


Rule of Life: Disciplines of purpose and discernment in an age of diversion and distraction.

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 = highlighted portions throughout were the lines or concepts that most struck the staff team as they read through it.

Rule of Life: Disciplines of Purpose and Discernment in an Age of Diversion and Distraction

□ Memory Verse: 1 John 2:6 (introduce this the first week)

Week 1 - The Life Promised and a Life Pursued

John 15:1-8 - 1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in me, as I also abide in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must abide in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. If you abide in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If you do not abide in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

We Want Happiness.
Jesus offers "Life" - Happiness
rooted in wholesome
keeper things.

Pt ①

Made His Goal
& Greatest Good, in
Mutuality of Love.

I have never met anyone, religious or irreligious, that did not claim to want freedom and happiness. Such a desire is not specific to age, culture, nation, sex, class, education, or any other set of human differences. Our desire for real liberty and what Jesus called, "life abundant" are, as the ancients said, "ineradicable and indefatigable." That is, we can't get rid of them. We can't stop wanting them. God made them part of our nature because we are creatures made for flourishing and love, not just survival—otherwise fear and pleasure would have been sufficient feelings.

The good news is, God does not stop promising life and liberty to anyone willing to come and see. He passionately offers and solemnly promises them both. He even sternly demands we receive what we so desperately need, which he has supplied in so costly a way. St Irenaeus said, "The glory of God is man fully alive," but by "alive" he didn't mean we "have a life." He said it in reference to the man Jesus—humanity alive in the perfect life of God, the same life he gives us in redemption. The whole sentence better translated is, "For the glory of God is a living man (Jesus), and the life of man consists in beholding God." God is glorified when we experience what we were meant to be and reflect—when we are image bearers of the holy God. The Bible calls this godliness, righteousness, or holiness.

Creation &
Exodus

Pt ②

His attitude is always liberating and generative. He offers freedom from the dominion of sin, and life that is full of purpose and passion. He gives beauty for ashes and makes us oaks of righteousness (Isaiah 61). He makes us all brothers and sisters to each other. He is against the violent men of terror (Ezekiel 32) and liberates the captives—whether captives of tyrants or of our own sin, brokenness, and immaturity. He offers eternal life. What we get hung up on is God's means—the how of freedom and happiness. Bonhoeffer, killed in a Nazi concentration camp, said, "When God calls a man, he bids him come and die." The same Jesus that said, "my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:30) is the same one that said we must "take up our cross and follow him" (Matt. 16:24), and that we must do it "daily" (Luke 9:23).

Irony: To Break/Fallen
Humans freedom is
enslaving.

↳ We become like stone up to Liberty (Empathic + mean as Hell) Ab. Schreier

↳ Like a young adult
having overbearing parents,
who really flourish w/ independence.

become mature and have their own lives. Freedom turned out to be more enslaving than captivity, and the happiness they hoped for was illusive. Many wanted to go back to Egypt. Most didn't want to fight their way into the Promised Land. So, they died in the desert—the uninhabitable place between slavery and liberty, misery and blessing. It was a place full of fear and grumbling—and that is where they died. God said of them, they “never entered my rest” (Heb. 3:11).

consider:
□ emphasize
the tie
between
REST and
HAPPINESS/
FREEDOM.

This is the truth of God's freedom and happiness. They are things we have to become strong enough to bear. They are for the mature. Godliness is humanity remade in the image of God through Christ and the work of the Spirit. We have not been given a spirit of fear, but of love, power, and prudence (2 Timothy 1). We are to add to our faith goodness, then knowledge, then self-control, then perseverance, then godliness, then brotherly kindness, then love—in increasing measure. (2 Peter 1) We are to clothe ourselves with the virtues that flow from a faith that sets our hearts and minds on things above (Colossians 3), not the things of the earth. We are to no longer conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:1-12). We humans are **creatures of habit**. We make choices, but we form and follow patterns until they make up character. Or, as the psychologists might say, **we're creatures of plasticity (changeable) and pathways (learned responses)**. God designed our minds to work on autopilot most of the time. Our senses, experiences, and beliefs run in the intuitive pathways of our emotional habits.

