

A vertical photograph of a paved path leading through a dense forest. Sunlight filters through the trees, creating a hazy, golden atmosphere. The path is flanked by lush green foliage. The text 'THE WAY' is centered in the lower half of the image. 'THE' is in a smaller, black, serif font, while 'WAY' is in a larger, bold, black, serif font with a decorative flourish on the 'A'.

THE
WAY



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Introduction

“Follow me.”

This was Jesus’ invitation to His first disciples, and it’s the invitation He still extends to each of us today. The call is one that is quite black and white—we’re either following Him, or we’re not. If we respond in the affirmative to His call to follow, our life is instantaneously redefined by that call. We are no longer following the way of the world; we are following Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, the Son of God.

Following Jesus can’t be reduced to a moral code of ethics, a system of belief, or a religious practice. To be sure, there are aspects of each imbedded in our pursuit:

- Jesus shows us what is truly Good and calls us to practice it
- He teaches us the ultimate Truth and challenges us to believe it
- He models for us what is the only real Life and invites us to live it.

However, pursuit of Jesus must go further. As Aaron Niequist writes, “He didn’t say, ‘Here is the truth. Believe me.’ He declared, ‘I *am* the truth. Follow me.’”¹

And yet, as Dallas Willard soberly yet accurately comments, “Most problems in contemporary churches can be explained by the fact that members have never decided to follow Christ.”²

What does it mean to follow a first century Middle Eastern carpenter and Jewish rabbi as 21st century people living in the west? Are we supposed to sell everything that we have and give it to the poor? (Mark 10:21) Should we leave everything associated with our profession and current life behind in order to embrace this new life? (Matthew 4:20) Or should we just encounter Him, experience transformation, and then return to our “normal” life declaring the good works of God? (Mark 5:19) What does it mean for us to “take up our cross and follow Him” (Matthew 16:24) in our postmodern world? What’s included in the promise of “abundant life?” (John 10:10) All these questions, and hundreds more, face us as we seek to take seriously the call to follow Jesus in our modern world.

¹ Aaron Niequist, *The Eternal Current*, (Waterbrook, New York, NY, 2018.), pg. 1.

² Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission*, (HarperCollins e-books), location 209-210.

These answers might not be easy to find, but there *are* answers. But for most of us, we settle with a sterile belief in the doctrines of Jesus while never making any real or sustained effort for our lives to look like His. As David Hearn, President of the C&MA Canada quoted in a recent video blog: “Many believers stopped with the experience (of conversion) and have never gone on to maturity. They have lived a life of spiritual poverty and defeat, always under the suspicion that there was more...”³

The good news is that there *is* more! Listen to the words of Jesus:

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.

(Matthew 11:28-30, The Message)

The goal of this study is to lead us back, once again, to the deep reservoirs of joy and peace found only in Jesus. Historically, the church has engaged these truths through *spiritual disciplines* or an “activity within our power that we engage in to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort.”⁴ But this isn’t just a series of disciplines. It’s really about what the theologians call “progressive sanctification” or the process of becoming more like Jesus. This is a study designed with the goal of spiritual transformation. But here’s the thing: “*I cannot transform myself.* What I can do is create the conditions in which spiritual transformation can take place, by developing and maintaining a rhythm of spiritual practices that keep me open and available to God.”⁵ That’s where we’re headed.

Soli Deo Gloria,
Brian Kannel
York Alliance Church

³ Quoted from the video blog “More” by David Hearn, <https://pacificdistrict.ca/momentum-video/> accessed 7-27-18.

⁴ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, (HarperCollins, San Francisco, CA, 1997.), pg. 353.

⁵ Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*, (IVP, Downer’s Grove, IL, 2006.), pg. 12.

How to Use This Book

This book is designed to be used as a companion resource to the 2018 Fall sermon series at York Alliance Church. Each Sunday's message will provide the central teaching of the Scripture passages for that week. You will receive most benefit from this study if you utilize it in conjunction with both the Sunday messages and regular connection with a small community with whom you are able to discuss and apply these truths. If you are unable to attend one of the Sunday morning gatherings for any reason, the sermon audio can be found at <http://www.yorkalliance.org/sermons/>

Please be aware that studying the Bible can be a challenging endeavor. Of course, there are very few worthwhile things in life that don't require some effort on our part. But beyond the difficulty of study in general is the fact that we have a very real enemy who is actively opposed to our understanding of the Word of God. Paul tells us that our battle is not "against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over the present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12) Therefore, if you find yourself feeling discouraged, frustrated, or unable to understand something, I strongly encourage you to stop and pray. Ask God to guide your heart and thoughts and to give you understanding.

Also, don't do this study in isolation. While most will complete the actual study individually, I would encourage you to get connected to someone else who is doing this study and to connect with that person each week to talk about what you're learning. Along the way, if you have frustrations or are confused about something you're studying, that person can provide encouragement and guidance as you journey through the study together. However, if you get stuck along the way, you should feel free to skip a section and move to the next one.

This particular study guide has a few unique features to help you grow as a student of the Word as well as a disciple of Jesus. Therefore, a few notes may be helpful as you begin your study using this guide:

- Each week contains a study that is specific to the topic that is being addressed that week. This is largely a traditional Bible study, seeking to provide a

Scriptural foundation for each week. You can do this study in one sitting or you can spread it out through the week as you choose.

- In addition to the study section, there are three active “ways” that are associated with each week: *Via Purgativa*, *Via Illuminative*, and *Via Unitiva*. The ancient church called this the “threefold way” which leads to fulfillment in the spiritual life.⁶ Each of these “ways” will suggest practices that should be engaged throughout the week. (See “The Way of Transformation” section for more details on these practices.) For many at various stages of life, practices such as those suggested each week may seem a bit overwhelming. If you are in that position, I would encourage you to read the last section of “The Way of Transformation” called *The Nineteenth Annotation*, which is written by my wife, Amanda. Homeschooling four children, ages 10-17, makes for a very full schedule, and this section is a reflection for those who feel overwhelmed by engaging the study and disciplines listed for the weeks ahead. She will suggest ways to adapt practices, engaging these practices “on-the-go,” and gives each of us encouragement to push through the busyness of “normal” life into the fullness of life that Jesus promised.
- Included with each study are blank sermon note sheets (for use on Sunday mornings and/or with the sermon audio available online) as well as a set of application questions, which will hopefully be useful throughout discussions with others that are engaging this journey with you.

If you have questions about how to best utilize this study guide, have comments on what you’re finding in it, or just want to report your experiences with using it, all are welcomed! Email me at bkannel@yorkalliance.org.

Lord Jesus, Your call to follow You is one that continues to speak to us in 2018. As we study, may we not simply add more knowledge to already full brains, but may we experience deep transformation of our hearts and lives. We know that the work of spiritual formation belongs to you, but we also know that you call us to be active participants. Teach us our part, and help us to engage the life that you’ve promised with discipline and with hope. May our lives increasingly reflect the fullness of joy that You promised us, and may that joy radiate to the world around us.

In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

⁶ Brian D. McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again*, (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 2008.), kindle location 1780.

Via Transformatio or “The Way of Transformation”

The ancient Christians saw following Jesus as a complete lifestyle; what we might call a “way of life.” In fact, early followers of Jesus weren’t known as “Christians” (that wasn’t until Acts 11), but rather, were described as followers of “the Way.” (See, for instance, Acts 9:2) This moniker was a reminder to all that the Christian life was not a static decision to believe a series of truths, but an active pursuit of living like their Master, Jesus.

The ancient church practiced a variety of habits, or disciplines, that were largely taken from the eyewitness accounts of the life of Jesus, found in the gospels, or the teachings of the apostles. These ancient practices came together in a threefold “way” that described the life of the apprentice, or disciple, of Jesus. The western church described these ways in Latin:⁷

- *Via Purgativa*. This is the self-examination in which we discover our sinful tendencies and desires, leading us to repentance, purification, and liberation. Without this step, transformation is impossible.
- *Via Illuminativa*. This is all about opening ourselves up to the light of Christ so that we can grow healthy and bear fruit. Through the way of illumination, we are intentionally opening ourselves up to the transformation of Jesus.
- *Via Unitiva*. This final step is built on the first two, uniting our spirits with God so that our will becomes His. We are not eliminated as individuals, but rather, we are made sacred and find His life being lived through us. (Galatians 2:20)

These three pathways will provide the structure for the active portion of our study each week. Under each of the three headings, several simple disciplines will be outlined, and you are encouraged to engage each in prayerful recognition of the work of the Spirit in your life. Remember the definition of spiritual disciplines from the introduction (see pg. 6): these disciplines don’t earn us favor before God. They are simply actions which we *can* do that develop in us outcomes that we *cannot*

⁷ These concepts are taken from Brian McLaren’s book “Finding Our Way Again” which is the first book in the Ancient Practices series, edited by Phyllis Tickle. (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 2008.) While I can’t recommend everything in this book, or this series, there are excellent truths available to the discerning reader.

generate on our own. Disciplines within *Via Purgativa* are centered around fasting and prayer, those within *Via Illuminativa* around silence, solitude, and meditation on Scripture, and those within *Via Unitiva* around the practice of Sabbath rest and the sacred meal.

If you read through these sections and the disciplines described feel difficult but *doable*, I encourage you to attempt them throughout the week. Perfection is not the goal, but rather, transformation, even if you can't complete everything that's laid out for the week. However, if you read through these sections and feel completely overwhelmed at the prospect of engaging these disciplines based on your current life and schedule, the *Nineteenth Annotation* is written just for you.

The Nineteenth Annotation

St. Ignatius of Loyola, in the 16th century, developed a series of Spiritual Exercises which are still used throughout the world today. These Spiritual Exercises, as published, are notes of guidance written for spiritual directors as they lead participants through the experience. However, they call for a commitment to a 30-day retreat during which the Exercises should be practiced. Recognizing that not everyone would be able to commit to a 30-day retreat, Ignatius penned the "19th Annotation" to the Exercises, which states: "One who is educated or talented, but engaged in public affairs or necessary business, should take an hour and a half daily for the Spiritual Exercises."⁸ This annotation has provided a way to engage the Exercises for those who would otherwise not have been able to do so.

My wife, Amanda, is one such person. As you'll hear, and as is the case for many of you as well, life for her is very full. Adding *anything*, no matter how good or worthwhile, seems like a monumental challenge. But, as you'll hear, there are ways... and it's always worth it. Here's Amanda:

I am Brian's wife and a mom of four. We homeschool all four of our kids which, as you might imagine, is a pretty consuming endeavor. I'm an "in the moment" person and I would describe myself as a Type-A wannabe. (I have this irrational perception that if I could have everything well-ordered, life would be much easier, and I could accomplish so much more.) But... I'm so far from Type-A it's not even funny.

⁸ St. Ignatius of Loyola, translated by Louis J. Puhl, S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, (Loyola Press, Chicago, IL, 1951.), pg. 9.

I love God's Word, but don't always do a good job of keeping the rhythm of reading my Bible. I am rejuvenated through solitude and conversation with God, but often find myself allowing the alone time in which I best converse with my Father to be crowded out. I love slowing down enough to embrace Sabbath and community, but often find that I've allowed the schedule and pace of a large family to dictate my days, limit my Sabbath and hamper my desire to gather with people.

When Brian and I first discussed me adding to this study guide, the intent was to add a "Nineteenth Annotation" to each week, creating a "slimmed down" version of the practices. However, as I read through the draft of the study guide, I decided that would be a disservice. These practices are good. And necessary. So, instead I want to encourage you... busy stay-at-home moms, those who work all day and come home to a full family schedule, those who work long hours and have long to-do lists, those who are wrestling with the challenges of physical or emotional illness—either their own or someone they are caring for... and the list goes on. To each of you: Don't. Give. Up. It's worth it. As you look at the practices for each week, be creative and offer yourself grace where necessary, but don't make excuses. Prayerfully *try*. Maybe you choose one or two to focus on each week. Maybe you created a slimmed down version of what is described in response to an especially busy week. But please don't throw up your hands and give up. Please try. God *will* meet you as you seek Him with all your heart.

I could write lots of words of encouragement and challenge, but ultimately God's Word is the best encourager. It is alive and active, and if we will listen, it will cut to our core. Recently I've been studying Psalm 32 and it has again reminded me to press in. Let me try to share with you some of what I've learned.

Psalm 32:1-2

*"Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.
Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in
whose spirit there is no deceit."*

David cuts right to the core when he says "Blessed is the man... in whose spirit there is no deceit." How often do I deceive myself and avoid recognizing the nature of my sin before God? I must examine my heart and be honest with myself and with God. So often, prayer and fasting are the avenues that lead to honesty. Only when I can readily confess will God forgive.

Psalm 32:3

"For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through groaning all day long."

When I don't seek the Lord, I can literally complain all day long. I don't see opportunities, I feel weary, and I become self-centered.

Psalm 32:4

"For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. [Selah]"

Learn to see God's heavy hand as a gift. When my strength is dried up, and I don't feel like I can teach my kids, finish the never-ending pile of laundry, or meet with another person, *let alone* spend time trying to develop any given spiritual discipline, I know I need to check my heart. God disciplines those He loves. Sometimes that discipline comes in the form of a weariness that only God can relieve. And He lovingly allows it so that we might return to Him.

Psalm 32:5

"I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. [Selah]"

Taking time and margin, often in silence and solitude, to recognize my position before God and open myself up for transformation is imperative. I must be determined to confess my sin and be humble before God. Notice the Psalmist (David) doesn't say "I'll *try* to confess." He says "I *will* confess." Only one stanza earlier he described how bone tired he was. And yet he pressed in, perhaps with his last bit of energy. (I know it feels that way to me sometimes!) We must believe that no schedule, no meeting, and no member of our family is more important than taking the time to bow the knee before our Father.

Psalm 32:6-8

"Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him. You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance. [Selah] I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you."

God promises, as I humble myself before Him, He *will* instruct me and lead me. He is the One that will transform my heart.

Psalm 32:10–11

"Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD. Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!"

I must have an outflow. I am made to worship *and* to share the goodness of God with others. He has forgiven me. He receives me. What better to place is there to live that out than in community? So, I must press into community, both for my sake and for the encouragement of the body around me.

I'll close this section with a story. When I was a little girl, my dad and I would play a lot of games. Games in the car, board games, outside games. Just games in general. When we played, he would always challenge me in a competitive voice with, "I'm gonna win." And in my child's voice I'd respond with, "NO, I'm gonna win!" The banter in and of itself became a game. Sometimes he allowed me to win and sometimes he didn't. He wisely knew the valuable piece in our game was not the actual winning but the importance of instilling a deep desire to keep trying. As I grew, and I faced challenging pursuits, my dad would encourage me: "Don't give up! Never stop trying—remember, you're going to win!" Sometimes I did and sometimes I didn't, but I learned what he wanted me to learn—there is growth in the journey, as long as we continue to try.

While I was in college my dad faced a battle with terminal cancer. As I watched him grow weaker, I challenged him one day: "Dad, remember that game we played? Now it's my turn to challenge you. You're going to win!" With sad and yet joyful eyes, he quietly responded: "I'd like to win, but I don't know about this battle." In the end, he didn't win his battle with cancer. But the joy in his eyes came from the fact that he knew Jesus had already won the battle for him.

Determination and the desire to keep trying is one of the most beautiful gifts that my earthly father passed on to me. It reflects the heart of my heavenly Father. I often hear Him say, through His Word, the community, or times with Him in prayer: "Never give up in your pursuit of Me. Never stop trying to draw closer to Me. Remember—you're going to win, but my Son has already won."

Press into the Way of Jesus. The ultimate battle is already won. For our part, we never stop trying, not in order to win the battle, but to engage the abundant life that Jesus promised. There truly is joy in the journey.

