

SALEM ALLIANCE CHURCH

UNSETTLED & QUESTIONING

RESOURCE GUIDE

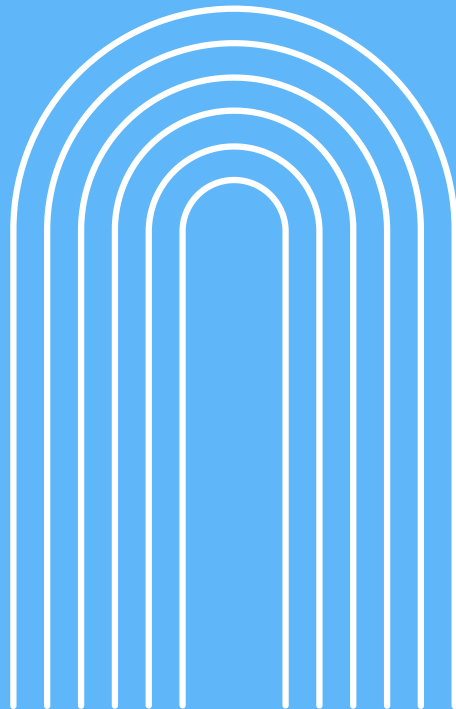


TABLE OF CONTENTS

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE	2
DEFINING SOME HELPFUL TERMS	3
PRAYER	5
Welcoming Prayer	6
Lament	7
Examen	12
DISCERNMENT IN COMMUNITY	13
Spiritual Direction	14
Spiritual Friendship	15
Group Spiritual Direction Instructions	16
SILENCE & SOLITUDE	17
Retreat	18
Silence	20
OTHER WAYS TO ENGAGE AT SAC	21
REFLECTION QUESTIONS	22
RECOMMENDED RESOURCES	24

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

This guide is a compilation of spiritual practices and resources that are specifically curated to help you engage with the stage you find yourself in on the Discipleship Pathway.

For each spiritual practice, there is a brief explanation as well as opportunities to put it into practice. We encourage you to read through the Resource Guide and see if there are one or two things that you sense the Holy Spirit inviting you to engage with.

These practices and resources are not the end goal but a means of deepening connection and communion with God, who is the one that transforms us into people of Christ-like love.

ABOUT THIS STAGE

Unsettled and questioning is a deep and personal inward journey.

This stage is often an unsettling experience yet results in healing for those who continue through it. Until now, our journey has had an external dimension to it. Our life of faith was more visible—more outwardly oriented—even though things were happening inside us. The focus fell more on the outside, the community of faith, nature, leadership, the display and use of the Spirit's gifts, belonging, and productivity.

However, at this stage, many of us face an abrupt change to almost the opposite. It's a stage of questioning, exploring, falling apart, doubting, dancing around the real issues, and sinking in uncertainty. And it can sometimes include indulging in self-centeredness.

While there are many experiences in this particular season, two common ones can be called “Deconstruction” and “Dark Night.” It can be helpful to know a little bit more about these very normal but difficult parts of the journey.

DESCRIBING SOME HELPFUL TERMS

DECONSTRUCTION

Deconstruction is a term often used to describe the process of questioning or re-examining one's long-held beliefs. In his article, "Reconstructing Faith: Christianity in a New World", Timothy Keller writes this: "Deconstruction or dismantling happens, at least in part, when we are remodeling a building. Parts of the building—especially the foundation itself—are left intact while other parts are taken down or removed in order to put up an overall better edifice. In some cases, the deconstruction is so extensive that no one can reside or work in the building for a period, but in those cases the final reconstruction is often the best and most extensive. In this metaphor, deconstruction enables reconstruction—strengthening and improvement—which could not occur otherwise.

Christians can indeed sometimes go through periods of 'deconstruction' and yet emerge stronger. We can go through times in which discarding or altering some of our ideas results in an overall strengthening of our Christian commitment." (Taken from the article listed under Recommended Resources, pg. 24)

"My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself."—**CS Lewis**

DARK NIGHT

The Dark Night is an experience of intense and prolonged spiritual dryness. God seems silent and distant, even when we attempt to connect with Him. Many spiritual leaders and authors have explored this very real experience in ways that can give us insight and compassion for ourselves and others who may be in a place of spiritual darkness.