→ Eph 4
make a long 2
on action

creatures of
formation
&
Habit. 3

Maybe you wish our minds didn't make most of our decisions almost automatically through our mind's established pathways. But think of how inefficient and overwhelming it would be to make literally every decision our intuitive mind and automatic mind make every day. There are probably more than a million such decisions each day. Do you really wish you had to make every decision deliberately? *Should I breathe? Where should I put my foot when I step, and how high should I lift it? What emotion should I feel in every experience every day? Am I in danger at this moment? What about now? How should I form the sentence that I want to say? Which direction do I turn the key when I get in the car?* Life would be impossibly tedious, maybe literally impossible. We don't want to make every decision without pre-programming. We do want to be able to stop or edit the programming. And thank God, we can.

control's
auto
design
Necessity

God didn't create us to have no control over our reactions, emotions, habits or character. We can use our **reasonable or deliberative mind** to stop the automatic processes of our emotional or intuitive mind in many situations. However, **one of the greatest ways we can change ourselves for the better is to choose the habits that will shape the intuitive and automatic functions of our character through discipline**. God gives us the content of these thoughts and actions in doctrines and teachings, but we **establish them in habit and character through disciplines, practices, rituals, and by taking on responsibilities and rhythms**. It takes time, but once we are more than age 8, **repetition and exposure are the most powerful forces for change we have**. We are no longer just learning, we are relearning—which is harder. When we act repetitively

disciplines
obedience

in accordance with Christ's truth in the Spirit's power, over time we find our sinful pathways are "plastic." They can be remolded. They are changeable. Becoming stronger, when we repeatedly expose ourselves to the difficulty of facing what enslaves us, we break free even faster. This is called faith and love in action. Faith propels us to face what is hard because it is God's good will, for the good of others. When we love other sinful people, we expose ourselves to some of the most arduous circumstances in life for the right reasons. *obedience*

This is generative. It changes us. It shapes us on the trellis of God's rule in his life until we bear much fruit. This process increases our faith, encourages our hope, and motivates further love. This process, from God's perspective, is what Jesus describes in John 15. Jesus is likened to a grape vine, and the Father is the cultivator. We are the branches of the grapevine. It's the job of the vine to feed life into the branches; they are worthless and dead without the vine. Without God's spiritual activity in us, we can do nothing. We do not and cannot do this on our own. In the words of the Apostle Peter, "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness..." (2 Pet 1:3a).

Yet that power isn't the only means God uses to give us life. The Father also shapes us painfully for our good. The job of a vine's cultivator is to shape the vine to the trellis and prune it so that it can produce the most fruit; the pruner isn't abusing the vine, he is helping it. Pruning and shaping is painful, but pruning stimulates vigorous growth that produces more and better fruit. Spiritually speaking, trellising and pruning is done within and by the Father's providence and is received in our submission to the pruning as we abide in the vine. The combination of Jesus' life-giving sap with the Father's careful cuts combine to stimulate growth and fruitfulness in us. Humble and hopeful abiding in the midst of pruning is a disciple's fundamental spirituality. We are submitting to His shaping work in our lives, hearts, minds and souls.

The Latin word for "rule" means measure or standard. This is the main meaning of the word in *Rule of Faith*, a phrase used in the early church, which is a set of doctrinal beliefs by which we measure all others (i.e. a creed). However, this word "rule" is also the word the early church used for a trellis—something that shapes a living thing. Therefore, a *Rule of Life* works itself out by the way we structure our lives spiritually around our Rule of Faith. A Rule of Life is a 'standard' we use to measure, evaluate, and structure our lives to direct and shape our spiritual devotion. A Rule of Life should be generative and a support, like a trellis; the rule doesn't just confront us, it also supports us. *Trellis?*

It is in the shaping that we experience being remade in the image of our Creator. In a Rule of Life, our habits become the strengths of virtue unto character. Virtue, then, is not only the mature form of faith, but the maturity that can bear and harness freedom to the ends of love rather than "indulging the flesh" that leads to misery. Thus, the Rule is Jesus' means of imparting and growing in godliness. It is how he makes us able to bear freedom so that we can find real blessing in the "life

*Planned Submission
in discipline*

*Improvisational
Submission in obeying
life's circumstances*

that is truly life" (1 Timothy 6:19). Such a life pleases God, builds up our neighbor, pursues justice, and fulfills us.