Week One: Choosing Apprenticeship

Luke 14:27-28, Matthew 8:18-22

Jesus' invitation to His first disciples is the same invitation given to us today: follow Him and become His apprentices. We are invited to be with Him, to become like Him, and to ultimately do what He did. For most of us, we never actively chose apprenticeship under Jesus. The intentional choice is foundational for us to follow the Way because His Way is counter to our instincts and desires.

However, it's the only pathway to the fullness of life.

Believing vs. Becoming

I remember the first time I set foot in an evangelical church. I had grown-up in a mainline church, but my best friend went to the large Baptist church on the other side of town, and he invited me to come along. That first experience was... odd. I found out that there was an entirely new vocabulary that I needed to learn if I was to have any hope of understanding what was happening! Words like *salvation*, *sanctification*, and *repentance* had only been very vague concepts to me, and phrases like *washed in the blood of the Lamb* were basically terrifying to my pre-teen ears! I learned, of course... and never got the actual blood bath I was fearing.

However, even once we have the “lingo” down and know how to use the words and phrases in regular conversation, we can still struggle to know what they mean. There are times we say things, but if we’re honest, we don’t really think through the meaning or the implications of what we’re saying. “Following Jesus” can be one of those concepts.

Before you move into the rest of the study, take a few minutes to write down what it means to you when you or someone you know says that they “follow Jesus.”

Read the following accounts of Jesus inviting disciples to follow Him:

- Mark 1:16-20
- Mark 2:13-14
- Mark 3:13-15
- Mark 8:34-37

What pattern do you see in Jesus’ expectation of His followers?

Now read Luke 14:26-33, which is in many ways a parallel passage to the Mark 8 passage above. How does Jesus expand upon what it means to be a disciple?

Finally, read Matthew 10:18-22. In addition to the high cost of following Jesus, which parallels the Luke 14 passage, what else is evident from Jesus' replies to those who wish to follow Him in Matthew 10?

Not only is there a high commitment, but Jesus expected a physical pursuit of Him! The invitation was for those first followers to:

- Travel with Him, eat with Him, listen to Him, and generally **be with Jesus**.
- Through that process, they would **become like Him**.
- Then, Jesus would send them out to **do what He did**.

This is still the expectation of a disciple (or *apprentice*) of Jesus today!

Consider the following:

- On a scale of 1-10, how certain are you that you are a Christian? _____
- On a scale of 1-10, using the above understanding, how certain are you that you are a disciple or apprentice of Jesus? _____

If there is a difference, why is that?

In his book "Following the Master" author and expert on discipleship Michael J. Wilkins makes the following statement: "Far too often we think, 'Disciple? Oh, that's for an extremist. I'm just a normal Christian'... we need to recognize that when Jesus spoke of disciples he had in mind what would be the *normal* Christian, not the abnormal."⁹

However, over time, that reality has faded. Instead of taking on the lifestyle of Jesus, those who called themselves "Christians" simply believed in Him but didn't follow Him. "Most conservatives by the early seventies generally accepted that being a Christian had nothing essentially to do with *actually* following or being like Jesus. The only absolute requirement for being a Christian was that one believe the proper things *about* Jesus."¹⁰

Read Matthew 11:28-30.

It seems odd initially that Jesus would use the image of a "yoke," which was used for working with oxen, while He was speaking of rest. However, in first century Jewish culture, "yoke" meant "the service of God as I teach it."¹¹ With that understanding, re-write Matthew 11:28-30 in your own words:

A.W. Tozer called it a "modern heresy"¹² for those who called themselves Christians to not serve and follow Jesus as Lord. While many in the church will use the language of first following Jesus as "Savior" and at a later point in life following Jesus as "Lord," there is no such distinction in the New Testament. "We *in one move* find forgiveness for our sins and 'take his yoke upon us and learn of him.'¹³

The essence of Jesus' message can be found in His initial declaration after coming out of the wilderness temptations in Mark 1. Read Mark 1:15.

⁹ Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1992.), Kindle location 633.

¹⁰ Dallas Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, (Harper & Row, San Francisco, CA, 1988.), pgs. 22-23.

¹¹ *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. V (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1939.), pg. 3127.

¹² A.W. Tozer, *I Call It Heresy*, (Christian Publications, Harrisburg, PA, 1974), pg. 5.

¹³ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, (Navpress, Colorado Springs, CO, 2002), pg. 242.

What is the essential message of Jesus in your own words?

All too often, the message we speak about Jesus has to do solely with eternal bliss (heaven) or eternal damnation (hell). These are certainly *aspects* of the whole gospel, but Jesus chose to speak the message quite differently—He emphasized the *present reality* of the Kingdom of God, and the open entry into it!

The early message was, accordingly, not experienced as something its hearers *had* to believe or do because otherwise something bad—something with no essential connection with real life—would happen to them. The people initially impacted by that message generally concluded that they would be fools to disregard it. That was the basis of their conversion.¹⁴

The desire of the early disciples was not simply to escape Hell and scurry off to heaven, but to engage in the Kingdom of God in the here and now! Read the following passages:

- 2 Corinthians 5:16-20
- Ephesians 1:7-10
- Ephesians 2:8-10
- Colossians 1:18-20

What are some of the *present* roles given to the disciple of Jesus?

The real question, then, is whether we have simply *believed in* Jesus, or if we are actually *following* Him. Unbelievably, for many of us, we've never even considered the question!

¹⁴ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, (HarperCollins, San Francisco, CA, 1997.), pg. XIV.

William Law, writing in 1728, diagnosed our modern problem perfectly: “If you will stop here and ask yourself why you are not so devoted as the primitive Christians, your own heart will tell you that it is neither through ignorance or inability but purely because you *never thoroughly intended it*.”¹⁵

Ouch. The bottom line for many of us is that we haven’t taken the time to **be with Jesus**, found ourselves **becoming like Jesus**, and haven’t been **doing what Jesus did** precisely because we never really intended to. We may have prayed a prayer, joined a church, gone to small group, and cleaned up some of our immoral behavior, but we haven’t truly taken the step of becoming an apprentice of Jesus.

Over the next few months, we’ll be journeying through what it means to truly be His apprentice. For now, at the outset, it’s a great time to consider the question—maybe for the first time: “Do I really want to follow Jesus?” Early in this study we looked at Luke 14:28 and considered the cost of being a disciple. However, it’s also vitally important to consider the cost of *not* being a disciple. (Matthew 16:26)

Read the following, and consider what comes with being an apprentice of Jesus:

- 1 John 1:3
- 1 Thessalonians 1:6
- Colossians 1:18
- 1 John 3:8
- 1 Corinthians 1:20
- Colossians 1:13
- John 10:10
- 2 Corinthians 4:17

And these are just *some* of the blessings of truly following Jesus! While the cost of following Jesus is high, many believe that the cost of *not* following is even higher. As the missionary Jim Elliot famously said: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”

¹⁵ William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, (Westminster, Philadelphia, PA, 1955), pg. 22.

Via Transformatio

As you consider the concepts from this week's message, engage the following practices during the week:

Via Purgativa

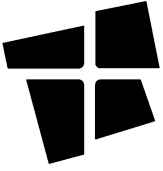
- **Fasting:** Consider whether you have the temptation to place an area of your life above your pursuit of Jesus. It could be something tangible like food or drink, or something that takes time like social media, reading sports or news websites or other publications, watching television, or any other kind of activity. During this week, intentionally fast in that area. If you are fasting from food, choose a meal to skip each day. Otherwise, choose to go completely without that thing this week.

Via Illuminativa

- **Silence and Solitude:** Each day this week, set your alarm 20 minutes earlier than normal (more if you're prone to hit snooze!). When you get up, grab your coffee if needed, and spend 10-15 minutes in complete silence. Don't read during this time, but just seek to focus on Jesus. You might find that focusing on a short word that describes the character of God (like *love, grace, power, glory*) and repeating it quietly will help you stay focused, and you can come back to softly speaking that word if your mind starts to wander.
- **Meditation:** Following your time in silence and solitude, spend a few minutes reading and re-reading Matthew 16:24-26. It may help you to write it on a notecard. Read it slowly, meditating on the words that Jesus is speaking. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak His truth to you as you meditate.

Via Unitiva

- **Sabbath:** If possible, designate a 24-hour period this week to spend with God and with friends and family. If 24 hours isn't possible, choose a significant period of time during the week (at least 3 or 4 hours) that you can clear your schedule and spend enjoying Jesus and His blessings. Avoid work, buying anything, and doing chores around the house during this time. Use this period to connect with family, friends, and most of all, to intentionally connect with Jesus.



Choosing Apprenticeship

Luke 14:27-28, Matthew 8:18-22

Sermon Notes:

Questions for Application:

- Has your definition of “following Jesus” been different from what the Scriptures intend? Why do you think that is?
- Do you see “being a Christian” and “being an apprentice of Jesus” as being the same things, or different? Why?
- What are some of the things that stand in the way of completely pursuing Jesus in your life?
- As you consider the cost of discipleship and the cost of non-discipleship, which one seems greater? Why?
- Have you *intended* to follow Jesus completely? Write a prayer below that expresses where your heart is right now, and where you hope it will be as you continue in this study.

Week Two: Be With Jesus

John 15:1-8

If we are to be apprentices of the Way of Jesus, our first step is simply to be with Him. This was the invitation given to the earliest disciples, and the invitation given to us as well. We are called to constantly live in two places at once—where we are physically, and also in the presence of Jesus. It's His presence that changes us. Too often we jump to the actions of the apprentice without first spending time with the Master.

How to Be With Jesus

The basic question we wrestle with as we consider apprenticeship to Jesus two millennia after He walked on the earth is simple: How do we spend time with One who is no longer actually *here*?

As Jesus unfolded the coming weeks and months to the disciples in John 14-16, they were wrestling with the same question. Of course, they had very little understanding of what Jesus was saying to them, but try to do an imaginative reading of John 14 and imagine the way the scene unfolds.

As you open your Bible to John 14, take a few minutes in silence. Imagine yourself in the room with Jesus. All of the disciples are there, and the Passover meal is set before you. It's warm in the room, but maybe there's a cool breeze coming through the open windows. Imagine having spent the past three years following Jesus everywhere He went: from the towns to the country, back and forth across the sea of Galilee, as well as various lakes and rivers. You've heard Him teach and been amazed. Even more, you've seen the miracles and the power of God flowing through Him. The hope that He will usher in a new age for Israel has been steadily building over the last year or so, and this moment, in Jerusalem at Passover, seems pregnant with possibility. What will Jesus do? What will He say?

Now, slowly read John 14:1-4.

- What is your emotion as Jesus talks about going to prepare a place for you?
- What's your response to His confidence that you know the way to where He is going?

It would be easy to feel like Thomas and be a bit alarmed at Jesus' words! Read slowly through John 14:5-14.

- Are you assured by Jesus' words in vs. 6 that He is the way and the truth and the life? How do you react to that statement?

- Do you think you would be able, in that situation, to understand that Jesus is God, which is why He's speaking about the Father as He is?
- How do you respond to Jesus telling you that you would do even greater things than He has? How does that tie into His promise about prayer?

So far, maybe you've been able to imagine the scene pretty clearly. However, it will be pretty tough to truly get a sense of what the disciples were hearing as Jesus continued to speak. As you read through John 14:15-31, underline the promises that Jesus makes to the disciples, and try to imagine how they received them.

- What promises would probably seem to be the most unrealistic to you if you were a disciple?

The promises of Jesus could be boiled down to two words: Presence and Peace. What Jesus was trying to communicate to His disciples was the answer to the question with which we began this study: "How do we spend time with One who is no longer actually *here?*"

- According to Jesus, how should that question be answered?

The promise of the Holy Spirit is Jesus' answer to our need to spend time with Him even when He is not present in the flesh. In fact, He would expound upon that reality to His disciples as the conversation continued...

Read John 15:1-8.

- What word or concept do you hear over and over again in this passage?

The invitation of Jesus through the Spirit is that we can *constantly* remain with Him. This means that we need to learn to be in two places at once: wherever we are physically, and also in the presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

Brother Lawrence, a seventeenth century French monk, called this “practicing the presence of God,” which he sought to do at all times, even during his work in the kitchen of the monastery. He said it this way: “The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament.”¹⁶

Read Psalm 16:8-9. What practice does David (the psalmist) use through which he receives joy and security?

Dallas Willard says it this way: “The first and most basic thing we can and must do is keep God before our minds.”¹⁷

Of course, this can be a practice that’s not as easy as it sounds. How do we abide in the presence of Jesus in the midst of all of the distractions and responsibilities of our day to day lives?

The answer is deceptively simple: We need to live like Jesus. **We will experience the life of Jesus only when we are engaging the lifestyle of Jesus.** Of course, we can’t go back to first century Israel to truly live like Jesus, but we can practice the lifestyle of Jesus through practicing the same things that He practiced in order to draw close to the Father.

Read the following, and note some of the specific practices that seemed to be a regular part of the life of Jesus:

- Mark 1:35
- Matthew 14:13
- Matthew 14:14
- Luke 11:1

¹⁶ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, (Spire, Grand Rapids, MI, Seventeenth printing, 2004.), pg. 30.

¹⁷ Dallas Willard, *Personal Soul Care*, (www.dwillard.org, accessed July 31, 2018.)

What are some of the practices of Jesus you see just in these four verses?

This is vitally important concept that Willard expounds upon:

To live as Christ lived is to live as he did *all* his life. Our mistake is to think that following Jesus consists in loving our enemies, going the 'second mile,' turning the other cheek, suffering patiently and hopefully—while living the rest of our lives just as everyone around us does. The general human failing is to want what is right and important, but at the same time not to commit to the kind of life that will produce the action we know to be right and the condition we want to enjoy.¹⁸

Re-read John 15:1-8, and as you do, think about what you know about gardening.

- Is growing fruit a short process or a long one?
- Does the process that Jesus describes in John 15 sound like a one-time action or an ongoing endeavor?
- What promises does Jesus make to those who abide in the vine? Look back at the promises of John 14 that you underlined earlier—how do these promises tie in with John 15?

¹⁸ Dallas Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, (Harper & Row, San Francisco, CA, 1988.), pgs. 5-6.

Jesus declared that our productivity, our fruitfulness, is directly linked to our abiding in Him. As Christians, we *will* bear fruit, but it will vary in degree. The closer we stay to Christ, the more fruit we will bear. The more we wander out from the center and neglect the means of grace that He has given to us, the less fruit we will produce.¹⁹

The bottom line is that of control. Who is ultimately responsible? The Bible will resoundingly declare that, when we are engaged in abiding with Jesus and following Him, He is.

Read the familiar promise of Romans 8:28. Now, read vs. 29-30.

- What is the process that Paul describes regarding the working of God in these verses?

- Why are those truths important things for us to recognize when we face difficulty and suffering?

The final word on the importance of being with Jesus will come from M. Robert Mulholland, Jr. and his landmark book “Invitation to a Journey.” It’s a dense quote, but he does an excellent job of narrating the journey of being with Jesus as His apprentice:

When spirituality is viewed as a journey... the way to spiritual wholeness is seen to lie in an increasingly faithful response to the One whose purpose shapes our path, whose grace redeems our detours, whose power liberates us from crippling bondages of the prior journey and whose transforming presence meets us at each turn in the road. In other words, holistic spirituality is a pilgrimage of deepening responsiveness to God’s control of our life and being.²⁰

¹⁹ R.C. Sproul, *St. Andrew’s Expository Commentary on John*, (Reformation Trust, Orlando, FL, 2009), Kindle location 3817.

²⁰ M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Invitation to a Journey*, (IVP, Downer’s Grove, IL, 1993), Kindle location 30.

Via Transformatio

As you consider the concepts from this week's message, engage the following practices during the week:

Via Purgativa

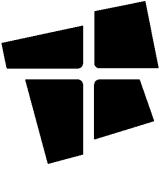
- **Meditative Prayer:** Each evening this week, before you go to sleep, pray through The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) slowly, meditating on each phrase. Talk to God about the ways that your heart is not engaged with His work in the world around you, and the ways that you have lived your life that day under your own control. Use this tool as a confessional time.
- **Fasting:** Choose a meal to fast this week and use that time to just spend time with Jesus.