FEELINGS YOU MAY EXPERIENCE IN A DARK NIGHT:

- Regression. Like I'm going backward emotionally and spiritually.
- I've done something wrong.
- I'm more sinful than ever.
- Things that were once life-giving (spiritual or otherwise) are now dull and uninteresting.
- The spiritual disciplines feel boring and dry.
- Weariness and lack of motivation.
- Like I'm not bearing fruit. Like a rose bush pruned.
- God has abandoned me.
- God isn't real.
- This is forever.

WHAT IS ACTUALLY HAPPENING:

- Progression: God is freeing me from attachments and anxieties.
- God is graciously allowing me to experience my own emptiness apart from Him.
- God is "mellowing" me. Gently forcing me to slow down, find joy in the simple pleasures, trust, sit quietly, stop striving, rest, etc.
- God is freeing me from misplaced confidence in ideas about God, feelings of God, and formulas for how to become like God, and instead gracing me with trust in Himself.
- God is preparing me for the next stage in my life with Him and in the world.
- God is leading to a place of greater love, joy, and peace in union with Him.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: PRAYER

Romans 8:26

And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words.

Matthew 26:41

"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

"Prayer is not what is done by us, but rather what is done by the Holy Spirit in us." —**Henri Nouwen**

"Darkness is a definite experience of prayer. It is to be expected, even embraced." —**Richard Foster**

Description

While the experience of feeling unsettled or questioning may cause one to avoid prayer, allow your discomfort to take you into new places of prayer.

WELCOMING PRAYER

Often when we have a negative or scary emotion, we tend to push it away. Welcoming Prayer provides an opportunity to welcome that emotion or experience and to do so with the Holy Spirit. This type of prayer is a way to detach from the need to be secure, liked, and in control, and attach to the presence of Jesus instead—it anchors us to Jesus in the middle of our mess. This prayer teaches us to both accept and release and it can be used when we are overwhelmed by an emotion in the midst of our daily activities.

There are three steps to Welcoming Prayer.

1. Notice the emotion or state of being in your body. Feel and sink into what you are experiencing at this moment. What does this sensation feel like? Is it moving around? Are you tensing parts of your body or breathing differently than usual? Is it a familiar sensation? Try to be fully present to this sensation rather than pushing it away. You don't need to analyze, explain, or even name the sensation, just notice it.

2. Welcome whatever you are experiencing. Accept that your feelings are there and that you can just be the way you are without trying to change. "Welcome" what you are experiencing this moment in your body as an opportunity to invite communion with the Holy Spirit.

3. Let go by saying "I let go of my desire for security, affection, and control, and I embrace this moment as it is."

TIME TO PRACTICE:

Set aside 5-10 minutes and engage with the 3 steps of Welcoming Prayer.

Lament is a way to process grief, difficulty, and heartache by turning to God. Lament is a form of prayer that is common in Biblical literature and is a healthy way to process these situations and experiences.

Psalm 130:1-2

*From the depths of despair, O Lord,
I call for your help.
Hear my cry, O Lord.
Pay attention to my prayer.*

Job 30:20

*I cry to you, O God, but you don't answer.
I stand before you, but you don't even look.*

TIME TO PRACTICE:

There are four movements in the practice of lament—**turning to God, bringing your complaints, asking boldly, and choosing to trust.** Below are descriptions of each of these movements as well as space to write out your own lament. Don't rush through this. Take your time with each movement. It may be helpful to spread this practice out over the course of a month, engaging with one movement each week.

TURNING TO GOD

To lament isn't simply to experience grief or cry out in our pain. It's the process of turning to God, of crying out to Him in our grief and pain.

In the space below, start writing out your lament by turning to God. Think about a situation in your life or someone else's that is causing grief and pain and cry out to God about it. Don't be surprised if this feels slightly awkward. For many of us, it is exercising a new muscle as we learn to lament.