Week 1 Reflection Questions

1. **Read John 15:1-8.** As you picture the metaphor that Jesus describes, what strikes you most?
2. What is significant about his use of the word "abide," as opposed to any other verb he could have chosen?
3. **Jesus offers "liberty" and "life abundant."**
 - a. What have you believed those offers *should* look like in your life?
 - b. What does "liberty" or "life abundant" *actually* look like—if your answer differs from the first question?
4. "God is glorified."
 - a. How would you finish this sentence: "God is glorified when...?"
 - b. How does Nic's completed statement, "God is glorified when we experience what we were meant to be and reflect – when we are image bearers of the holy God" challenge or reinforce what you currently believe about how God is glorified?
5. How have you experienced "pruning" from the Father? How did this experience shape you?
6. How would you describe the look and make-up of your trellis as it stands right now? Take a minute to jot down the first few thoughts that come to mind before sharing with others.
7. What are you motivated to think about or do after reading this week's passage and overview?
8. On a scale from "terrified" to "grateful," how are you left feeling after reading the passage from John 15 and this week's content? What are you most looking forward to, and most dreading, about the idea of forming a Rule of Life?

□ consider:
comment on
Lewis' essay
about the
pursuit of
"first things"
and
"second things"

Note from →
N&G in
Week 9
during the
staff
discussion

- ⊗ □ Define "Rule," and connect with "Trellis" analogy
- Address both audiences:
 - 1) "Don't tell me what to do!"
 - 2) "Tell me exactly what to do!"
- Explain the relationship between "freedom" and "abiding" or "dwelling"
- ~~FORSHADOWNING~~ ideas to mention NOW:
 - need for spiritual brutality
 - need for doing this in community
 - this will feel awful. Keep going.
 - we won't be able to accomplish ANY of this into the

• the promised life
is worth it.

Week 2 - Honest Measures

Proverbs 11:1-6 – 1 The Lord detests dishonest scales, but accurate weights find favor with him. 2 When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom. 3 The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity. 4 Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death. 5 The righteousness of the blameless makes their paths straight, but the wicked are brought down by their own wickedness. 6 The righteousness of the upright delivers them, but the unfaithful are trapped by evil desires.

Why are these verses together in Proverbs 11? It starts with the morality of using honest measures. Then, it turns to the measurements that matter even more. **Are you measuring your life by a ruler of pride or humility? One is an accurate measure and will guide you well. The other isn't. The same is true of integrity vs. unfaithfulness, wealth vs. righteousness, blamelessness vs. wickedness, righteousness vs. unfaithfulness. These are the ways people measure their lives. These are the rulers they live by that become the trellises that shape them.** Before the Lord, ask yourself: are you using honest measures? Do you want to know the truth about yourself? Do you want real feedback, or do you want Jesus to function like a blank check? Are you really trying to measure things that will reveal what you need to see and know? What is really happening to us, and to me?

Think about someone with dangerously high cholesterol and bad heart health. Statins are drugs designed to lower cholesterol, as opposed to a personal trainer who might make a person change the very routines and habits of his or her life. Which do you think Jesus is? What do you think the Holy Spirit indwells in you *for*? Is he like a statin—something you add to your unhealthy lifestyle to mask and avoid the consequences—or is he like a trainer who is forming us to look like him and become trainers ourselves? Who and what are you *really* measuring for?

Our lives are made up of habits. Some habits are intentional, and others are reactions or distractions. For the next 3-4 weeks, we'll start with something of an audit. We'll look at our lives to become clear-minded and honest about what we are doing – especially when we aren't thinking about it. The goal is honesty and humility – where are we? Our bodies, attention, energy, and time are the resources and gifts that make up our life. **To love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, we will need to have habits of heart, soul, mind, and body that help point us in the right direction.**

Remember that the root of "discipleship" is the word "discipline." Yet consumerism and tribalism are seeking to get our reactive attention. They are designed to make turning to them a reflex – a habit of our senses. It's ironic that all our technological advances could reduce us to beasts, led by our hungers and cravings. Paul warned us that we could become people whose "god is their stomach" (Phil. 3:19). God intended us to be beings of deep hearts and trained minds.