Via Illuminativa

- **Silence and Solitude:** Each day this week, set your alarm 20 minutes earlier than normal (more if you're prone to hit snooze!). When you get up, grab your coffee if needed, and spend 10-15 minutes in complete silence. Don't read during this time, but just seek to focus on Jesus. You might find that focusing on a short word that describes the character of God (like *love, grace, power, glory*) will help you stay focused, and you can come back to softly speaking that word if your mind is wandering.
- **Meditation:** Throughout the day, work to bring your mind and spirit back to the presence of Jesus. Consider using your phone to set reminders or give yourself visual cues throughout the day. As you go into a new activity, ask God's direction in that activity, and as you complete an activity, thank Him for His faithfulness in that which you just completed.

Via Unitiva

- **Sacred Meal:** Invite some friends over for a dinner in your home. Throughout the preparation, the meal itself, and the clean-up, seek to keep Jesus in the forefront of your mind. If your guests are believers, talk about the ways that Jesus is stretching you as you seek to be with Him. If they are unbelievers, look for opportunities to express the heart of Jesus toward them, and the specific ways that Jesus has been working in your life.



Be With Jesus

John 15:1-8

Sermon Notes:

Questions for Application:

- Do you struggle to keep a conscious awareness of the presence of Jesus throughout the day? What are the most difficult times for you?
- What practices of Jesus are the most difficult for you?
- Does the promise that Jesus made to the disciples of “peace” seem a far cry from your reality? What are some areas of your life where you know that your lifestyle and the lifestyle of Jesus are dramatically different? How might you start to make adjustments in those areas?
- Are there times you are impatient with the pace of “fruit bearing” in your life? Does Romans 8:28-30 reassure you? Why or why not?

Week Three: Become Like Jesus

Luke 6:39-40, Galatians 5:16-25

Is change truly possible? The call of Jesus is first to be with Him, but it doesn't end there. The expectation for the apprentice of Jesus is that we would become like our Master. This doesn't happen solely through our own effort, but it does require our effort. As we engage the training of Jesus through teaching, practice, and community, the Holy Spirit transforms us to be like Him.

Changing to be Like Him

It's rare for Friedrich Nietzsche, who famously declared that "God is dead," to be quoted in a study on spiritual formation. However, in addition to being wrong about the mortality of God, he also said this: "The essential thing 'in heaven and earth' is that there should be a *long obedience in the same direction*; there thereby results, and has always resulted in the long run, something which has made life worth living."²¹ (emphasis mine)

"A long obedience in the same direction." Eugene Peterson borrowed this phrase for a book on the psalms of ascent in the 80's²² and in it he highlighted a cultural problem that Christians face as we seek to be apprentices of Jesus in our modern world: there's no shortcut. We live in a culture of instant gratification, and that's only getting greater with each passing year. What was a problem with the onset of the microwave and the personal computer in the early 80's has been magnified by the internet, the iPhone, and Amazon Prime in our day. We are accustomed to the instantaneous download, the free two-day shipping, and videos "on demand." It's remarkable that, years ago, conversations actually ended without resolution...

"When did the Cleveland Indians last win the World Series?"

"I think it was '52." "No, pretty sure it was '55." "Are you sure?"

And then, suddenly the conversation was over, unless a phone call could be made to a subject expert (for instance, my father...) to clear up the discussion. Today, however, someone pulls out an iPhone and "Googles" it. Problem solved. Immediately.²³

Apprenticeship to Jesus isn't like that. Read Luke 6:39-40.

This brief parable has much to tell us about apprenticeship:

- What is the ultimate goal of a "fully trained" disciple/apprentice?

²¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *AZQuotes.com*, (Wind and Fly LTD, 2018.), www.azquotes.com/quote/816360, accessed August 01, 2018.

²² Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, (IVP, Downer's Grove, IL, 1980/2000.)

²³ For those who are interested, it's actually all the way back in 1948. As of the time of this writing. We Cleveland fans are still holding out for this year... as we do every year...

- What does “when he is fully trained” tell us about the process?
- According to Jesus, is it possible to be partially trained? Poorly trained?

The problem we face is that, if we are going to be like Jesus, we need to change. I think we can all agree that we’re not exactly like Jesus right now! So, the big questions we need to deal with are:

1. Is change possible?
2. How do we change to be like Jesus?

Read 2 Corinthians 3:18. What does Paul say the result of “beholding the glory of the Lord” will be in the life of the believer?

2 Peter 1:3-11 is a fascinating passage on spiritual growth. Read through these verses carefully.

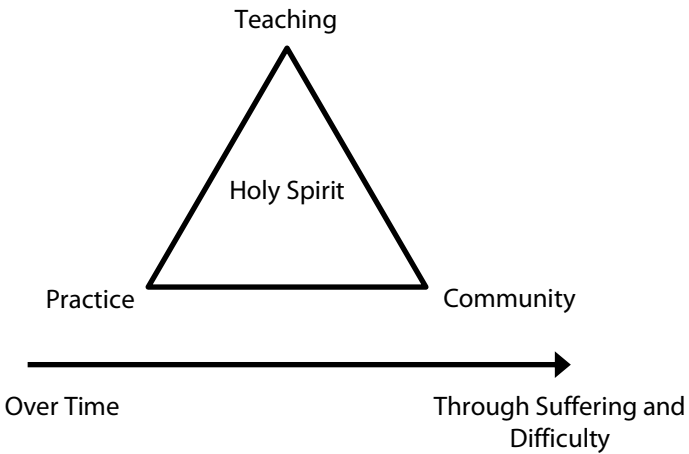
- Has Jesus given us everything that we need in order to change to be like Him?
- Does this change happen automatically, or does it require our effort?
- Do we gain the qualities of Jesus immediately, or do they grow over time?

One author says it this way: “[God says] ‘For I will be with you.’ Your guilt and your inadequacies are no longer the ultimate truth about you. You are what you are—but that’s not all you are. You are what you are, but you are *not yet what you will be...* The *primary* goal of spiritual life is human transformation.”²⁴

So, *YES* we can change. But how?

²⁴ John Ortberg, *The Life You’ve Always Wanted*, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1997), pg. 21, 24.

A helpful model of spiritual formation looks like this:²⁵



Much of the next 50-75 pages will be unpacking this model, but for now it's important to recognize just a few factors:

- What are the three “human” factors over which we have some control that are part of the change process?
- Is this purely a model based on human effort?
- What two things does the arrow represent in our lives?

The portion that makes the most intuitive sense to us in spiritual formation is at the top of the triangle: teaching, or a knowledge of the Word. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

- What are some of the functions that the Word of God fulfills in our lives?

²⁵ This model and many of the associated spiritual formation concepts are taken from www.practicingtheway.org.

Now, read Deuteronomy 6:5 and Matthew 22:37.

- What are the three or four aspects of our lives that should be a part of the whole picture of spiritual transformation?

Loving God with our *minds* is certainly vital and important, but it isn't everything! "You can listen to innumerable sermons and read countless books, but the true transformation happens only when you practice the disciplines that lie at the heart of faith."²⁶ At some point, if we are to change to be like Jesus, we need to live like Him, not just know about Him.

Read the following:

- Galatians 5:16 and 25
- Ephesians 4:22-24, 5:15-16
- Philippians 2:12-16
- Colossians 3:12-15

These are just a small sampling of the *many* passages in the New Testament that tell us that our faith needs to be active. Practices, then, must be a key aspect of our spiritual formation! However, the mindset with which we approach these practices are key. Read Galatians 3:2-3.

- What is Paul's concern for the spiritual formation of the Galatian believers?

Practices can never become a "new law" or a way to earn the free salvation offered through Jesus. This need for our effort to engage in spiritual formation doesn't minimize the sovereign grace of Jesus in our spiritual formation. As the early church father Augustine said, "Without God we cannot, without us, He will not." Or in more contemporary language: "Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action."²⁷

The final aspect of formation that is under our human control is our need for community. It is an inescapable reality that we are shaped by those with whom we

²⁶ Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way*, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005), pg. 31.

²⁷ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission*, (HarperCollins e-books), location 948.

associate and spend time. Not only is spiritual formation to be practiced in community, it is proven there as well: “Jesus gave a sure mark of the outcome of spiritual formation under his guidance: we become people who love one another.”²⁸

Read Romans 12:3-21 slowly, taking note of the way the community is to interact with one another. We will study this passage to a greater degree later in this study, but for now, simply read the verses that precede this section, Romans 12:1-2.

- What is the initial cause of the behaviors listed in Romans 12?
- Based on what you learned in 2 Peter 1, do you think that transformation happens completely *before* the Romans 12 behaviors happen, or does it seem that the transformation and the behaviors in community work together?

The model we looked at above uses an arrow to show us both time and circumstance, which are both a significant part of our spiritual growth.

Read Romans 5:3-5 and James 1:2-3.

- What do both of these passages teach us to rejoice in?
- How do you typically respond to suffering and trials?

For most of us, we do everything within our power to avoid the *very thing* that God tells us will form us. The difficult truth is that we truly are formed through suffering and pain more than through joy and comfort—if we’ll allow God to do it.

²⁸ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, (Navpress, Colorado Springs, CO, 2002), pg. 183.

You can't take an epidural shot to ease the pain of giving birth to character. In a sense, every day of your life is labor: the rhythm and agony of producing that person who will wake up in your body tomorrow, creating your reputation, continuing your legacy, and influencing your family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, and countless strangers for better or for worse.²⁹

The fact is that there is no substitute for both time and difficulty in the process of spiritual formation. That certainly doesn't mean that we should seek out pain and suffering, but we probably shouldn't simply run from it on principle either. Both the time formation takes and the suffering that accelerates the process are outside of our control.

Which brings us to the final factor in change—the centerpiece of spiritual formation, the Holy Spirit. The combination of solid biblical teaching, engaging the practices of Jesus, living in community over time while enduring periodic suffering and difficulty will only form us into the character of our Master Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Read Galatians 5:16-25.

- As you look back at the passage, underline the words that indicate a *command* or *imperative* that we are to follow. What words/phrases did you find?

- How, then, is the fruit of the Spirit produced in the life of the believer?

Often, we read a passage like Galatians 5 as a list of commands for us to follow; behaviors that are to be produced through our effort. However, Paul is clear that both what we *no longer* do and what we *now* do are produced by the Holy Spirit at work within us.

²⁹ Brian D. McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again*, (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 2008.), kindle location 1780.

Read John 16:7-15.

- What are the works that Jesus tells His disciples that the Holy Spirit will do in our lives?
- How does Jesus say that the Spirit will glorify Him?
- Now read Jeremiah 31:33. How does Jesus' promise in John 16 tie into this?

Finally, read 2 Corinthians 5:14-20.

- Who or what is in control of the follower of Jesus? (vs. 14)
- What is the result of being controlled by the love of Christ according to the rest of the passage?

Real change is not only possible, it's the right expectation of the apprentice of Jesus. It's not something that we can do on our own, but we absolutely must put forth effort—we have a role to play.

The final word comes from Dallas Willard:

The disciple or apprentice of Jesus, as recognized by the New Testament, is one who has firmly decided to learn from him how to lead his or her life, whatever that may be, as Jesus himself would do it. And, as best they know how, they are making plans—taking the necessary steps, progressively arranging and rearranging their affairs—to do this.³⁰

³⁰ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, (HarperCollins, San Francisco, CA, 1997.), pg. 291.

Via Transformatio

As you consider the concepts from this week's message, engage the following practices during the week:

Via Purgativa

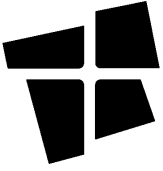
- **Fasting:** Inventory your daily behaviors and activities, from brushing your teeth in the morning to your bedtime routine. Consider which of those actively distract you from the presence of Jesus and remove those for the rest of the week. Some ideas: checking your phone before bed or first thing in the morning, turning on the TV at various times, social media, etc.
- **Meditative Prayer:** Each evening this week, before you go to sleep, pray through The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) slowly, meditating on each phrase. Talk to God about the ways that your heart is not engaged with His work in the world around you, and the ways that you have lived your life that day under your own control. Use this tool as a confessional time.

Via Illuminativa

- **Meditation:** Spend a few minutes each morning reading and re-reading Galatians 5:22-23. It may help you to write it on a notecard. Read it slowly, meditating on the words that Jesus is speaking. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak His truth to you as you meditate. Then, carry the card with you through the day, and read it as often as you're able through the day. It may help to set a reminder on your phone to engage this passage.

Via Unitiva

- **Sabbath:** If possible, designate a 24-hour period this week to spend with God and with friends and family. If 24 hours isn't possible, choose a significant period of time during the week (at least 3 or 4 hours) that you can clear your schedule and spend enjoying Jesus and His blessings. Avoid work, buying anything, and doing chores around the house during this time. Use this period to connect with family, friends, and most of all, to intentionally connect with Jesus.



Become Like Jesus

Luke 6:39-40, Galatians 5:16-25

Sermon Notes:

Questions for Application:

- Do you feel that becoming more like Jesus is possible in your life? Why or why not?
- What are some of the best ways for you to receive good teaching on the Word?
- Are there specific practices/disciplines of Jesus that are a regular part of your life currently? Think through your life—what other practices/disciplines (that *aren't* necessarily practices of Jesus!) do you engage regularly?
- Do you tend to avoid suffering? Can you think of something in the past that was very difficult at the time, but now you can see the benefit that you gained from it? How does remembering that help you with difficulties now?
- What's an area in your life where you might be trying to do the work of the Holy Spirit? What's an area in your life where you're waiting for the Holy Spirit to work, but it may be something in which you need to put forth some effort?

Week Four: Do What Jesus Did

John 14:12-17

The startling declaration of Jesus to His disciples is that they/we would do *even greater* things than He did. The death of Jesus is a sacrifice for our sin and a gateway to the Father; the life of Jesus is a model for what it means to live as One led and controlled by the power of the Holy Spirit. When we recognize the power for Jesus' life, we also recognize an invitation into the same kind of life.

The Stuff Jesus Did

John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard Movement, once talked about his desire as a young Christian to be “doing the stuff”³¹ that Jesus did. He explained that when he read the New Testament, he got really excited about the things that Jesus did. He loved the idea of multiplying the bread and fish, or healing sick people, or proclaiming the Kingdom to the most broken of society. He went to church for the first time expecting to hear about the plan to go do the stuff that Jesus did, and was surprised when that didn’t happen. He recounts asking someone about when they get to do the stuff that Jesus did, and he got this reply: “Oh, you don’t have to do it. You just have to believe it was done once.” Wimber’s response: “Now that’s pathetic!” He said that he found out over time that “in church they cried about it, sang about it, preached about it, prayed over it, and gave to it, but never did it”—they never got to go do the things that Jesus did.

I wonder how many of us have had a similar experience. Or else we’ve grown up in church and gotten used to the fact that the stuff of Jesus doesn’t often make appearances in the life of the church. But should we be used to that?

Read Matthew 4:18-22.

- What did Jesus call Peter, Andrew, James, and John to do?

- How did they respond?

Read Matthew 9:9-10.

- What did Jesus call Matthew to do?

- Once he responded in the affirmative, what did they do?

³¹ There is an excellent short clip of Wimber talking about this on YouTube. You can find it by searching “John Wimber Doing the Stuff” or you can type this very confusing address into your web browser: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U7wLM77curg>

Read Matthew 9:12-34.

- Write a brief outline of what Jesus did with the disciples in this passage.

Read Matthew 10:1-15.

- Once Jesus specifically calls the 12 disciples, what does He ask them to do?

Read Matthew 14:13-21.

- Who did Jesus expect to feed the crowd?

Read Matthew 17:14-21.