Here are some examples of what turning to God can sound like in prayer:

- *“God, I need you to hear me. I’m hurting and in pain from this divorce. I’m asking for you to listen to my lament. I desperately need your grace today”*
- *“Father, here I am again with a heart full of worries and fears because of my wayward son. I’m praying to you by faith with a heart that is struggling”*

BRINGING YOUR COMPLAINTS

The practice of godly complaint can feel foreign to many Christians. We often associate complaining with a lack of faith or a sign of immaturity in our suffering. And yet the Bible is full of examples of people bringing their complaints to God—Job did this very well. Throughout the book of Job, we see Job specifically naming the injustices he experienced in his life. He brought his questions and frustrations to God, all with an unfiltered and unedited honesty.

It seems that instead of our complaints being a lack of faith or maturity, it is the biblically appropriate and faith-filled response to bring the injustices, disappointments, and sorrows we and others experience in this broken world to God.

In the space below, continue writing out your lament by bringing your complaints to God. Try not to filter or edit your words as you do. It may be that some of what you write doesn't sound theologically accurate or "appropriate" for a Christian to say. That's okay. That's part of embracing the messy and necessary process of lament.

Here are some examples of what bringing your complaints to God can sound like in prayer:

- *"I'm totally overwhelmed, God! The pressures of life, family, and work feel too great. I don't have enough energy, strength, or wisdom for all the challenges. I'm drowning. And it gives rise to unbelief in my heart. I start to doubt your faithfulness to me"*
- *"God, I feel weary. I'm tired of longing for a child only to be met with disappointment. My heart feels like a balloon that's been inflated with hope and then deflated with discouragement so many times. Will you ever bring this journey of infertility to end?"*

ASK BOLDLY

It can be tempting to camp out in complaint and or to let our complaints consume us. And yet the practice of lament now instructs us to ask boldly—“to fix our eyes on God and specifically call upon Him to act in a manner that fits His character.”

In the Bible we see that there are many examples of what it looks like to ask boldly. The examples include calling on God to act justly, asking Him to remember His covenant faithfulness, and begging Him to bring restoration and to provide mercy. Job asked God boldly to vindicate him and to not be silent in his suffering.

In the space below, continue writing out your lament by presenting your “asks” boldly to God.

Here are a couple examples of what asking boldly can sound like in prayer:

- “God please, would you take away my back pain? I can’t take it anymore. I know that you have the power to heal. I know that you are a merciful God. In your kindness would you bring healing or at least give me the strength to endure?”
- “Help me, God! Right now. I’m writing this prayer because I need you to reorient my thinking. Conquer the lies of the enemy that run through my mind.”

CHOOSING TO TRUST

Job's final response to God was one of worship (**Job 42:2-3**). Despite all the pain and suffering he had and continued to experience, he chose to put his trust in the mystery and majesty of God.

We too are invited to do the same. This isn't just a one time act. "We must enter into lament over and over so that it can keep leading us to trust"

In the space below, end your lament by choosing to trust. For some, all that you may be able to muster is "Lord I trust you, help my lack of trusting." For others, you may find yourself drawn to expressing your trust by rehearsing God's steadfast love and faithfulness in your life. Whatever the pathway to trust looks like for you, take a moment to respond below:

Here is an example of what choosing to trust can sound like in prayer:

- *"None of this is a surprise to you. You've heard every word. You know what I'm feeling and you are greater than anything I face. You can supply what I need and give me the strength even if others don't understand. I can trust you with what people say about me. You've helped me through many worse situations. So I'm going to keep my eyes on you. I'm trusting you. I'm still going to worship you. Thank you"*

Examen is a practice that helps us to notice where and how God shows up in our day. This form of prayer acknowledges both the difficult and the beautiful, the monumental and the mundane. Typically, Examen is meant to be practiced at the end of a day, but it can also be used at the end of a week or a particular season. Examen is simply two questions that help us to prayerfully look back over our day with God.

“The Examen makes us aware of moments that at first we might easily pass by as insignificant, moments that ultimately can give direction for our lives.” —**Dennis Linn**

TIME TO PRACTICE:

1. Find a quiet moment and place at the end of your day.

2. Choose two questions that can help you review the day.

Here are some typical Examen questions:

Option 1:

- *For what moment today am I most grateful?*
- *For what moment today am I least grateful?*

Option 2:

- *Where did I give and receive the most love today?*
- *Where did I give and receive the least love today?*

Option 3:

- *Where today did I have the deepest sense of connection with God, others and myself?*
- *Where today did I have the least sense of connection?*

3. Bring each moment before God with both honesty and gratitude.

Notice any themes that may emerge. Don't try to fix anything, just notice.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: DISCERNMENT IN COMMUNITY

James 1:5

If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking.