What are we measuring? We are measuring how we are using the life God has given us. We are trying to show ourselves, like in a mirror, what our actions and attention tell us about what we actually love with our heart, soul, mind and strength.

Start by measuring areas of habit at a level of complexity you can handle, perhaps a week at a time. *When do you wake up and go to bed? When and what do you eat? Are you actually hungry when you eat, or is your mouth just lonely? How many videos are in your YouTube history? How many times did you post to social media? What endless scrolling apps do you use? How much total screen time did you log each day? How many times do you start looking at your phone each day? When and how much were you working? How, and how much, did you rest?*

Be sure to also measure inherently positive things—habits of a deep heart and an attentive mind. *Do you come to worship? Did you read the Bible and pray? Did you have times where your mind was unoccupied when you contemplated something, rather than filled the space with something supplied? Who did you listen to, and did they have your full attention? How did you love another person in a way that meant something to them? Did you do anything that would lead to sharing Christ with someone? What actions did you take to solidify and make friendship gratifying? What rituals do you have around mealtimes or bedtimes, with yourself or with kids? What hobbies do you use for leisure, and what does it do in your heart or with your attention? What touches of encouragement did you have on your kids, spouse, or roommate?*

Remember, at this point the goal is not so much improvement, but measurement. It is true that what we measure tends to improve, but that is not the purpose of the next few weeks. Use this time to pursue clarity and honesty with ourselves, with God, and with those who care about us. Spend time simply measuring, focusing at least some of your attention on technology and its effects—the ingress of our technological society on our personal lives. Get a clear picture of what is actually happening, and begin to understand how these things function in relationship to our bodies and our lives in spiritual ways. Think of creative ways to measure what matters so that you have a better understanding of how to train for developing a deep heart, attentive mind, and a disciplined body. No matter how many things or which things you decide to track—using a phone app, filling your calendar to know how to spend your time—I suggest using a fairly detailed timesheet to capture all that you find. Either track yourself in time increments, or select a specific set of things for each day that you can evaluate simply that you are doing or not doing them in your assigned increments.

□ note:
concentric
circles of
influence/
responsibility

Tracking Question Ideas

MIND

1. What are you paying attention to? Why? For how long?

2. How much time are you focused on yourself and controlling your surroundings, and how much time are you serving others?
3. What are your intrusive interests – the things that come into your mind uninvited and will not leave when you mentally excuse them?
4. What are your triggers? What are you reflexively avoiding? *Homework, talking to family, praying?*
5. Set a 25–45-minute timer and ask yourself the following questions whenever it goes off:
 - a. What were you thinking about when the timer went off? Is there repetition? Is it positive or negative?
 - b. How much are you in an anxious vs. a peaceful frame of mind and heart? You can monitor this one by setting a timer and taking stock each time it goes off, logging from 1-10 how peaceful/anxious you are at that moment.

☐ "These thoughts score your path over time!"

-NG

RELATIONSHIPS

6. Who do you spend time with and in what way?
7. Think about everyone you talked to today. On a scale of 1-10 how cheerful and genuinely interested in them were you? 1-5, how much did they have your undivided attention?
8. What time is spent in public/corporate worship, study or prayer?
9. Do you have any scheduled or ritual time to spend time as a family? A shared dinner time?
10. Do you have any daily times of prayer alone or with anyone else? First thing when you get up, or right before bed?

BODY

11. When and what do you eat?
12. When and how do you exercise?
13. What and when do you use stimulants or self-medication?
 - a. *Example: caffeine, alcohol, sugar, tobacco, vapes, etc.*
 - b. *The idea is not that these are bad; it is that if we are borrowing from rest or we don't have peace, we may be using these to fill in the gaps.*
14. How well are you sleeping?

GENERAL

15. What are you spending your time doing?
16. What do you do automatically without really intending it? *Pay particular attention to distractions and anxious repetitions. Usual suspects are eating, turning on music or other sounds, going to the bathroom when unnecessary,*

clicking on links that waste time or are defiling of your attention often for vanity or sensuality.