- Why does Jesus heal the boy?

Now read Matthew 28:19-20.

- What is the final command that Jesus leaves with His disciples?

These passages form a simplistic illustration of what is a tried and true method of apprenticeship to a master. Notice the process:

1. They are invited to become apprentices.
2. Master does, apprentices watch
3. Master explains/casts a vision for doing
4. Master does, apprentices help
5. Apprentices do, master helps
6. Apprentices do, master watches

Therefore, if I'm an apprentice of Jesus, it should be my goal to "do the stuff"—to do what Jesus did! Read these passages to see what "the stuff" is:

- Mark 1:15 Activity: _____
- Mark 1:34 Activity: _____
- Mark 1:35 Activity: _____
- Mark 2:15-16 Activity: _____
- Mark 11:15-17 Activity: _____
- John 8:1-11 Activity: _____
- Matthew 23:2-15 Activity: _____
- Matthew 23:37-39 Activity: _____

You may have used a variety of different words, but you should have read about Jesus doing some of the things that were most regularly part of His life: proclaiming the Kingdom and the Gospel, healing the sick, praying, eating and drinking with people who are far from God, doing justice, peacemaking, standing up against religious and political corruption, and prophesying. This is the "stuff" that we should have the goal of doing in the world around us!

The immediate pushback is: "But I'm not God, and Jesus was!"

Read John 14:12-17.

- What does Jesus say that we will do as His disciples?

- What power does He tell us will do these things through us?

Read Philippians 2:6-7.

- What might Jesus have set aside when He "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped?"

- Reword vs. 7 based on your understanding of what Paul is saying.

Theologians debate the specific implications of this great passage, but they are mostly united on the fact that when Jesus took on flesh, He set aside the active usage of His divine power. The vast majority of scholarship agrees that Jesus did *all that He did* empowered by the Holy Spirit, not by accessing His divine nature.

Of course, “doing what Jesus did” isn’t something that we step into immediately upon our conversion. On the contrary—we must continue to grow in faith and likeness to Jesus as His apprentice, similar to the progression listed above in the Master-Apprentice relationship.

Read Hebrews 5:8.

- How does the writer explain that Jesus gained obedience?

It seems that, in some mysterious way, the eternal God lowered Himself to the same process that you and I engage as we grow in our faith. “Obedience, even for [Jesus], was something to be *learned*. Certainly we cannot reasonably hope to do his deeds without adopting his form of life.”³²

This points to the need to recognize the stage of the journey toward Christlikeness we are in, and to engage our apprenticeship accordingly. Willard explains it this way, highlighting a popular way of approaching doing what Jesus did:

Asking ourselves “What Would Jesus Do?” when suddenly in the face of an important situation is not an adequate discipline or preparation to enable one to live as he lived. It no doubt will do some good and is certainly better than nothing at all, but that act alone is not sufficient to see us boldly and confidently through a crisis, and we could easily find ourselves driven to despair over the powerless tension it will put us through. The secret of the easy yoke, then, is to learn from Christ how to live our total lives, how to invest

³² Dallas Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, (Harper & Row, San Francisco, CA, 1988.), pgs. 29.

all our time and our energies of mind and body as he did. We must learn to follow his preparations, the disciplines for life in God's rule that enabled him to receive his Father's constant and effective support while doing his will. We have to discover how to enter into his disciplines from where we stand today.³³

Living the life of Jesus requires that we learn to live the *lifestyle* of Jesus. And even as we progress into the lifestyle of Jesus, we recognize that we are following a first century Jewish carpenter turned itinerant rabbi! The better question, rather than "What Would Jesus Do?," is "What Would Jesus Do If He Were Me?"

As we grow, we need to start with the basics. Look at the list of Jesus activities that you made earlier. List a few that don't seem too "daunting" to you:

For most of us, we don't start with healing and prophecy, but things like eating and drinking with people who are far from God. Praying. Recognizing that when Jesus said "Love your neighbor" it wasn't a metaphor for some grand activity—He's calling us to simply love the people near us.

That's what it really means for us to be "doing the stuff."

³³ Ibid. pg. 9.

Via Transformatio

As you consider the concepts from this week's message, engage the following practices during the week:

Via Purgativa

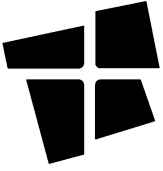
- **Meditative Prayer:** Each evening this week, before you go to sleep, pray through The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) slowly, meditating on each phrase. Ask God to show you where you aren't loving others or seeing the world the way that He does. Use this as a confessional exercise.

Via Illuminativa

- **Silence and Solitude:** Each day this week, set your alarm 20 minutes earlier than normal (more if you're prone to hit snooze!). When you get up, grab your coffee if needed, and spend 10-15 minutes in complete silence. Don't read during this time, but just seek to focus on Jesus. You might find that focusing on a short word that describes the character of God (like *love, grace, power, glory*) will help you stay focused, and you can come back to softly speaking that word if your mind is wandering.
- **Meditation:** Following your time in silence and solitude, spend a few minutes reading and re-reading John 14:12-17. It may help you to write it on a notecard. Read it slowly, meditating on the words that Jesus is speaking. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak His truth to you as you meditate.

Via Unitiva

- **Sacred Meal:** Invite some friends over for a dinner in your home. Throughout the preparation, the meal itself, and the clean-up, seek to keep Jesus in the forefront of your mind. If your guests are believers, talk about the ways that Jesus is stretching you as you seek to be with Him. If they are unbelievers, look for opportunities to express the heart of Jesus toward them, and the specific ways that Jesus has been working in your life.



Do What Jesus Did

John 14:12-17

Sermon Notes:

Questions for Application:

- As you think about the progression of walking with Jesus that the disciples experienced in the sections from Matthew we looked at, can you put a finger on where you are in your journey with Him?
- How do you feel about Jesus' declaration that you and I would do even greater things than He did?
- What are some of the activities of Jesus that excite you? Are there any that make you nervous? Why do you think that is?
- What's *one change* that you could make to your life that would put you in a greater position to engage the lifestyle of Jesus?

Week Five: Intentionality and Repentance

Mark 1:15, Matthew 7:24-27

We need to engage spiritual formation with intentionality because we are being formed unintentionally whether we have chosen to be or not. Choosing intentional spiritual formation is at the heart of the call to repentance—it's not a one-time event, but an ongoing ethic.

The Need for Repentance

What's the first image or idea that comes to mind when you hear the word "repent" or "repentance?" For most of us, we see a screaming man on a busy street corner holding a sign and yelling at passersby, or maybe a well-polished pastor talking about why we shouldn't be playing cards and watching rated "R" movies. For most of us, the idea of "repentance" doesn't strike very close to our real lives.

However, at least since Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of Wittenberg Chapel 500 years ago (thus beginning the Protestant Reformation), repentance *should* be understood as being much closer to home. The very first thesis states: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said 'Repent,' he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance."

1500 years earlier, Jesus Himself made a similar declaration. In his gospel, Mark is very intentional about the first words that are recorded as coming out of Jesus' mouth.

Read Mark 1:1-20.

- There are only two sentences that Jesus speaks in this passage. What are they?

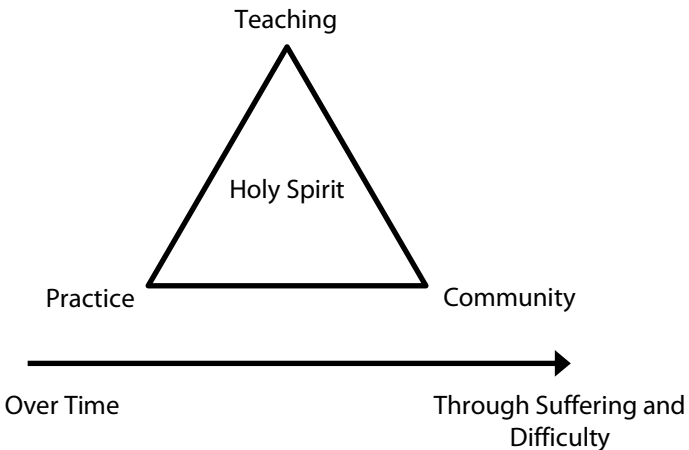
- Why might Mark have chosen vs. 15 as Jesus' first words?

When Jesus first speaks in vs. 15, He uses a significant word that is lost within our English translations. "When Jesus announces that the 'time' has come, Mark uses the Greek word *kairos*, which refers to the supreme moment, as opposed to *chronos*, or sequential time."³⁴

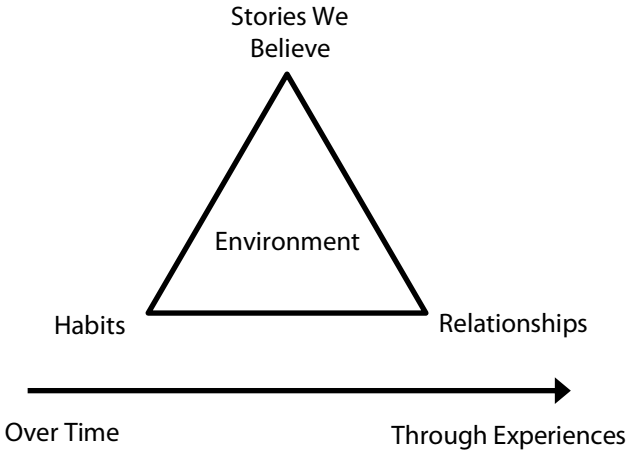
³⁴ Michael Card, *Mark: The Gospel of Passion* (IVP, Downer's Grove, 2012.), pg. 35.

- What is Mark trying to communicate by his use of *kairos*?
- Do you see a tie between Jesus' first recorded sentence (vs. 15) and His second (vs. 17)?
- With that in mind, how is His call in vs. 17 an extension of vs. 15?
- What word does Mark use to describe the way that both Simon (Peter) and Andrew (vs. 18) and James and John (vs. 20) follow Him?

A few studies ago, we looked at a model of spiritual formation (below). This could be labeled "Intentional Spiritual Formation."



However, “Intentional Spiritual Formation” isn’t the only choice available to us. The following model might be termed “Unintentional Spiritual Formation:”³⁵



This kind of formation, of the unintentional variety, is happening to us all the time, whether we want it to be or not. “We [often] fail to realize that the process of spiritual shaping is a primal reality of human existence. *Everyone* is in the process of spiritual formation!”³⁶ Consider:

- We are impacted by our environment. A kid growing up in urban Manhattan is different than one growing up in Kansas, and that’s not even stretching as far as the streets of Calcutta or the jungle in Central Africa.
- The stories we believe affect us. Whether we grow up rich or poor, we tend to believe that “money equals happiness,” even though we know it isn’t true. For those of us in church culture, we’ve believed that “good church folk” are safe and... well, good... regardless of what many news stories have shown us over the years.
- Our habits impact our lives, from our morning/evening routines to our thought patterns and way of doing things.
- Finally, the relationships we have profoundly impact us: family, friends, co-workers, whether the people around us look like us (or not), think like us (or not), etc.

³⁵ Thanks to www.practicingtheway.org for these models and concepts.

³⁶ M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Invitation to a Journey*, (IVP, Downer’s Grove, IL, 1993), Kindle location 128.

So why was the “immediate” response of Peter, Andrew, James, and John such a big deal? Because spiritual formation is constantly happening in one way or another. C.S. Lewis says it in his usual and profound way:

[E]very time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow-creatures, and with itself. To be the one kind of creature is heaven: that is, it is joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state or the other.³⁷

It’s this reality that leads us to repentance. When we understand the inevitability and ongoing nature of spiritual formation, we recognize that significant effort is needed to combat the forces that are already at work around us, and that we have fallen short.

Take a few minutes and review the “Unintentional” model. What are some of the aspects of your life that have formed you, either knowingly or unknowingly?

- Environmental Factors

- Stories I’ve Believed

- Habits

- Relationships

³⁷ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (MacMillan, 1943), pg. 72.

Repentance, then, stems from a right understanding of how we've been shaped by the world around us. It also comes from a right understanding of who we are.

Read Proverbs 4:23.

- Why is the heart emphasized so greatly?

- Now read vs. 24-27. How might each of those activities flow out of the heart?

Read Matthew 12:33-37.

- What is Jesus saying in his paraphrase of Proverbs 4:23?

We can often give ourselves more grace than we ought. We tend to see sin as “making a mistake” and bad behavior as an anomaly, but not an indicator of our character. However, Jesus says otherwise—our action displays what's in our heart.

We must clearly understand that there is a rigorous consistency in the human self and its actions. This is one of the things we are most likely to deceive ourselves about. If I do evil, I am the kind of person who does evil; if I do good, I am the kind of person who does good. Actions are not impositions on who we are but are expressions of who we are. They come out of our heart and the inner realities it supervises and interacts with.³⁸

When we lie, it's easy to think that we're a generally honest person who happened to tell a lie. Jesus' words unmask us and call us a liar. Our actions flow out of our hearts. (With this in mind, read 1 John 1:5 – 2:6)

Willard, again, with the last word:

Projects of personal transformation rarely if ever succeed by accident, drift, or imposition. Indeed, where accident, drift, and imposition dominate—as they usually do, quite frankly, in the lives of professing Christians—very little of any human value transpires.³⁹

³⁸ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, (Navpress, Colorado Springs, CO, 2002), pg. 39.

³⁹ *Ibid*, pg. 83.

Via Transformatio

As you consider the concepts from this week's message, engage the following practices during the week:

Via Purgativa

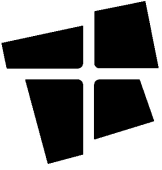
- **Fasting:** Choose either a full day or 24-hour period this week to fast from everything except clear liquids. Use this time to focus your heart on the ways in which you have been shaped by the unholy forces around you, as well as the darkness and evil of your own heart. Keep a journal of your thoughts during this time, and before you break your fast, write an honest confessional prayer. Then, after you have written your prayer, read 1 John 1:9 very slowly 10 times... and enjoy some food.
- **Meditative Prayer:** Each evening this week, before you go to sleep, pray through The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) slowly, meditating on each phrase. Ask God to show you where you aren't loving others or seeing the world the way that He does. Use this as a confessional exercise.

Via Illuminativa

- **Silence and Solitude:** Each day this week, set your alarm 20 minutes earlier than normal (more if you're prone to hit snooze!). When you get up, grab your coffee if needed, and spend 10-15 minutes in complete silence. Don't read during this time, but just seek to focus on Jesus. You might find that focusing on a short word that describes the character of God (like *love, grace, power, glory*) will help you stay focused, and you can come back to softly speaking that word if your mind is wandering.

Via Unitiva

- **Sabbath:** If possible, designate a 24-hour period this week to spend with God and with friends and family. If 24 hours isn't possible, choose a significant period of time during the week (at least 3 or 4 hours) that you can clear your schedule and spend enjoying Jesus and His blessings. Avoid work, buying anything, and doing chores around the house during this time. Use this period to connect with family, friends, and most of all, to intentionally connect with Jesus.



Intentionality and Repentance

Mark 1:15, Matthew 7:24-27

Sermon Notes:

Questions for Application:

- What gets in the way of “immediately” following Jesus?

As you think about that question, consider this from Ruth Haley Barton:

One of the great temptations of the spiritual life is to believe that if I were in another season of life, I could be more spiritual. The truth is that spiritual transformation takes place as we embrace the challenges and opportunities associated with each season of our life.⁴⁰

- What are some of the factors that have been (or continue to be) forming you in ways in which you’ve not been consciously aware?
- Is there an area that you tend to believe that you “sometimes sin” but aren’t really the kind of person who is a sinner?
- What’s something that you can do to be more intentional about your spiritual formation in the next few weeks?

⁴⁰ Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*, (IVP, Downer’s Grove, IL, 2006.), pg. 149.

