the children of Israel, we read, “When we worship, even in captivity, we experience freedom.” How are worship and freedom connected?

What does it mean to “bless God”? What words or actions would accomplish this? What is one thing you want to do in the coming week to “bless God”?

What is one way you can “notice and name” what you see God doing in your life and the world around you? How might this form you spiritually?

### **Action Step:**

Set aside 15 minutes in the coming week to worship God. Set aside requests, complaints, even confession. Focus on God, on awe and wonder. You might journal, sing, pray, walk outdoors, even dance—just make it not about you, but God. How does this 15 minutes impact the rest of your day, or even your week?

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### **Simplicity: Space in my Soul**

What misconceptions does our culture have about simplicity? Why do you think it appeals to people?

What “inward reality” do you need to experience in order to move toward simplicity?

Jesus told us, “Do not worry.” What do you worry about? How have your worries changed in different seasons of your life?

Rather than worry, Jesus said, “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:33). What do you think it means to seek first God’s kingdom and righteousness?

In this chapter, we read: “The opposite of simplicity is not complexity but duplicity.” Duplicity is double-mindedness, or trying to pursue two things at the same time. What do you tend to chase after? What draws you to do so?

Think about your calendar, commitments, and relational capacity. What do you see as your next step in practicing simplicity in these areas?

### **Action Step:**

In the chapter, the author writes “what we hang onto tells us a story about ourselves.” This week, set aside an hour. Spend the first 30 minutes going through items in a closet or dresser, and deciding which to keep, throw away or give away. Then, spend 30 minutes writing in a journal about the following questions: What feelings rise to the surface when you throw or give away possessions? How does your inner reality impact your outward reality (i.e. your stuff)? What do you long for when it comes to simplicity?

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### Generosity: Space in my Budget

- Which is harder for you: to be generous with your time, or your money? Explain.
- Describe a time someone was generous to you. How did it impact you?
- What values, spoken or unspoken, did your family of origin pass along to you about money and generosity?
- What hinders you from being generous? What is one step you could take to engage in the practice of generosity?
- If generosity as a practice scares you, take a little time to think about why. What, specifically, makes you nervous?

### Action Step:

This week, be generous. Give some of your resources away to someone in need, or to a charity or church that is doing work you want to support. Pray for God's guidance about how much to give and where to give it. What emotions does giving stir up? What impact does it have on your soul?

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### Gratitude: Space in my Relationships

- What does it mean to “choose gratitude” even if you don’t feel grateful?
- What (or who) are you most grateful for?
- How do you express your gratitude? Do you journal, pray, talk to a friend?
- In this chapter, we pondered the question “What am I running from?” In what ways do you find yourself running, perhaps not literally, but by keeping yourself busy and overscheduled? What are you running from?
- What brings you joy? Whatever it is, do you spend time doing it? What would happen to your ability to practice gratitude if you did so?

### Action Step:

Set aside a half hour or more in the coming week to do something that brings you joy—whether it is a physical activity, a walk through a garden, a craft or hobby, whatever. While you engage in whatever brings you joy, express gratitude to God for it. If you’re not sure what brings you joy, try something new. Notice not only how you feel, but how it impacts your connection with God.

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### Critical Thinking: Space for Faith and Doubt

- Why do you think doubt and questions make some people uncomfortable?
- What were you told about doubt as you grew up in your family or faith tradition?
- What comes to mind when you hear the term “critical thinking”?
- The chapter describes four stages in our faith journey. What is your response to this idea? Which stage would you say you are in right now?
- What do you think it means to “love the questions” in our lives? What makes questions hard to love?
- What do you think it means to think critically about the Bible? Is it possible to value biblical truth and intellectual curiosity?

### Action Step:

This week, read a newspaper or blog or book that you feel is biased—one that represents a different point of view than yours, either politically or theologically. Notice your own reaction. How does reading a different opinion impact your ability to articulate your own views? What questions does this exercise raise for you? What feelings rise to the surface? Journal about your experience. Talk about what you’ve learned with a trusted friend or your group.

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