17. What time is spent in private worship, study or prayer?
18. What are your habits? When do you do them? Are they good or bad?
19. Are you watching or looking at sexually explicit material (pornography)?
 - a. Not just IF, but when? And why then?
20. How much money have you spent, and in what categories, over the last 3 months?

Week 2 Reflection Questions

1. Read Proverbs 11:1-6 and make note of all of the juxtapositions.
2. Why do you think that "disgrace" is juxtaposed with "wisdom" in verse 2?
3. In just three verses, the word "righteousness" is used three times. Why is this significant following the statement made about God's character in verse 1?
4. Read through the two lists of questions on page 7 and highlight then share which the questions that most pique your interest or prick your heart.
5. Can you think of any additional questions we could ask ourselves as we perform this audit?
6. What will the answers to all of these questions reveal about us?
7. If you perform an audit for the next month, what do you anticipate finding?
8. *Challenge:* A specific way to measure these sorts of things is to set a 45 minute alarm on your phone for the week, and every time it goes off, ask yourself, "Am I more in the peace of God or in the anxiety of the pagan world?" For at least just today, set a timer *right now*, determine *where* you are going to record what you are thinking about or doing in that moment, and then record your findings. Depending on what you start your timer, you could probably capture between 10 and 20 "data points" in just one day.

Add: What is the motivation behind these anxious expressions?

Add: "we need to avail ourselves to reality." } -NG
"We want people to see something that they can't unsee."

Note: non-Western cultures may view this measuring as robotic

Challenge: What efficiencies are undermining how you exhibit Christian virtues (like hospitality)?

Add: put your measuring tool somewhere you will actually see and use it.

~~What is the motivation behind these anxious expressions?~~

Week 3 - Structures, Content & Companions

Philippians 3:13-21 – 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. 15 All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained. 17 Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. 18 For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Earlier in Philippians 3, the apostle makes clear that everything we have in God is a gift—even righteousness is “from God”—through Christ. Through embracing his death out of a love of union with him in his love and purpose, we experience the resurrection power. But embracing grace through faith *makes us* want to be in union with Jesus, *to be like him* in his death. Like in 2 Peter 1:3-7, God’s free gift and our striving go together. Just as grace must create faith, receiving grace motivates us to be a real agent of the Kingdom of grace. Jesus giving himself for us makes us want to give ourselves to him, his purposes of love, and his mission for love and justice in creation.

Take a look again at verses 13-21. Do you see the profound difference in approach—in purpose and attention? The problem is not a stark, raving, intentional, malevolent wickedness. **The problem lies within our cravings and desires.** The problem is a lack of moral intention and spiritual identity, resulting in our being overtaken by the flesh. The apostle says “their god is their stomach” so that we can see **we are living for our desires or cravings that are shallow and visceral. This is the alternative god: not Satan, but your stomach, your cravings, your anxieties—the most immature, selfish parts of you. Instead of being self-giving courageous lovers, we become beasts who scratch our itches.** In order to identify the source of these itches and properly measure them, we must start by recognizing the structures, content and companions that are shaping us.

Structures shape us. What are the structures that are shaping you, and what kind of shaping are they exerting? For example, the human mind and character changes shape as the way we take in information changes. Before the printing press most knowledge was memorized. During printing people read mostly whole works, thought deeply about them, and debated. Now people scan articles looking for sentences that look important. We normally glean some “facts” without context, and cannot reproduce the argument of the article. This is not a “lie” or a “bad companion” – it is a structure. Yet, structures are not neutral. The structures shape

→ give concrete examples: kids in extracurriculars, family structures, where I spend my time / what is in my calendar, organized sports vs. independent play, use of language (or emojis)

us in ways we often don't see. We are absorbing their effects and so we don't think to resist them, unless we are so mature that we can feel that they are unwholesome.

Measure: What is the effect of the things you pay attention to? Do they foster attention or diffuse it? Do they focus on shallow things or deeper things? Do they stimulate good longings or lower cravings?