Week Six: The Word

2 Timothy 3:14 – 4:4

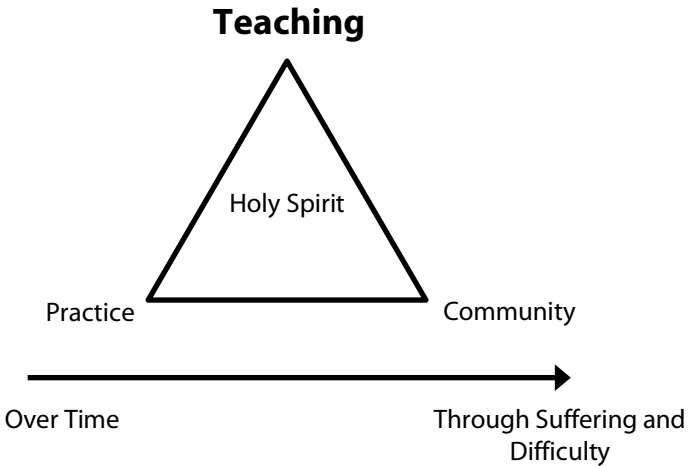
The Word is the only real foundation for our spiritual formation—through the reading and teaching of the Word, we encounter Jesus, the glorious image of the Father, and have the opportunity to be transformed into His image.

Value of the Word and Teaching

Decades ago, A.W. Tozer penned the following statement: “What comes to our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”⁴¹

Without continuing with an extended quote, Tozer’s point is that our worship is as pure as our thoughts of God are, and that the church and religion itself will never rise above our mental image of God. Knowing *about* God is a vitally important undertaking.

Over the next several studies, we will be looking at the individual parts of the “Intentional Spiritual Formation” model. On the top of the triangle rests “Teaching.”



We begin study there because *teaching* is the raw material for spiritual formation. However, for much of the 21st Century church, it’s also been the *extent* of our spiritual formation. More knowledge about God will not, in itself, transform us. However, knowledge about God is vital to our transformation.

It’s important to recognize that our thinking about God has gotten shallow over the past several generations. Our ancestors memorized catechisms as children and read and listened to theology as adults. Five to ten minutes of a great sermon from the late 1800’s would put a modern person to sleep (not that our more shallow and entertaining sermons of today don’t!) and reading some of the great Christian literature from the past is nearly beyond the ability of most of us today.

⁴¹ A.W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, (Christian Publications, Harrisburg, PA, 1961), pg. 1.

Try to read the following passage from Adam Clarke, a British theologian from the early 1800's:

The eternal, independent, and self-existent Being; the Being whose purposes and actions spring from himself, without foreign motive or influence; he who is absolute in dominion; the most pure, the most simple, the most spiritual of all essences; infinitely perfect; and eternally self-sufficient, needing nothing that he has made; illimitable in his immensity, inconceivable in his mode of existence, and indescribable in his essence; known fully only by himself, because an infinite mind can only be fully comprehended by itself. In a word, a Being who, from his infinite wisdom, cannot err or be deceived, and from his infinite goodness, can do nothing but what is eternally just, and right, and kind.⁴²

Try to summarize that paragraph in a few sentences:

If you're like most of us, you struggled to read and understand that passage. It's not that you didn't understand the individual words, but that our minds don't *think* like that anymore! And as you can likely see from your attempt at summary, much is lost in the simplification process.

The question is, where might we turn in order to understand more about the nature and character of God?

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

- What are the six things that Paul tells Timothy the Word of God is profitable for?

⁴² Adam Clarke, taken from *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, Vol. 3, quoted in Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, (HarperCollins, San Francisco, CA, 1997.), pg. 65-66.

In your own words, write a brief definition of each of those terms:

- Teaching
- Reproof
- Correction
- Training in Righteousness
- Made Complete
- Equipped for Every Good Work

Read John 1:1-18

- How does John's account of the Word *fee*/different than Paul's instruction to Timothy?
- As you read John 1, how do you sense you should be engaging the Word?
- Read Colossians 1:15, but substitute "The Word" for the pronoun "He," using John's permission to do so from John 1. What do you find out about the Word?

- Now read the rest of Colossians 1:15-20. Can you fathom that all of those things are present in the Word? Why or why not?
- Read Hebrews 4:12. What do you think it means when the writer says that the word of God is living and active?

The utilitarian and pragmatic nature of the Word (teaching, rebuking, training, equipping, etc.) must be balanced with the deep, life-giving nature of the Word. Ruth Haley Barton, discussing the way that she has engaged the Word over time, confesses: "I had fallen into a pattern of using the Scriptures as a tool to accomplish utilitarian purposes rather than experience them primarily as a place of intimacy with God for my own soul's sake."⁴³ How many of us might confess the same thing?

Read David's very different confession in Psalm 119:103.

- To what does David compare the Word of God?
- How does that compare with Jesus' words in Matthew 4:4?

In some mysterious sense, we are to be nourished and strengthened by the Word of God, as well as being taught and trained.

All of this requires multiple ways of reading the Scriptures. We'll practice four of them: Reading for study, reading for context, imaginative reading and *Lectio Divina*. Obviously, the following is a greatly simplified explanation of each of these kinds of reading. We will use Luke 18:35-43 as the example.

⁴³ Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*, (IVP, Downer's Grove, IL, 2006.), pg. 47.

Reading for Study

Read the passage in 2-3 different translations, noting any differences in meaning. Summarize the following:

- (1) What happens in the passage? Is there anything that surprises you?
- (2) What was the original meaning of the passage? Why did Luke record it?
- (3) How does this passage apply to me today?

Reading for Context

Read the passage again. Now, go back and read through Luke 15-18.

- (1) Think about the major themes of each individual paragraph or story.
- (2) Why might Luke be telling these stories in the order that he is?
- (3) How does one story help interpret the other?

Imaginative

Look back at pgs. 22-23 in this study guide. This is a very brief example of imaginative reading. Re-read the passage, trying to place yourself in the scene.

- (1) What does it look like? Smell like? Feel like?
- (2) What do you notice about Jesus? About the blind man? About the crowd?
- (3) Where are you in the scene? Does Jesus speak to you? How do you respond?

Lectio Divina

This is an ancient practice of experiencing the Scripture in six stages:

- (1) Preparation/Silencio: Relax your body, clear your mind, breathe deeply, and invite Jesus to speak to you through His Word.
- (2) Read/Lectio: Read the passage slowly, out loud, pausing between sentences. Listen for a word or phrase that catches your attention. Repeat that word or phrase a few times silently.
- (3) Reflect/Meditatio: Thinking about your word, read the passage again. Ask God how this passage, and specifically this word, connects with your life.
- (4) Respond/Oratio: Talk with God about your personal response to this word and this passage, listening if He is calling you to act in some way.
- (5) Rest/Contemplatio: Read the passage one more time, returning to a full posture of rest in God.
- (6) Resolve/Incarnatio: As you leave this encounter, resolve any specific actions that need to be carried out of this passage in daily life.

Via Transformatio

As you consider the concepts from this week's message, engage the following practices during the week:

Via Purgativa

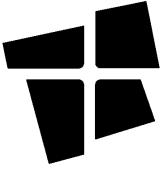
- Meditative Prayer: Each morning, at noon each day, and each evening this week, read one stanza of Psalm 119 very slowly. Use it as a confessional prayer prompt for you to bring your heart before God in regard to His Word. It will likely help for you to journal your prayers, and possibly to write down the stanza that you are meditating on as well.

Via Illuminativa

- Silence and Solitude: Each day this week, set your alarm 20 minutes earlier than normal (more if you're prone to hit snooze!). When you get up, grab your coffee if needed, and spend 10-15 minutes in complete silence. Don't read during this time, but just seek to focus on Jesus. You might find that focusing on a short word that describes the character of God (like *love, grace, power, glory*) will help you stay focused, and you can come back to softly speaking that word if your mind is wandering.
- Meditation: Following your time in silence and solitude, spend a few minutes reading and re-reading 2 Timothy 3:16-17. It may help you to write it on a notecard. Read it slowly, meditating on the words that Jesus is speaking. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak His truth to you as you meditate. At night, following your Psalm 119 prayer, spend a few minutes meditating on both John 1:1-4 and 14-18.

Via Unitiva

- Sacred Meal: Invite some friends over for a dinner in your home. Throughout the preparation, the meal itself, and the clean-up, seek to keep Jesus in the forefront of your mind. If your guests are believers, talk about the ways that Jesus is stretching you as you seek to be with Him. If they are unbelievers, look for opportunities to express the heart of Jesus toward them, and the specific ways that Jesus has been working in your life.



The Word

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Sermon Notes:

Questions for Application:

- What comes to your mind when you first think about God? Does that fall in line with how the Scripture reveals Him?
- What are some of the ways that you best receive teaching from the Word? (Bible reading, sermons, podcasts, books, blogs, etc.) Do you utilize those methods regularly? Why or why not?
- When you read the Scripture, are you able to “have a place of intimacy with God for [your] own soul’s sake”? Why or why not?
- Of the four methods of Bible reading, which one resonates the most with you? Why? Which one is the hardest for you? Why?
- Be very practical. For most of us, we know that we *should* read the Bible, but we fail to actually do it. We don’t need to be convinced. Instead, we need to make a *decision* and then make *provision*. Answer the following two questions, and then *follow through*:
 - **When?** Choose a time (morning, evening, during lunch break, etc.) that you can consistently use to spend time in the Word.
 - **How?** Which of the four reading methods are you going to use? Are you going to change each day? What portion of Scripture will you read?⁴⁴ Will others be reading with you and/or holding you accountable?

⁴⁴ There are hundreds of great Bible reading plans. The ESV phone/tablet app has many of them, as does the very popular YouVersion app. You can also Google “Bible Reading Plan” or you can do it the old-fashioned way and just start in a book and work your way through it! The point isn’t the specific plan as much as it’s actually getting into the Word.

Week Seven: Practices

1 Corinthians 9:24-27, 2 Timothy 2:1-7

Too often our spiritual lives are marked by the starts and stops of trying hard, intermittently succeeding and failing, and then giving up until we are convicted, and the process starts again. However, there's a better way. The practices of Jesus are designed to develop our spiritual muscle so that we can do what Jesus did.

However, engaging the practices requires effort and intentionality.

Training vs. Trying

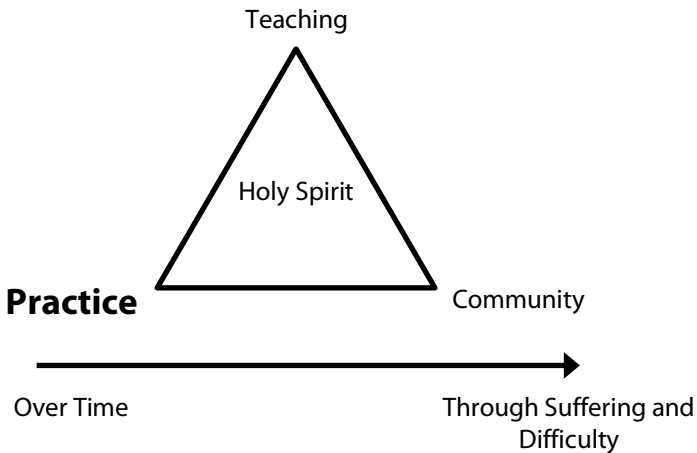
Listen.

If you're not in a quiet place, maybe move to a quiet place. And then, in the silence, listen. Listen hard.

Right now, at this very moment, there are dozens and even hundreds of AM and FM radio signals passing through the air around you, and even through your body. Can you hear them? Of course you can't—but that doesn't mean that they aren't there! No matter how hard you listen, you can't "tune your ears" to radio waves. However, with a radio tuned to the right frequency, you can pull the sound out of those radio waves, and suddenly, you can hear them.

That's a great illustration of the fact that God is speaking right now. However, our lives, for the most part, aren't tuned to hear Him. How do we get tuned?

Last week we started to look at the individual parts of the "Intentional Spiritual Formation" model by engaging teaching. This week we'll look at "Practice."



As much as teaching is a generally understood part of spiritual formation in the 21st century church in the West, practice is equally under emphasized. We've loved the Lord with our *minds* (or at least we've understood that we're supposed to), but we've failed to engage our hearts, our souls, or our bodies.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

- What metaphor is Paul using for the process of spiritual formation?

- What does he do to his *body* in order to keep it under control?

The Greek word translated *discipline* in the ESV is *hypopiazō*. It's a compound word combining "hit" and "eye" with the idea of subduing. It's not a bad translation to say "I punch myself in the eye in order to subdue my body." Paul seems to be pretty serious about this!

Look up the following Scriptures:

- Acts 20:24
- Galatians 5:7
- 1 Timothy 6:12
- 2 Timothy 4:7-8

What imagery does Paul consistently use for spiritual formation throughout life?

Paul seems to be fascinated with athletic imagery, likely in no small part because of the discipline that athletics require.

Dallas Willard, one of the leading writers on the role that practice plays in the life of an apprentice of Jesus, says this:

If we are to be transformed, the body must be transformed, and that is not accomplished by talking at it. The training that leads to *doing* what we hear from Jesus must therefore involve, first, the purposeful disruption of our "automatic" thoughts, feelings, and actions by doing different things with our body. And then, through various intentional practices, we place the body before God in such a way that our whole self is retrained away from the old kingdoms around us and within us and into "the kingdom of the Son of His love." (Colossians 1:13)⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, (HarperCollins, San Francisco, CA, 1997.), pg. 322.

How do these intentional practices work? There are many definitions out there for these practices, or spiritual disciplines (you can look at page 6 for one of Willard's definitions). I would define them this way:

Any practice of our mind and/or body, taken from the life of Jesus, that is within our power to do that which seeks to bring our heart, soul, mind, and strength in line with God's created design for the world.

These practices are like training for a marathon. Most of us can't simply walk out the front door and run 26.2 miles. However, the vast majority of us, given proper training, sufficient time, and oversight are *capable* of running a marathon. The gap between our present reality and our future capability is bridged by training.

Read 2 Timothy 2:1-7.

- What does Paul say is the source of the strengthening that Timothy should be seeking?
- What are the three metaphors that Paul uses to communicate to Timothy?
- What are the commonalities between each of these three kinds of people?
- How does Paul describe the way a soldier stays away from areas of distraction in the world around them? Read Hebrews 12:1-3. What is the parallel between these two?

- What does Paul have to say about the way that athletes compete?
- How does this speak to shortcuts to faster spiritual growth?
- In what way is a farmer different from a soldier or an athlete?
- How does this speak to the mystery of spiritual transformation?

Willard captures well the mystery of our effort (the hard-working farmer) mixed with God’s work (the One who makes the seeds grow): “The training required to transform our most basic habits of thought, feeling, and action will not be done for us. And yet it is something we cannot do by ourselves.”⁴⁶

What are these spiritual disciplines (or intentional practices, or “habits of grace,” as one writer called them⁴⁷)? There isn’t one comprehensive list. However, here is a sampling of some of the classic spiritual disciplines:

- Silence and Solitude
- Anything having to do with reading/studying the Bible: Bible reading, meditation, memorization, etc.
- Prayer
- Intentional Community

⁴⁶ Ibid. pg 345-346.

⁴⁷ David Mathis, *Habits of Grace*, (Crossway, Wheaton, IL., 2016)

- Keeping the Sabbath
- Celebration
- Grieving
- Fasting
- Sacred Meal
- Weekly worship gathering
- Simplicity
- Service
- Confession
- Secrecy
- Gratitude

Each of these disciplines, along with dozens more which could be pulled from the life of Jesus, are designed to reprogram our “heart, soul, mind, and strength” to come more fully in line with Jesus’ way of life.

The ultimate goal of the practices is never the practice itself; it’s likeness to Jesus, or spiritual transformation. Our behavior is often driven by habit and the deep motivations of our hearts, some of which we aren’t even consciously aware. The practices of Jesus help us to rewire those habits and motivations according to His lifestyle and values.