“The Creator arranged things so that we need each other.”—**Basil of Caesarea**

Description

Discernment opens us up to listen to and recognize the voice and patterns of God’s direction in our lives. While discernment can and does happen in solitude, we also need each other as we learn the voice and ways of God. We look to Jesus and are reminded that we are not meant to do our lives without the company and care of others. Jesus, Himself, modeled a life of giving and receiving as He shared both the common, ordinary moments as well as the deep and meaningful moments of His life with His friends. When we invite others into our healing journey, we are reminded that we are not alone in our struggle and that we can support one another as we surrender ourselves even more fully to God’s work in us.

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Spiritual direction involves a process through which one person helps another person understand what God is doing and saying. Discernment is a crucial gift in the work of spiritual direction.

“Spiritual Direction is simply a relationship through which one person assists another in attending to the presence and call of God in all of life. Spiritual direction is for anyone yearning for God. Sometimes this desire appears as a sense of longing for something greater or a sense of discontent with the status quo. For others this pining is more focused, rising from a clear understanding that a sense of God’s presence is missing from particular parts of life.”—**Richard Foster**

TIME TO PRACTICE:

Below are a couple places you can go to find out more about connecting with a spiritual director:

1. Spiritual directors who attend Salem Alliance. There are a number of people who attend our church that have been trained as spiritual directors and who would be happy to meet with you. *For more information, contact Laura Scharer at lscharer@salemalliance.org.*

2. Soul Formation. This is a local organization that has been training spiritual directors for years. *Scan the QR code for more info or use the following URL*
<https://soulformation.org/find-a-spiritual-director>.



SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP

When you are unsettled and questioning, it can be tempting to isolate. You may feel like there are very few people to talk to. You might even fear being judged by others for what you are feeling and thinking.

However, when you take the brave step of sharing your struggles, others will realize that they are not alone either. There is mutual support for a community of very real and honest people as we face our struggles together. At its best, the family of God is a welcoming community who walks with each other through dark seasons.

TIME TO PRACTICE:

Choose one of the following or add one of your own:

- 1. Think of one person that you can reach out to in order to share what you are going through.** You may consider someone older, wiser, or farther along in their journey than you. Make the decision and a plan to reach out.
- 2. If you are in a Life Group, take the brave step of sharing with your group.** Ask them to listen to God with you. Allow them to offer you compassion and care. If you are not in a Life Group or other spiritual community, we would love to explore possibilities with you. Contact us at lifegroups@salemalliance.org.
- 3. Invite two friends to join you in what some would call Group Spiritual Direction.** Group spiritual direction is a time set aside to share with and listen to each other as you notice the movement of God in your lives. The goal is not to answer life's questions, rather, the goal is to draw closer to God in the midst of the questions.

For more info on how to practice Group Spiritual Direction, review the instructions on the following page.

GROUP SPIRITUAL DIRECTION INSTRUCTIONS

1. Set aside enough time to engage in this process together. We suggest an hour or so. That way each person has an adequate time to share and respond, and no one feels rushed throughout the process.

2. Decide who in the group will share first.

3. Give each person 15-20 minutes to reflect and respond to some of the following questions:

Possible questions to ask the person sharing:

- *How would you describe your relationship with God today?*
- *What is prayer like for you?*
- *How do you experience temptation in your life?*
- *What is your soul longing for today?*
- *How is it for you when you read Scripture?*
- *When are you bored in your spiritual journey?*
- *Is there any question you would like us to ask you?*

Question to ask in order to go deeper:

- *How is your view of God changing because of this experience?*
- *How would you like God to help you in this?*
- *How are you being changed by this relationship or set of circumstances?*
- *What do you think the Spirit of Jesus might be whispering to your spirit in this situation?*
- *Do you sense any invitation from God in this?*

As the person shares, simply listen. You may want to ask some questions that can help them go deeper, but do not engage with advice giving.