Content shapes us. What is the content that is shaping you and what is the dose? We think that we pick and choose what we want from the content we take in without it having a power over us. We think it's like a salad bar – we take and keep what we want. But this isn't really how it works. When we watch stories and listen to people in videos or reality shows, we naturally empathize with them. We intuitively imagine whether they would approve of us, and we want to express empathy to sympathetic figures. **Why do you think sinful characters are always depicted in such sympathetic ways, and characters portraying morality or tradition or faith are depicted in unsympathetic terms? When we watch people in stories or channels we intuitively "cheer" for and against people. When we cheer for people, we overlook their faults, over-estimate their arguments, and we fall a little more in love with their desires.** You can lessen this effect by discussing it with someone that will ground you sympathetically in-person, but there is still an effect if the dose is high enough. So, what content are you taking in? What sin does it make seem sympathetic to you through slow absorption? And what content are you taking in the makes God's ways sympathetic?

Measure: Are you taking in trustworthy content pointing you to God? Scripture? preaching? podcasts? How much do you read out of a book and think more deeply about? What deepens concentration? What only has your fluttering attention?

What about content that focuses on facts and reason? Are you meditating on the word of God written and the word of God in Christ? You may read Scripture occasionally, but what is the *dose*? **What is your daily dose of worldliness and your daily dose of godliness? You want godliness to be the meal and worldliness the junk food, at most. Most of us are doing the reverse.** Are you measuring for it? How much time and attention did you give to the stories and logic of godliness? Did you give direct attention to God? How much to memes, infinity scrolling, mockery and sympathetic portrayals of what god calls evil? What is the DOSE?

Companionship shapes us. If you don't rule your life, you'll be controlled by those that will use you. You can decide who you'll be tomorrow by who you decide to be with today. We choose people because we want them to confirm us in something. We choose people to make pathways for our trajectory. Psalm 1 starts the book off with this human universal: **the one that is a companion of mockers will be confirmed in the way of wickedness. Mockery is a key idea – people that make fun of the good. Mockery seeks to humiliate you for taking the right things seriously by assuming that you are too uptight, narrow-minded, or judgmental. But mockery comes from a place of uptightness, narrow-mindedness, and judgmentalism – but from the perspective of worldliness.** Because mockery never actually makes an

□ Sermon analogy idea:

Parkes + Rec. April making fun of

11 dancers (ask Adam)

argument, it's hard to really take it apart. It's reactive; you just feel a visceral desire to not be associated with the thing or people being humiliated. **Stick around with this, and everything in you that wants power, affirmation, comfort, and control will want to get in line with the mockery. It is poison masquerading as high-minded, sophisticated sarcasm. Get away from it. It defiles everything, and such defilers can't be trusted as friends. If they betray the good and the dignity of the truth, they will betray you if it suits them.**

Measure: Who are you spending time with? Who is sharpening you? Who are you forming your character with? Who do you eat with?

Week 3 Reflection Questions:

1. **Read Philippians 3:13-21.** In your own words, how do structures, content, and companions naturally feed "the god of our stomach" (verse 19) if not measured and adjusted to pursuing maturity in Christ?
2. What are you measuring that may be making you shallower?
3. What are your "itches," cravings, and impulses that lead you around by your senses? What "itches" do you just habitually scratch? (*What do you do that: you regret immediately after, you don't know why you're doing it or why you're doing it right then, distracts you from what you have deliberately chosen to do?*)
4. What do you crave unnaturally? (*It seems more intense than is healthy or holy, is something you want to repeat again almost as soon as it is over?*)
5. What is this itch manifested by? Where is this impulse or itch coming from in you? *The right answer will probably not be sophisticated and will feel humiliating to realize.*
6. How do your impulses rule you as though your "stomach" (intuitive urges) is your god? Especially, how is your use of technology reflexively scratching and worshiping your stomach?
7. What breach of faith and triumph of fear is evident in it?
8. How can you burn this picture into your mind and heart as something you want to avoid at any cost?

□ consider: explain why the three categories of structures, content, and companions were chosen.

Week 4 – Evaluate: A Parched and Fruitless Bush, or a Verdant and Purposed Tree?

Jeremiah 17:5-8 – 5 This is what the Lord says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the Lord. 6 That person will be like a bush in the wastelands; they will not see prosperity when it comes. They will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. 7 "But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. 8 They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

□ Be very clear about how this passage

It's time to start interpreting what you're finding. Try this thought experiment: if you got the information you measured about you about a stranger, what profile would you construct of the god this person believed in? What does their god think makes for a good life? What is important to their god? What does their god want from them or encourage them to enjoy? What is that god's highest value? And so on.