The final word comes, of course, from Willard:

Habitual following of a desire leads to strengthening the power of that desire over us. In the realm of the will there is something like the power of inertia in the physical realm. It is easier to do what you have done than what you have not, and especially when that goes *contrary* to what you have done. That is *spiritual inertia*. Truly becoming one who will above all to act with the kingdom of God and to have his kind of goodness will not happen overnight. But upon a path of clear intention and decision, with appropriate spiritual disciplines and accompanying grace, it is not as far away as many would suppose.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, (Navpress, Colorado Springs, CO, 2002), pg. 154, 156.

Via Transformatio

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Via Purgativa

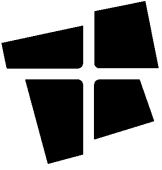
- **Fasting:** Choose either a full day or 24-hour period this week to fast from everything except clear liquids. Use this time to focus your heart on the ways in which you have mindlessly engaged habits that have separated you from God or failed to engage habits that would draw you near to Him. Keep a journal of your thoughts during this time, and before you break your fast, write down *one* discipline that you are going to start to engage over the next few weeks, and make a plan for how you will do it... and enjoy some food.
- **Meditative Prayer:** Each evening this week, before you go to sleep, pray through The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) slowly, meditating on each phrase. Ask God to show you where you aren't loving others or seeing the world the way that He does. Use this as a confessional exercise.

Via Illuminativa

- **Silence and Solitude:** Each day this week, set your alarm 20 minutes earlier than normal (more if you're prone to hit snooze!). When you get up, grab your coffee if needed, and spend 10-15 minutes in complete silence. Don't read during this time, but just seek to focus on Jesus. You might find that focusing on a short word that describes the character of God (like *love, grace, power, glory*) will help you stay focused, and you can come back to softly speaking that word if your mind is wandering.

Via Unitiva

- **Sabbath:** If possible, designate a 24-hour period this week to spend with God and with friends and family. If 24 hours isn't possible, choose a significant period of time during the week (at least 3 or 4 hours) that you can clear your schedule and spend enjoying Jesus and His blessings. Avoid work, buying anything, and doing chores around the house during this time. Use this period to connect with family, friends, and most of all, to intentionally connect with Jesus.



Practices

1 Corinthians 9:24-27, 2 Timothy 2:1-7

Sermon Notes:

Questions for Application:

- What are some of the practices (spiritual or otherwise) that you engage in regularly? Think through the routines of your day and your week—you'll likely be surprised at how many habits you come up with!
- Are there some areas of your life where you know that you need to “discipline your body” in order to keep it under control? What are they, and how might you do that?
- What are some distractions/entanglements of which you need to be aware on your journey?
- Are you prone to shortcuts in the spiritual journey? In what ways?
- How do you balance your effort with God's work in your life? Do you tend toward legalism and seeking to earn salvation, or spiritual laziness?
- What is in area of your life where you have *negative* spiritual inertia? What is an area in which you have *positive* spiritual inertia?

Week Eight: Gospel Community

Genesis 1:26, 2:8, Romans 12:9-18

Community is a vital aspect of our spiritual growth. We need to learn to celebrate one another, care for one another, and even challenge one another in healthy ways. While structures and programming can create a venue for gospel community, authentic community must be pursued and developed with intentionality.

Being Real with One Another

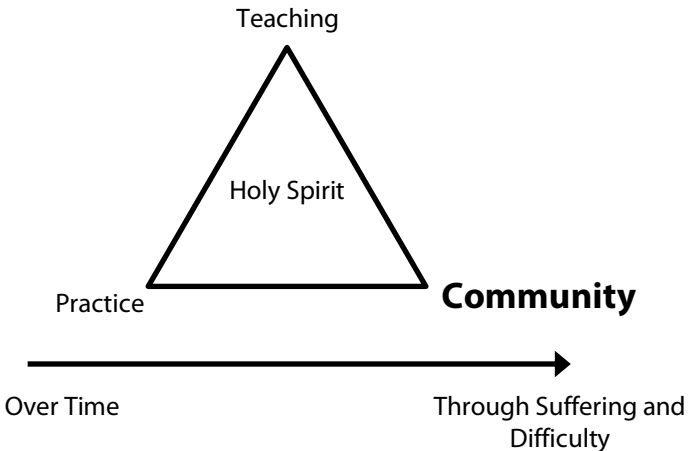
Several years ago, we were visiting family in West Virginia and took a side trip to a place called Prickett's Fort. I don't remember a ton about it, likely because I was trying to stop one wild young boy or another from destroying several centuries of colonial history, but I do remember the blacksmith. The area was set up to replicate the activity in and around the fort in the late 1700's and early 1800's, which included lots of colonial era activity. The blacksmith shop was as you might imagine it: hot, dirty, and loud. In comparison to the other "nice" exhibits, it seemed raw and unruly. The iron was shoved into the coals, pulled out of the goals glowing orange, and then the iron hammer came down on the glowing hot metal, shaping it and sharpening it. It was fascinating... but not necessarily pleasant.

Read Proverbs 27:17.

- How does the writer describe the shaping that happens in community?

I guess it makes sense that community isn't always fun...

We come to the last of the three aspects of the triangle in the "Intentional Spiritual Formation" model: Community.



Engagement of the Word of God through reading and receiving teaching naturally leads into practice: we seek to *do* what we *learn*. The context for both the learning and the doing is community.

Paul's letter to the Romans has long been regarded as one of the greatest theological treatises in history. In this incredible book, Paul makes a statement in Romans 12:5 that is easy to miss but is one of the most profound realities in the entire book: *"So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."* (underline added) He literally tells the individual parts of the church that we *belong* to one another! The rest of the New Testament will then unpack the way that we are supposed to engage each other within the body. One way to look at those teachings in summary is to study the "one another" commands. Read through the following (partial) list slowly:

1. "Be at peace with each other." (Mark 9:50)
2. "Wash one another's feet." (John 13:14)
3. "Love one another..." (John 13:34, 35, 15:12, 17, Romans 13:8, I Thessalonians 4:9, 1 John 3:11, 23, 4:7, 11, 12, 2 John 5)
4. "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love..." (Romans 12:10)
5. "Honor one another above yourselves." (Romans 12:10)
6. "Live in harmony with one another..." (Romans 12:16)
7. "Stop passing judgment on one another." (Romans 14:13)
8. "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you..." (Romans 15:7)
9. "Instruct one another." (Romans 15:14)
10. "Greet one another with a holy kiss." (Romans 16:16, I Cor. 16:20, 2 Cor. 13:12, 1 Peter 5:14)
11. "When you come together to eat, wait for each other." (I Cor. 11:33)
12. "Have equal concern for each other." (I Corinthians 12:25)
13. "...Serve one another in love." (Galatians 5:13)
14. "If you keep on biting and devouring each other...you will be destroyed by each other." (Galatians 5:15)
15. "Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other." (Gal. 5:26)
16. "Carry each other's burdens..." (Galatians 6:2)
17. "Be patient, bearing with one another in love." (Ephesians 4:2)
18. "Be kind and compassionate to one another..." (Ephesians 4:32)
19. "Forgiv[e] each other..." (Ephesians 4:32)
20. "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." (Eph. 5:19)
21. "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Ephesians 5:21)
22. "In humility consider others better than yourselves." (Philippians 2:3)
23. "Do not lie to each other..." (Colossians 3:9)
24. "Bear with each other..." (Colossians 3:13)

25. "Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another." (Col. 3:13)
26. "Teach...[one another]" (Colossians 3:16)
27. "Admonish one another (Colossians 3:16)
28. "Make your love increase and overflow for each other." (I Thessalonians 3:12)
29. "Encourage each other..."(I Thessalonians 4:18, 5:11, Hebrews 3:13, 10:25)
30. "Build each other up..." (I Thessalonians 5:11)
31. "Spur one another on toward love and good deeds." (Hebrews 10:24)
32. "Do not slander one another." (James 4:11)
33. "Don't grumble against each other..." (James 5:9)
34. "Confess your sins to each other..." (James 5:16)
35. "Pray for each other." (James 5:16)
36. "Love one another deeply, from the heart." (I Peter 3:8, 4:8)
37. "Live in harmony with one another..." (I Peter 3:8)
38. "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." (I Peter 4:9)
39. "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others." (I Pet. 4:10)
40. "Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another..."(I Peter 5:5)

Now go back and read through that again since you almost certainly read 4 or 5 and them skimmed or skipped the rest!

- Are there some of these that you feel like you do pretty well? Star them. Are there some that you really struggle with? Circle them.
- As you read these, do you think first of how you should be living toward others, or how others should be living toward you? Why is that?

Living out these commands can be difficult for a variety of reasons, including our sinful hearts. However, one of the key barriers is a challenging one in our modern culture: proximity! Niequist says it this way: "It's challenging when you realize that almost none of the [one another] commands can be fully obeyed in the traditional church gathering."⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Aaron Niequist, *The Eternal Current*, (Waterbrook, New York, NY, 2018.), Kindle location 1420, pre-release electronic copy.

And it doesn't get any easier. Read Romans 12:9-18.

- Paraphrase this list of commands below.

For most of us, these are very difficult if not *impossible* for us to do given the way we typically engage in church! Willard offers a helpful reminder and critique:

We must recognize that this our world is not normal, but is only *usual* at present. We must try to see it for what it is and then begin to think of specific ways grace and truth can begin to change it. We who follow Jesus must understand that a couple of hours per week of carefully calibrated distance in a church setting will be of little help, and may only re-enforce the patterns of withdrawal that permeate our fallen world.⁵⁰

God's design is certainly for closer proximity and greater connection than we are used to having. Read the following:

- Galatians 6:1-3
- James 5:13-16
- Matthew 18:15-17

Each of these commands, along with the many we've already looked at, require significant proximity and connection. However, what *else* is required when you think about these three commands?

⁵⁰ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, (Navpress, Colorado Springs, CO, 2002), pg. 189.

You may not have come up with the same word, but you probably figured out the idea: gospel community requires *boldness*! Acknowledging that someone is in a situation or sinful pattern that's too much for them, or admitting that you are in such a situation, isn't easy. Confronting someone in the fellowship who has offended you or is caught in a pattern of sin is among the most lovingly difficult things that we are called to do. And yet, each of these are vital to our spiritual growth. Much like the noise and harsh friction of the blacksmith's shop, these are the things that truly shape us.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer lived among 25 other pastors prior to the start of World War II as he worked among the Christian resistance to Hitler. Out of that time he wrote a short book called *Life Together* which is still one of the best works available on gospel community. Bonhoeffer says this: "Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin."⁵¹

So how do we do it? How do we get connected enough, know one another well enough, and live *boldly* enough to have real gospel community? At York Alliance, we are seeking to use four venues for community. While everyone might not be involved in all four at any given time *within* the walls of York Alliance, we believe it's vital for *every believer* to have substantial connection with believers in Jesus within all four of these types of relationships:

- (1) Celebration Gatherings—*Public Relationships*. We should all be committed to the regular weekly gathering of believers for worship. Through Celebration Gatherings we identify with one another.
- (2) Open Houses—*Social Relationships*. Roughly monthly there are gatherings in people's homes around the county so that we can get to know one another better. Through Open Houses we connect with one another.
- (3) Community Group—*Personal Relationships*. Weekly gatherings of a smaller community who are committed to one another journeying together toward Jesus. Through Community Groups we grow with one another.
- (4) Discipleship Partners—*Intimate Relationships*. Same gender groups of two or three that connect regularly to discuss the Word, confess, and pray for one another. Through Discipleship Partners we support one another.

⁵¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, (Harper & Row, New York, NY, 1954), pg. 107.

Via Transformatio

As you consider the concepts from this week's message, engage the following practices during the week:

Via Purgativa

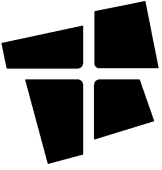
- **Fasting:** Choose either a full day or 24-hour period this week to fast from everything except clear liquids. Use this time to talk to God about your habits as it relates to community. Give special attention to ways that you do (or do not) practice the Romans 12 lifestyle among those with whom you are in close proximity. Keep a journal of your thoughts during this time. At the end of the fast, plan to eat with at least one other believer.
- **Meditative Prayer:** Each evening this week, before you go to sleep, pray through the "one another" list from pages 85-86. Pray saying "God, help me to..." slowly, meditating on each command. Ask God to show you where you aren't loving others as He desires. Use this as a confessional exercise.

Via Illuminativa

- **Meditation:** Each morning, spend a few minutes reading and re-reading Romans 12. Read it slowly, meditating on the words that Paul is writing. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak His truth to you as you meditate. As there are phrases or verses that stick out to you, write them on notecards and carry them with you throughout the day. As you have moments available, take them out and read through them, meditating on each one. Add to your notecards through the week.

Via Unitiva

- **Sacred Meal:** Invite some friends over for a dinner in your home. For this meal, intentionally invite some people with whom you are connected at church—possibly your Community Group or Discipleship Partner, someone you've recently met, or someone that you've known for years. Throughout the preparation, the meal itself, and the clean-up, seek to keep Jesus in the forefront of your mind. Talk over dinner about what it means to truly be community with one another and some of the barriers to community that you experience in your life.



Gospel Community

Genesis 1:26, 2:18, Romans 12:9-18

Sermon Notes:

Questions for Application:

- What are some of the most difficult “one another” commands for you? As you survey the most difficult ones, can you see any commonalities? Why do you think they’re hard for you?
- Make a list of those people with whom you are in close enough proximity to truly live out Romans 12:9-18. Are you doing it with those people? Why or why not? What could you do to expand that circle of people?
- Are you quicker to celebrate the victories of others, or to tell others about your victories?
- As you think about the “difficult” commands of Galatians 6, James 5, and Matthew 18, is there anything that the Holy Spirit is prompting you to do?
- What is one change that you could make to your life in order to live more fully in gospel community?

Week Nine: Holy Spirit

2 Corinthians 3:12-18

Teaching, practice, and community are vital to our spiritual formation. However, if all we do is engage those three things in our strength, we still wouldn't become like Jesus. The power of the Holy Spirit is the fuel for our transformation. He works in us both in crisis and progressive experiences, working in us individually and as a part of the body of Christ.

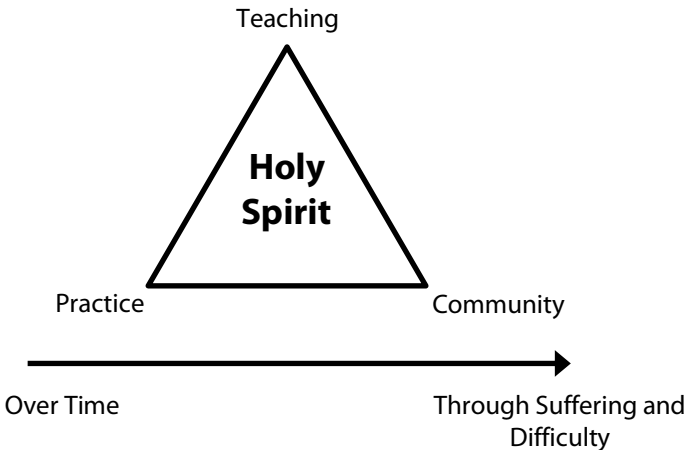
Transformed by Degrees

A few months ago, I decided to experiment with a new recipe. I love to cook on the grill, and I had heard of someone making a grilled version of a jalapeño popper. I figured if I was mixing jalapeños, cream cheese, and cheddar cheese, even if it wasn't right, it couldn't be *that* bad. So, I commenced with the experiment.

As I started the process, I heard the dreaded words: "Can I help?" Of course, "help" is a relative term in a house with kids, even among those who have culinary skills as strong as ours do. I relented. "We" cut, "we" de-seeded, "we" mixed in experimental ingredients, "we" put them on the grill, and in the end, "we" made some pretty good pepper poppers! And, of course, as the plate came in a few minutes before dinner and everyone tried them, there was one child full of pride at the food that "he had made." Did he make them? Well, he technically helped. However, if he hadn't, they would have been done more quickly and probably more effectively. But he was thrilled that he had "made" them, and I was thrilled because he was one more step down the path of being the kind of man that could cook for his own family someday.