4. Once their time of sharing has come to an end, invite the next person to share and repeat the process above.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: SILENCE & SOLITUDE

Luke 5:16

But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

“In a noise-polluted world, it is even difficult to hear ourselves think let alone try to be still and know God. Yet it seems essential for our spiritual life to seek some silence, no matter how busy we may be. Silence is not to be shunned as empty space, but to be befriended as fertile ground for intimacy with God.” —**Susan Muto**

Description

Jesus modeled the need for times of silence and solitude, away from the noise and demands of our lives. Jesus would often pull away from the crowds and find a solitary place in which to spend time with His Father. We live in a very noisy and busy world, so it can become essential to seek and protect times of quiet in our lives. These times remind us that the world can go on without us for an hour or even a day. In quietness we often notice things that have become buried—sadness, anger, impatience, and/or weariness. As these things come to the surface, we can give them the attention they need.

A personal spiritual retreat can be quite helpful when trying to sort through areas of life that are unsettled. Setting aside a time of solitude makes space for honest processing and listening to God.

“If you don’t come apart for a while, you will come apart after a while”.—**Dallas Willard**

TIME TO PRACTICE:

Plan a Retreat

There are a variety of local retreat centers that offer a quiet and sacred space. We highly recommend the Mt. Angel Abbey. They are open during the day and guests can utilize the guest house space free of charge. They also have lodging that is reasonably priced for overnight stays. Scan the QR code for more info or use the following URL



<https://www.mountangelabbey.org/guesthouse/>

It can be easy to go away on a retreat and feel a little lost if you don’t plan ahead. You may find it helpful to prepare for your retreat by engaging with the prompts below:

- **When do you plan on going on your retreat? For how long?** (Include your start and end time.) **Where will your retreat be?**

- **What do you need to take with you? What do you need to leave behind?**

- **Who do you need to let know about your retreat before you leave?**

- **What Scripture(s) would you like to meditate on?**

- **What questions/feelings/circumstances do you want to process with God?**

- **What other spiritual practices would you like to incorporate into your retreat? (Silence & solitude, prayer, journaling, etc)**

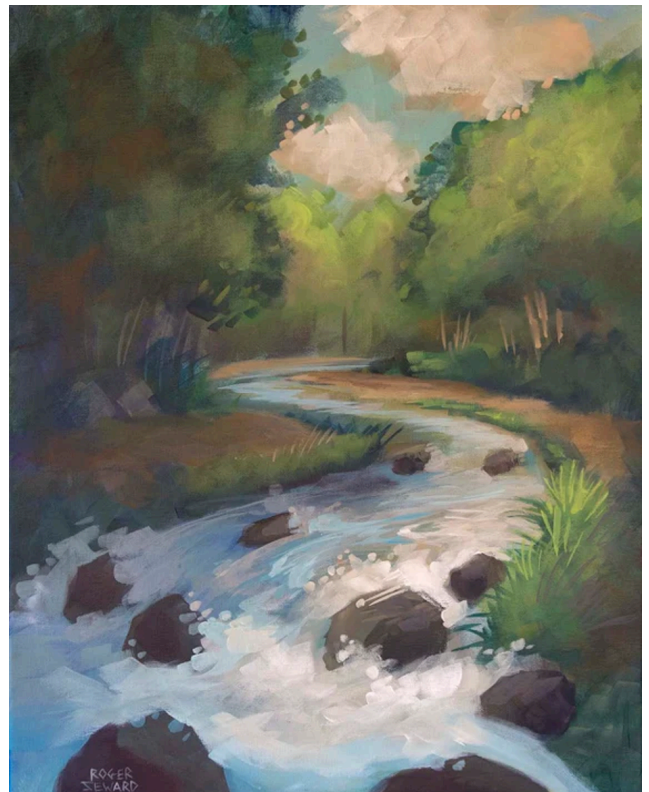
In quietness we often notice things we would rather not notice or feel, but those are the things that often could benefit from attention. Everything we notice in the struggle to get quiet can become an invitation to prayer. Silence is a time to rest in God—a place to be formed rather than fixed.

Psalm 62:1

My soul finds rest in God alone.