You see, we all have an image of salvation and God in our mind. It's a sort of picture that you have made. It may or may not resemble the God that exists and who spoke and showed himself in Jesus the Christ. Just because we have the label right (Jesus), doesn't mean we have the content right. God made us in his image, but we are making ourselves, through our choices and habits, into the image of the picture of the god we believe in. If that god is not like the God who is there, we are worshiping an idol – and we will become like it rather than Him. It will resemble the Flesh, the Devil, Worldliness, or some combination of the three, but not Jesus and true, redeemed humanity. Now, none of our heart-pictures of God are perfect. However, Scripture says we can "know" God. We can be close enough so that the functional picture of God we carry in our minds works as real knowledge of the one whose ways and being are much higher than our own. We call it "resemblance." The picture of God in our hearts and minds is not anything like perfect or complete. But it can resemble him beautifully, and the Holy Spirit can conform us to Him through that resemblance.

You will either have his Rule, or you will be ruled by worldliness, your stomach, your past or those that want to use you. He has come to give you real liberty and life to the full. He has given you his Spirit, who works in accordance with his vine dressing. He has come to deepen your heart, renew your mind, give peace and rest for your soul, and renew your strength. **Faith is not just taking on his name, it is submitting to his program.** His Rule. His discipline as his disciples.

What does it take to find the Liberty, blessing and love of Christ? God has made us creatures who must consume or die. Most of our desires and pleasures are bound up in our nature as creatures. We consume our world through senses, and the pleasures of these senses are rooted in our life in the body. Work and rest, eating, sex, rest, warmth or coolness, embrace, bathing – so many pleasures are "sensuous," or of and through our embodied senses. These are not the only pleasures, or even

the deepest ones, but they are good pleasures connected to the common acts of life in the body. This is a good gift of God. We are holy creatures, divine animals. Deny the body and we deny the will of God, the good of creation, and our own nature. To do so is not just a blasphemy, it is also an inhumanity.

Further, these good pleasures of the physical senses are conduits for greater moral and spiritual goods. We express and receive in and through our bodies most acts of courage, nobility, honor, compassion, mercy and love. The pleasures of our senses are amplified and mingled with the pleasures of the heart, mind and soul, working in harmony to make up the human self and community. We were created and redeemed to express the divine image in the material creation through this body of flesh, senses, work and consumption. Hence, the body is good in itself and is the means of the greater goods of spiritual life.

However, life in the body is also vulnerable and broken. Our senses don't always guide us rightly and can suffer from great distemper and obsession – the embodied cravings of sin which Scripture calls "the Flesh." 2 Peter 1:4 says that this is the main thing we need to escape in our knowledge of Christ: "escape the corruption that is in the world, caused by evil desires." That is, we humans have a desire problem. The Apostle Paul uses the word "Epithumia", meaning something like passions that are overwrought, out of control, misplaced, addicted, craving, intemperate – more like an obsessive itch than a rich love. They do damage in us and through us.

A large part of sanctification (Christ growing holiness in us through his Spirit) is fully reconnecting our heart with our soul, with a mature mind and a renewed strength. **The goal here is not just to exert self-control when our desires are evil, but to experience an increasing healing in our desires and a great deepening of our emotions.** Hence 2 Peter 1:5 ends with the virtue not of self-control, but love. Love is the perfect union of heart, soul, mind, and strength renewed in the mind of Christ, expressed in perfect liberty and virtue toward the true good of another. Love is the result of our hearts loving another in the love of God with our whole redeemed, united, and tempered self.

So now the trellis and pruning of Jesus: **how do we come to good desire and a renewed mind in Christ? The short answer is: practice.** "Practice" assumes we are exerting faith in Christ and the Gospel and are seeking to walk in the Spirit. This, after all, is what we are practicing. The question is: how do we practice this? The first answer is simply obedience. Do what Jesus commanded. However, most people find we aren't getting that done well – not without some kind of training along with it. We need what Jesus called "discipleship" – holistic spiritual training.