And in the midst, though I'm not sure I realized it at the time, we had seen a perfect picture of the way the Holy Spirit works with us in our spiritual transformation.

The final aspect of the "Intentional Spiritual Formation" model is the center of the triangle and the most important aspect: the Holy Spirit.



As we've said all along, spiritual formation requires our effort. We need to actively engage in sitting under and seeking out good teaching, making spiritual practices a regular part of our lives, and stepping into community even when it's difficult. These are our roles, and we must do them. However, if the Holy Spirit doesn't show up, we still won't find ourselves being changed into the likeness of Jesus. We will be better educated, more disciplined, better connected, and just as much of a pagan as when we began. "Perhaps one of the most basic things we need to understand about spiritual transformation is that it is full of mystery. We can be open to it, but we can't accomplish it for ourselves."⁵²

Read 2 Corinthians 3:12-18.

The first thing you probably notice as you read Paul's words to the Corinthians is that he is referencing a somewhat obscure Old Testament story. In order to get a better picture of what he's saying, read Exodus 34:29-35.

- How many people had access to the Spirit of God at this point in history?

- How did the rest of the people respond to the sign of the Spirit?

Now read Numbers 11:16-17, 24-30.

- At this point how many people had access to the Spirit of God?

- What did Moses long to see happen?

⁵² Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*, (IVP, Downer's Grove, IL, 2006.), pg. 11.

Read Joel 2:28-29.

- What did God promise through the prophet Joel about those who would have access to the Spirit of God?

Which brings us back to 2 Corinthians 3:12-18. (It might help to re-read it now.)

- How does Paul say that the “lifting of the veil” has come?

- What is the immediate result of the presence of the Spirit in the life of a believer?

- What happens as we “behold the glory of the Lord?”

- Based on the tense of the verb (“are being”) and the direct statement of causality (vs. 18b), who is responsible for this work?

This is an incredible picture of the process of spiritual formation! Paul, of course, doesn’t mention the need to sit under teaching, engage practices, or live in community—simply the work of the Spirit! Is that all there is to it?

Read Philippians 2:12-13.

- According to Paul, does the work of transformation belong to us or to the Holy Spirit?

The answer, of course, is “yes.” How do we hold together the tension that we are called to “work out our salvation” and yet “it is God who works” in us?

Listen first to C.S. Lewis:

[We are not] saying that Christians are to read what Christ said and try to carry it out—as a man may read what Plato or Marx said and try to carry it out. They mean something much more than that. They mean that a real Person, Christ, here and now, in that very room where you are saying your prayers, is doing things to you... The real Son of God is at your side. He is beginning to turn you into the same kind of thing as Himself. He is beginning, so to speak, to “inject” His kind of life and thought, His *zoe* [life], into you; beginning to turn the tin soldier into a live man. The part of you that does not like it is the part that is still tin.⁵³

And then, on the other hand, Dallas Willard:

Reliance upon what the Spirit does *to* us or *in* us, as indispensable as it truly is, will not by itself transform character in its depths. The action of the Spirit must be accompanied by our response, which as we have seen, cannot be carried out by anyone other than ourselves. [It requires] active participation on our part.⁵⁴

Our effort isn't the sole ingredient in the work of transformation. It's not even the primary ingredient. But it is a *necessary* ingredient. Not so much because our work is necessary, but because God has chosen to require it. As we've already heard from the early church father St. Augustine: “Without him we cannot, without us he will not.”

So, what do we do? How do we proceed from where we are when we recognize we are desperately in need of the work of the Spirit?

Read the following:

- 2 Chronicles 16:9
- Psalm 34:15

⁵³ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (MacMillan, 1943), pg. 148-149.

⁵⁴ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, (HarperCollins, San Francisco, CA, 1997.), pg. 348.

How would you paraphrase those two verses together?

The “promise” that God is watching and He is helping those who are blameless can, at first, be terrifying. However, now read the following:

- 2 Corinthians 5:21
- Mark 9:24

How do those two verses help encourage you about the fact that God is watching and aware and ready to help those who are blameless before Him?

There are times where we seem to be unable to do what is right. There are even times that we seem unable to want to do what is right. But for the believer in Jesus, we always have the hope of wanting to want to do what is right, and that God takes that little tiny “mustard seed” kind of faith (Matthew 17:20) and does miraculous things with it.

Dallas Willard speaks to this, and he, again, gets the last word:

Our tiny “willpower” is not the source of our strength. We hardly notice any exercise of it, though it is fully dedicated to carrying out God’s purposes in every respect. It may be that at present we cannot even imagine what it would be like for us to have a will significantly identified with God’s will... But we must never forget that he “is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, in terms of the power that is working within us.” (Ephesians 3:20) Our part is to begin as best we can.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, (Navpress, Colorado Springs, CO, 2002), pg. 152.

Via Transformatio

As you consider the concepts from this week's message, engage the following practices during the week:

Via Purgativa

- Fasting: If you have been engaging the disciplines over the last few months, you should be ready to try a slightly longer fast. Depending on your readiness and tolerance, extend your fast from one 24-hour period to either 36, 48, or maybe 72 hours. Keep in mind that the most difficult "hunger pangs" happen in the first few days of a fast. ("That is not real hunger; your stomach has been trained through years of conditioning to give signals of hunger at certain hours. [It] is like a spoiled child, and spoiled children do not need indulgence, they need discipline."⁵⁶) Whatever length you choose, determine it beforehand and stick to it. Use this time to listen to the Spirit and to journal your thoughts and prayers.

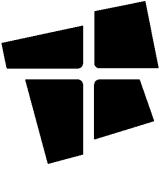
Via Illuminativa

- Meditation: Each morning, take a few minutes in silence, and then spend a few minutes reading and re-reading 2 Corinthians 3:12-18. Read it slowly, meditating on the words that Paul is writing. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak His truth to you as you meditate. As the week goes on, consider adding in a slow reading of John 14-16, maybe a few sections at a time.

Via Unitiva

- Sabbath: Designate a 24-hour period this week to spend with God and with friends and family. If 24 hours isn't possible by this point in the study, take some time to consider the flow of your life and how obedience to the Sabbath command should work for you. For whatever period you are able, up to 24 hours, clear your schedule and spend enjoying Jesus and His blessings. Avoid work, buying anything, and doing chores around the house during this time. Use this period to connect with family, friends, and most of all, to intentionally connect with Jesus.

⁵⁶ Richard Foster, *The Celebration of Discipline*, (Harper & Row, New York, NY, 1978), pg. 50.



The Holy Spirit

2 Corinthians 3:12-18

Sermon Notes:

Questions for Application:

- What's your immediate reaction when you hear about the Holy Spirit?
- Do you tend to focus more on your own effort or waiting for the Holy Spirit to work in your life?
- Are there times in your life that you've felt/sensed the power of the Holy Spirit working in you? What was the situation?
- What are some things that you could do in your life to be more receptive to the work of the Holy Spirit? Barton says that we can be "open to it, but we can't accomplish it ourselves." How might you be more open?

Week Ten: The Cross and Denying Self

Luke 9:23-26, 14:25-33

It's hard to even fathom self-denial in an age of self-fulfillment. Even our approach to church is often consumeristic, and the way we engage the rest of the world around us is even more so. However, self-denial is the consistent call of Jesus and vital to us becoming more like Him.

Losing Life to Gain It

Perhaps Dietrich Bonhoeffer's greatest contribution to the modern understanding of Christianity is his book *The Cost of Discipleship*. In it, he attacks the idea that simply because grace is freely given to us by Jesus it isn't supposed to cost us anything. He calls this idea "cheap grace":

Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession.... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.⁵⁷

Later in the book, he summarizes: "Discipleship is not an offer that man makes to Christ."⁵⁸ What, then, *is* discipleship?

Read Luke 14: 25-33.

In this passage, Jesus gives us clear conditions for what it means to be a disciple of His. However, in order to understand the conditions, we also have to get at the motivations behind discipleship as well. Jesus lists three conditions for discipleship in Luke 14: 26, 27, and 33. What are the three conditions that He makes?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Obviously, these are tough conditions! Bonhoeffer, again, says it like this:

The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (Touchstone, New York, NY, 1995 edition), pg. 44-45

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* pg. 63.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* pg. 89.

But what is Jesus truly asking of us?

Read Luke 14:31-32.

- What metaphor does Jesus use?

- When soldiers go off to war, they go with joy and camaraderie, but obviously risk complete disconnection from family and death. Why, then, do they go? How does this relate to being a disciple?

Our cross must be interpreted through Jesus' cross. Therefore, we mustn't see "our cross" as personal suffering alone, which is often self-focused. Rather, a "cross" is suffered "vicariously...our suffering is sympathy with others...strength being poured out in order to help others."⁶⁰

What might this look like for a disciple of Jesus?

Read Luke 14:28-30.

- What metaphor does Jesus use here?

Read Matthew 13:45-46.

- What metaphor does Jesus use here?

⁶⁰ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Revell, New York, NY, 1931). pgs. 177.

- If our “all” is compared to building supplies or funds for an invaluable pearl, how would you describe “renouncing all we have”?

Re-read Luke 14:28-32.

Many translations will add the transitional word “for” at the beginning of vs. 28 (ESV, NASB, KJV). The New Living Translation goes as far as to add the sentence: “But don’t begin until you count the cost.” However, none of that is present in the original text. It simply begins: “Which of you...”, and Jesus gives two common scenarios that His listeners might have been faced with.

For most of us, we have always read this text as Jesus telling us that we should count the cost, as though we are a builder or a king. Is following Jesus worth it? Will we be willing to follow it through to the end?

But what if our perspective changes? G. Campbell Morgan, the great British preacher and Bible expositor from the early 1900’s makes the case that Jesus was asking them to do nothing of the kind! Rather, “He was telling them that He had to count the cost. He is the Builder. He is the Warrior King.”⁶¹

- Re-read this passage from that perspective. How does that change the way that you see it?

- Why would Jesus tell the crowd, after laying out such difficult conditions, that *He* needed to count the cost?

⁶¹ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Revell, New York, NY, 1931). pgs. 178.

"He said...that is why the terms are severe. That is why you cannot be My disciple save on fulfillment of these conditions. It was as though He said: I am in the world for building and battle, therefore I have to reckon upon the quality of My workmen and My soldiers."⁶²

- Read Judges 7:1-23. How does this narrative parallel Jesus call to discipleship?

- Look at Matthew 7:13-14. Do you see the connection?

Now, read the continuation of the story in Luke 15:1-2.

- Which group of people listened closely, and which group objected to His teaching?

- Why do you think those who are blatantly sinful responded more readily to this teaching of Jesus?

⁶² Ibid.

Read Luke 14:27 and 33 one more time.

- What absolute statement does Jesus make in both of these verses?

Does this seem too high a bar, or too difficult a standard? Dallas Willard likens this to a blind person driving a car:

Christian spiritual formation rests on this indispensable foundation of death to self and cannot proceed except insofar as that foundation is being firmly laid and sustained. Those who are not genuinely convinced that the only real bargain in life is surrendering ourselves to Jesus and his cause, abandoning all that we love to him and for him, *cannot* learn the other lessons Jesus has to teach us. They cannot proceed to anything like total spiritual transformation. Not that he will not let us, but that we simply cannot succeed. If I tell you that you cannot drive an automobile unless you can see, I'm not saying I will not let you, but that you cannot succeed even if I do.⁶³

⁶³ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, (Navpress, Colorado Springs, CO, 2002), pg. 64, 66..

Via Transformatio

As you consider the concepts from this week's message, engage the following practices during the week:

Via Purgativa

- **Meditative Prayer:** Each evening this week, before you go to sleep, pray through The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) slowly, meditating on each phrase. Ask God to show you where you aren't following Him completely. Use this as a confessional exercise.
- **Fasting:** Take a week off from food fasting, but instead, choose something that you value very highly and go a week without it. It may be a piece of technology, a part of your daily routine, a specific food or drink, etc. Replace it with a regular meditation on Luke 14:25-33. Write it on a notecard and keep it with you to refer to throughout the day.

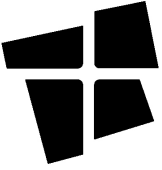
Via Illuminativa

- **Meditation:** Each morning, take a few minutes in silence, and then spend a few minutes reading and re-reading Luke 9:23-27. Read it slowly, meditating on Jesus' words. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak His truth to you as you meditate. Near the end of the week, choose a time when you won't be rushed, and read slowly through one of the stories of the crucifixion in the gospels: Matthew 26:36-27:61, Mark 14:32-15:47, Luke 22:39-23:56, or John 18:1-19:42. Take time to notice details and to imagine. You might also want to consider going to a local catholic church and walking the Stations of the Cross or using an online resource to engage the Stations.⁶⁴

Via Unitiva

- **Sacred Meal:** Invite some friends over for a dinner in your home. Throughout the preparation, the meal itself, and the clean-up, seek to keep Jesus in the forefront of your mind. If your guests are believers, talk about the ways that Jesus is stretching you as you seek to be with Him. If they are unbelievers, look for opportunities to express the heart of Jesus toward them, and the specific ways that Jesus has been working in your life.

⁶⁴ If you Google "Online Stations of the Cross" there are many audio and video options available.



The Cross and Denying Self

Luke 9:23-26, 14:25-33

Sermon Notes:

Questions for Application:

- What are you tempted to have higher loyalty to and affection for than Jesus?
- Can you think of a time that you've suffered on behalf of someone else? What would that kind of "cross" look like in your life?
- What are things in your life that, by holding onto them, you could slow or even stop the transformational work of Jesus in you?
- Do you feel desperate and willing to change enough to respond to this radical teaching of Jesus? How can you keep your heart in that position?
- What's one practical thing that you can do in your life to obey what Jesus is teaching in this passage?

Week Eleven: Removing Hurry

Matthew 11:28-30

Hurry is the great enemy of the spiritual life. However, when people ask how we've been, most of us quickly respond with "busy!" Our lives are packed full, which hasn't left room for the Spirit of God to work in us. Sabbath is both a command and a discipline where we engage the beauty of Jesus while humbly admitting our limits.

Sabbath and Slowing Down

John Ortberg shares the story of making a phone call to Dallas Willard, his long-time friend and mentor in the way of Jesus, shortly after he arrived in Chicago to serve at Willow Creek Church, one of the largest churches in the world. Ortberg described the pace that life moved, both in the city and at the church, and talked about the way both his family life and his heart were struggling to keep up. His question was simple: What did he need to do in order to be spiritually healthy in this new setting?

There was a long pause on the other end of the phone. And then Willard, clearly and deliberately, said, *“You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.”*

There was another long pause, and Ortberg finally broke it by saying, “Yes, I’ve written that one down. That’s a good one. Now what else is there?”

Another long pause. (This was in the days when long distance phone calls were expensive, and Ortberg, of course, had many things to do!) Finally, Willard said, “There is nothing else.”⁶⁵

This wise mentor had laid out the way of Jesus with clarity. A close reading of the gospels will reveal that Jesus, while living a very full life, was never in a hurry.

Read Matthew 11:28-30.

- What is the invitation that Jesus gives to the weary?

- What does he offer as “rest” in vs. 29-30?

It is odd to offer a yoke, which is a tool for working, when rest is needed. As we looked at this passage on pg. 14 of this study, we recognized that “yoke” was a first century way of talking about a set of teachings or a way of life. Another way to say it is that Jesus was offering us *rest* by offering us a new way to work!

⁶⁵ John Ortberg, *The Life You’ve Always Wanted*, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1997), pg. 81.