TIME TO PRACTICE:

- Set aside a period of time, at least 15 minutes.
- As much as possible, quiet any background noise - tvs, music, etc.
- Settle into a comfortable position.
- Go into silence, placing yourself in the presence of God with the words “Here I am.”
- As distractions come to mind, let them go by imagining they are boats floating down a river.
- Let the current take the distractions away—don’t follow the distractions.
- Gently return to God repeating “Here I am.” Sit quietly in His presence.



WAYS TO ENGAGE AT SAC



Referrals to Counselors

Our pastoral staff has a list of trusted, local counselors, with a variety of modalities and specialties. For more information, contact Laura Scharer at lscharer@salemalliance.org.



Pastoral Care

Many of our pastoral staff are equipped and ready to listen and pray with folks who are seeking spiritual care and discernment. To connect with a pastor, contact Gordon Bergman at gbergman@salemalliance.org.



Healing Prayer

Sometimes you need prayer for something deeper. We have a trained and compassionate team of people who specialize in prayer for emotional and spiritual issues. Scan the QR code for more info or contact Stephanie Brown at healingprayer@salemalliance.org.



Support Groups

We offer a number of support groups including Grief Share. Scan the QR code for more info or contact Gordon Bergman at gbergman@salemalliance.org.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

If you hope to get the most out of these spiritual practices, reflection is a helpful tool.

After engaging with one of these practices for a while, take five to ten minutes to journal your answers to the following three questions.

“We don’t change from our experience, we change when we reflect on our experience.” —Trevor Hudson

WHERE DID I NOTICE RESISTANCE AS I ENGAGED IN THIS PRACTICE?

WHERE DID I FEEL DELIGHT?

HOW WOULD I DESCRIBE THE CONNECTION AND COMMUNION WITH GOD I EXPERIENCED THROUGH THIS PRACTICE?

WHERE DO I SEE EVIDENCE OF MYSELF BECOMING A PERSON OF CHRIST-LIKE LOVE THROUGH THIS PRACTICE?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

BOOKS

- ***Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament*** by Mark Vroegop
- ***Invitation to Retreat*** by Ruth Haley Barton
- ***Sacred Companions*** by David Benner
- ***Invitation to Journey*** by Robert Mulholland
- ***Soultalk*** by Larry Crabb
- ***Seeking God Together*** by Alice Fryling
- ***A Grief Observed*** by CS Lewis
- ***The Shattered Lantern: Rediscovering a Felt Presence of God.*** by Ronald Rolheiser
- ***Every Moment Holy, Vol. II: Death, Grief, and Hope*** by Douglas McKelvey
- ***God Works the Night Shift*** by Ron Mehl
- ***Disappointment with God*** by Philip Yancey
- ***Reaching for the Invisible God*** by Philip Yancey
- ***Spiritual Friendship*** by Mindy Caligure
- ***Prayer: Find the Hearts True Home*** by Richard Foster

PODCASTS

- **Restoring the Soul** podcast
 - <https://open.spotify.com/episode/6jVEkvhFjD211WrVSsQTOx?si=2dmsRt-gTgaXUXj5Hpg9tg>

ONLINE RESOURCES

- **Reconstructing Faith** by Timothy Keller
 - <https://quarterly.gospelinlife.com/reconstructing-faith/>
- **Welcoming Prayer**
 - <https://www.lindsayboyer.com/welcoming-prayer>
- **About the Dark Night** by John Mark Comer
 - <https://practicthewayarchives.org/naming-your-stage-of-apprenticeship/step-sheet>
- **Salem Alliance Bible Study - Job and James**
 - Contact Sarah Morrow at smorrow@salemalliance to access this resource.

YOU'RE INVITED TO JOURNEY WITH US AS WE PURSUE LIFE WITH JESUS, TOGETHER AND ON MISSION.

JESUS

- Baptism Class
- Exploring Faith Ministries
- Healing & Prayer Ministries

TOGETHER

- Weekend Services
- Partner Class
- Life Groups
- Age & Stage of Life Ministries

ON MISSION

- In Church
- In the Neighborhoods
- In the Nations
- Baraka (Refugee Ministries)



Find out more

Cover design by Salem Alliance Church
Materials created by Salem Alliance Church Printed by permission only 2024

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright ©1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