Ruth Haley Barton puts it this way:

[The] reason we are so tired is that we are always working hard to figure things out rather than learning how to cease striving, how to be with what is true *in God's presence* and let God be God in the most intimate places of our life—which is, in the end, the only thing that will change anything. We're busy trying to make stuff happen rather than waiting on God to make stuff happen.⁶⁶

The call of the believer is not a call to laziness, but rather, a call to trust in Him for the real work. M. Basil Pennington reminds us: "The fact is there is nothing that we are doing that God could not raise up a stone in the field to do for him."⁶⁷ Remembering that reality quells our pride and reminds us of our place in the universe.

Slowly read Eugene Peterson's great translation of Matthew 11:28-30, taken from the Message:

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.

As you read that, do you find yourself meeting the qualifications? Tired, worn out, and burned out on religion? That's where many of us land.

- How does Peterson translate the call of Jesus? What are the imperatives that He calls us to do?

He doesn't eliminate work, as much as we'd sometimes like Him to. Instead, He invites to learn to live like He lived. As we've said at the beginning of this study, the key for us is to take on the *lifestyle* of Jesus if we'd like to gain the *life* of Jesus.

- What are some of the practices and rhythms in your life right now that mirror the life of Jesus?

⁶⁶ Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*, (IVP, Downer's Grove, IL, 2006.), pg. 41.

⁶⁷ Quoted in *Ibid.*, pg. 43.

- What are some of the practices and rhythms in your life right now that do not mirror the life of Jesus?

For most of us, that list should begin with our pace of life. When we look at Jesus' life and rhythm and then look at ours, we notice very quickly that we're moving much faster than He is. If you were on a walk with Jesus, who do you think would need to slow down their pace? My guess is that most of us would. "For many of us the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of it."⁶⁸

The most difficult way to follow Jesus is for us to try to live like the world around us and then layer in a pursuit of Him. The easiest way is for us to truly apprentice Him by learning to live like He did, even in the midst of our fast-paced world. That's the message that Jesus is speaking in Matthew 11.

How do we do it? While slowing our lives is a long-term pursuit, one of the first disciplines that we can engage to move us in the right direction is one that we've been seeking practice increasingly throughout this study: Sabbath.

Read Mark 2:23-28.

- Paraphrase Jesus' statement in vs. 27.

- What do you think He means by that?

⁶⁸ John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1997), pg. 82.

Now read Mark 3:1-6.

- What two emotions does Mark record as Jesus observed the Pharisees?
- Based on Mark 2:27, why might He have had this response?
- Think honestly about your own practice and view of Sabbath. What might Jesus emotional response be to you? Why?

Barton, again, diagnoses us this way:

Our unwillingness to practice sabbath is really an unwillingness to live within the limits of our humanity, to honor our finiteness. We cling to some sense that we are indispensable and that the world cannot go on without us even for a day. Or we feel that certain tasks and activities are more significant than the delights that God is wanting to share with us. This is a grandiosity that we indulge to our own peril.⁶⁹

With Barton's concept in mind, read Genesis 3:5.

- What is the core of the temptation that led to sin entering the world?

⁶⁹ Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*, (IVP, Downer's Grove, IL, 2006.), pg. 138.

Now read the following:

- Exodus 16:26
- Exodus 20:8-11
- Exodus 31:12-17
- Numbers 15:32-36
- Isaiah 56:1-8
- Isaiah 58:13-14

These are just a few of the many Old Testament admonitions to keep the Sabbath.

- Why might God be so concerned about maintaining Sabbath practice, based on Genesis 3:5?

Sabbath isn't the only practice that can eliminate hurry from our lives, but it is a key one. For many of us, a great first step in learning the "unforced rhythms of grace" is committing to a Sabbath practice. Ortberg lists several other "slowing" practices that can also get us moving in the right direction:⁷⁰

- (1) Deliberately get into the slow lane on the highway and remain there throughout your trip. Pray for the drivers around you as they hurry past.
- (2) For the next week, eat your food slowly. Take small bites and chew at least 15 times before you swallow each bite.
- (3) Get in the *longest* line at every store that you're in for the next month, and then let someone who is behind you go ahead of you now and then.
- (4) Go a whole day without wearing a watch or looking at the clock on your phone.

The last word comes from Jesus, using Eugene Peterson's paraphrase, one more time. Read slowly and meditate:

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.

⁷⁰ John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1997), pg. 89.

Via Transformatio

As you consider the concepts from this week's message, engage the following practices during the week:

Via Purgativa

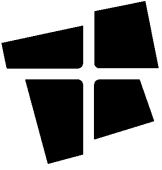
- Meditative Prayer: Each evening this week, before you go to sleep, pray through The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) slowly, meditating on each phrase. Ask God to show you where you aren't following Him completely. Use this as a confessional exercise.
- Fasting: Think about the next month or so, through the end of the year. What is one thing that you might eliminate from your life that could have a significant benefit on your spiritual formation over the next month? It may be a food or drink, an activity, a change to your rhythms, etc. You may even need to add something, although that should probably be paired with removing something else. Put together a plan for the remainder of 2018.

Via Illuminativa

- Silence and Solitude: Each day this week, set your alarm 20 minutes earlier than normal (more if you're prone to hit snooze!). When you get up, grab your coffee if needed, and spend 10-15 minutes in complete silence. Don't read during this time, but just seek to focus on Jesus. You might find that focusing on a short word that describes the character of God (like *love, grace, power, glory*) will help you stay focused, and you can come back to softly speaking that word if your mind is wandering.

Via Unitiva

- Sabbath: Designate a 24-hour period this week to spend with God and with friends and family. If 24 hours isn't possible by this point in the study, take some time to consider the flow of your life and how obedience to the Sabbath command should work for you. For whatever period you are able, up to 24 hours, clear your schedule and spend enjoying Jesus and His blessings. Avoid work, buying anything, and doing chores around the house during this time. Use this period to connect with family, friends, and most of all, to intentionally connect with Jesus.



Removing Hurry

Matthew 11:28-30

Sermon Notes:

Questions for Application:

- What are some areas in which hurry can threaten to overtake your life?
- Where do you tend to “make stuff happen” rather than waiting for God to “make stuff happen?” What might you do to change that?
- How significant is Sabbath as a discipline for you? Why is that?
- What are some of the hallmarks of the lifestyle of Jesus that are not currently part of your life? *(Hint: If you don't know, take the next few weeks to read slowly through the gospels. Take note of Jesus' actions and rhythms, not just His teaching. It requires careful reading, but you will be able to see pretty clearly the way that Jesus practiced life!)*
- What's one thing that you can do that would make an impact on the presence of hurry in your life?

Acknowledgements

In many ways, this has been a study that's been "in the works" for more than a decade. From the first time I read Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* and then was captured by the simplicity and grace in John Ortberg's *The Life You've Always Wanted*, I've longed to make the connection in my own life between teaching, community, and practice, and longed to help the church to do the same. It wasn't until about a year ago when I stumbled upon a teacher, John Mark Comer, from Bridgetown Church in Portland, Oregon that everything started to crystalize for me. After Amanda had listened a bit, she pointed me towards a series of teachings that provide the backdrop for the information that can be found on www.practicingtheway.org, and the rest, as they say, is history.

I haven't enjoyed writing a study guide like this one in a long time. The process always has some good and bad to it, and this one was no exception, but this one flowed more quickly than normal and was a joy all along the way. I recognize that this is a very different kind of study guide, for those of you who have been engaging these for years, but I hope that it is one that will be helpful as we engage the Scriptures and the concepts this fall and moving forward. I truly believe that the ideas contained in here will provide the foundation of how we live and grow together as apprentices of Jesus for years to come.

Before I thank the many local people who have been such an important part of this journey, I need to thank a few people I've never actually met face to face. Dallas Willard is chief among them; his writings have opened my eyes to the Scriptures in a new way, and I'm so thankful for loving push he gives me and many within the church as we seek to engage the way of Jesus in the world. Ruth Haley Barton became a very practical spiritual guide through her writing and the way in which her heart shone through. Coming back to the works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, C.S. Lewis, William Law, Ignatius of Loyola and Brother Lawrence was a great joy for me, and constantly reminds me that there is really nothing new under the sun. I should also thank an eclectic group of musicians who provided a stirring soundtrack for the reading and writing process: The Gray Havens (new album out this fall! I have the pre-release, and it's fantastic!), Phoenix, Phil Wickham, Mount Valor/Kyle Novy, U2, Josh Garrels, Jess Ray, and The Sea The Sea. I'm sure there were others, but those are the ones that stick out to me.

And here in York... I'm so thankful to Marty Krebs, who continues to offer his abundant talent and creativity to projects like these. Thanks for doing what you do so well, and for offering it with such grace and joy! I'm so thankful for my new "editor extraordinaire" Don Weidemann, who somehow is able to see things that are completely invisible to me. Thanks for making reading this a more pleasant experience for lots of people! I also want to thank the Elders for continuing to provide a way for these intensive times of study to happen. I believe that they are so valuable to the church, and I'm thankful for your willingness to take the risk and trust me with these times. Of course, being gone for several weeks in the middle of the summer puts a significant burden on the rest of the staff. Belinda, Re, Beth, Tim, and Mike, it's an incredible joy and privilege to work alongside of you all. Thanks for picking up my slack this summer. You make my job so much easier, but you also make it a ton more fun.

And, of course, to my wonderful family. The schedule is "different" when I work on these projects, and it's definitely not easy. Thank you for your grace with the late nights in the office, the vacant expressions on my face when my mind is clearly still in a book somewhere, and the joy with which you invite me back into reality when I finally switch gears. Tia, Ethan, Josiah, and Micah, you are my greatest earthly treasures and I love you all so much. And dear Amanda... every book has your fingerprints on it to some degree, but none more than this one. From your encouragement to dig into these ideas of spiritual formation to the hours of conversation we had as I refined these ideas, to your contribution of the "Nineteenth Annotation" in the introduction, you have played an incredibly significant role all along the way. I love you and I'm glad we get to live this crazy life together.

And finally, thank you to all who have made it through the book this far. These are difficult ideas to engage at this point in the history of the American church. May you apprentice Jesus with grace and joy, entering into His unforced rhythms of grace, and may you find in Him the life that is truly life. (1 Timothy 6:19)

Grace and peace,

Brian Kannel
August 4, 2018

Annotated Bibliography

This study just scratches the surface of the topic of spiritual formation. There are hundreds of excellent resources available. The following are books that I read in preparation for this series and would also recommend others read. (There are some I read that I could not recommend to others.) Some are cited within this study guide, others simply provided foundational information and ideas for writing and developing the material.

Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*. This is an excellent and personal account of developing spiritual habits in the midst of a busy life. Barton writes with both ease and profundity. Not an exhaustive treatment by any means, but excellent.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*. This is a landmark volume with lots to say. Bonhoeffer makes a clear call for the believer in Jesus to sacrifice for the sake of following Him, and for the joy of losing our lives for the sake of the gospel. Bonhoeffer is not always easy to read, but worth the effort.

-----, *Life Together*. This is a much shorter work that is focused on the role of community in discipleship. Bonhoeffer covers everything from the theological and theoretical to the very practical, all out of his experiences.

Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*. This is the classic work on the spiritual disciplines. In many ways it's a nuts and bolts instruction guide for "how to" engage the disciplines, but he doesn't shy away from theological concepts or historical background. Both instructive and inspirational.

Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way*. Jones studied ancient forms of spiritual formation during a sabbatical, and this is the fruit of his study. He writes very accessibly, giving an overview, history, theological framework, and directions for practice for each of the ancient disciplines he highlights.

William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. While this is several centuries old, it is still an excellent book on spiritual formation. While the names and situations feel dated, the writing style is engaging, and Law's concepts are brilliant and necessary for today. Can tend toward legalism, but worth the read.

Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*. This is a very short and focused book on dwelling always in the presence of God. It is divided into conversations with Brother Lawrence and letters he wrote. A spiritual treasure.

David Mathis, *Habits of Grace*. This relatively new book is a treatment of spiritual disciplines from a Reformed perspective. Mathis highlights a variety of disciplines (habits) around the headings of “hear His voice,” “have His ear,” and “belong to His body.” Not a difficult read, and very helpful.

M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Invitation to the Journey*. This is an excellent treatment of spiritual formation utilizing both our personality types (he uses the Myers Briggs profiles) and the spiritual disciplines. The core of the book is that spiritual formation is not a quick process, but a long journey.

David Naugle, *Reordered Loves, Reordered Lives*. This is a treatment of an Augustine theme of man’s desire for happiness. Naugle shows that happiness comes through properly ordered loves, which translate to lives that are also ordered properly. Not a hard read but took two readings for me to really digest.

Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life*. Nee uses a variety of passages from Romans to unpack the growth and development of the believer. He does an excellent job returning to the cross and resurrection as the foundation for growth. Dense but accessible.

Aaron Niequist, *The Eternal Current*. Niequist developed an alternative gathering called “The Practice” at Willow Creek Church outside of Chicago. This book is a description of the how’s and why’s behind the gathering, but also gives great insights into having a faith built on practice and not simply knowledge.

John Ortberg, *The Life You’ve Always Wanted*. I don’t know that Ortberg would call it this, but this is a very engaging “cliff’s notes” version of Dallas Willard’s writings and philosophy. Ortberg’s writing is clear and very engaging.

Rob Reimer, *Soul Care*. While this reads like a book, it’s really a manual for bringing our souls to a healthy place before God. Reimer writes honestly and personably, and yet doesn’t pull any punches. This is a hard-hitting and helpful book for those who are willing to not just read but truly engage.

Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*. Scazzero develops the statement “You can’t be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature.” He uses personal examples with Biblically solid instruction on growing emotionally as you are developing spiritually.

James K.A. Smith, *You Are What You Love*. This is Smith’s popular level treatment of Augustinian philosophy. He makes the case that our lives are ordered by our loves more than our knowledge or even conscious choices. Our personal “liturgies” develop our loves, and we must “curate” those loves by recognizing and sometimes changing those liturgies. The ideas aren’t simple, but they are excellent and the book is well written.

Dallas Willard, *Hearing God*. This is Willard’s first book in his trilogy on the spiritual life. He argues for a conversational relationship with God in which we engage Him in order to live in relationship with Him, not simply to gain from Him.

-----, *Spirit of the Disciplines*. The second of the trilogy, in which Willard makes a case for whole life transformation for the believer through engaging the lifestyle of Jesus, particularly the classical spiritual disciplines.

-----, *The Divine Conspiracy*. In the final book of the trilogy, Willard critiques our modern church culture through expansive thoughts on the Sermon on the Mount and what it means to apprentice under Jesus.

-----, *Renovation of the Heart*. Willard uses a step-by-step approach to opening ourselves up for transformation in six distinct areas of our lives: thought, feeling, will, body, social context, and soul.

Note: All of Willard’s books are dense but accessible. They require slow reading in order to fully digest them, but they reward the diligent reader.

Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master*. Wilkins is a top scholar on discipleship yet writes in a relatively accessible way. The footnotes are almost book length by themselves as he tries to compress a scholarly treatment of discipleship into a popular level book. He mostly succeeds. Not an easy read, but worth the effort.

“Follow me.”

This was Jesus' invitation to His first disciples, and it's the invitation He still extends to each of us today. Modern church culture often seems to emphasize believing in Jesus. That's a vital first step! But it isn't the final goal. Jesus' teachings, as well as those of the early disciples, emphasized not simply believing the truth, but following and becoming like the One who declared Himself to be the Truth.

What does it mean to follow a first century Middle Eastern carpenter and Jewish rabbi as 21st century men and women? This is the question that we must come to terms with if we are to take seriously the call to follow Jesus in our world.

There are deep reservoirs of joy and peace to be found in taking on the lifestyle of Jesus of Nazareth. But we cannot transform ourselves. What we can do is place ourselves within the Way of Jesus, and in doing so, be open and available to the God who longs to transform us.



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