The old traditions used the word "ascetic," which often referred to extreme self-denial. Although many (even very extreme) forms of self-denial are not forbidden in Scripture, they are also not taught. In fact, in Colossians 2:16ff the apostle explicitly tells believers that asceticism can be a form of legalism (a false gospel), including "self-imposed worship, false humility, [and] harsh treatment of the body," yet he says they "lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence." (vs 23).

□ remind:
"practice" is
not solely
exhibiting
self-control.
We are
empowered
by the
Holy Spirit.

Who would have thought? Be harsh with your body for the wrong reasons and you'll get bad results – though you'll get the results you were actually looking for – a pleasurable and evil bath of self-righteousness. That is, there is a way to renounce our natural life in the body that is hard on creation and doesn't do anything to order *epithumia*—the distemper of desire in our hearts and minds. That is the wrong kind of self-denial. Yet, Jesus and his apostle aren't all spas and milkshakes either.

There is a kind of intentional deprivation that is critical to spiritual growth. The word "ascetic" comes from the Greek "askein" which means to train for athletic competition. That is, there is a self-denial that is specifically for a good purpose. Jesus affirmed fasting as a spiritual discipline with purpose. In 1 Cor 9:19-27 the Apostle Paul talks about freedom, and then discipline. In vs. 19-23 he says he used his freedom to love – to be flexible in himself so as to reach people of all kinds with Christ. Love requires flexibility with integrity: liberty. Then, in vs 24-27 he makes clear that his freedom must be rooted in discipline (*askein*). This training is a harshness, but one that aids in the success of our acts in the body, the completion and fruition of good desire. The apostle says, "I don't run aimlessly, or train for boxing by punching the air; I beat my body into submission so I can win the prize." Discipline is one thing in Christian life that is FOR something else. We don't deprive ourselves because deprivation is good in itself. We deprive ourselves in specific ways because such deprivation is good FOR us – to train us for our goal to run the race in Christ.

Read Colossians 2:16-23 and notice two errors: too much mysticism and too much asceticism. Letting your abstract imagination go wild and taking deprecation and austerity too far for the wrong reasons. Notice that both of these are not motivated by a desire for growth in godliness but are rooted in pride. They are "puffed up." The training they subject themselves to isn't rooted in faith in the good news of God's work for us in Christ; rather, the acts of worship are self-imposed. They are not God's prescription or idea. This amounts to a false humility; they make themselves "low" in their extra effort for God, but it's a false humility. They are motivated by pride. Last, they utilize a "harsh treatment of the body." That is, it's not the right kind of deprivation. It isn't the restraint that gets the senses back in line. These are acts that punish the body for being a body. They aren't "body correcting" acts, but body punishing acts. Such asceticism is not training. It is God-ignoring self-abuse rooted in religious pride. No wonder it has no power to curb sensual desires.

The austerity and asceticism of Jesus is for your good. It promotes a deep heart, a sound mind, a restored soul and a renewed strength. It frees us from the slavery of desire, the itch of craving, and a mindless reflexive indulgence that strengthens harmful habits of body and heart. This training is not a work we do to earn God's love, but a way to receive a gift of his grace. This is not something we are doing for him; it is yet another thing he is doing for us. Not only is he training us, but he is also preparing us to receive the gift of solidarity with him: to walk with him in his sufferings and to experience resurrection love (Phil 3:11?). To really walk with

him in his mission, we need to be strengthened. We can't be spiritually made from the frothy mist of worldliness. We need to be growing into oaks of righteousness. When my kids were young, they asked if they could go with me on backpacking or hunting trips. I always said, "This is something I'll share with you when you grow stronger; as soon as you're ready." It would have only been misery for us both if I had taken them before they were ready, yet as their dad, emotionally, I couldn't wait until they were ready for me to share these things with them. There are some gifts God can only give you when you grow into being able to bear them. They are some of the closest things to his heart.

You've measured for a while. Does the God of your measured life resemble the God of Scripture or the man Jesus Christ? Does it seem to be getting closer or further away? Is what you are doing taking you where you want to go? It's time to start taking stock. Is this the trellis you want to shape you? Is this the Trellis of Jesus? Is your discipline of life the one of his discipleship? Is your Rule like his Rule?

□ use this analogy

Week 4 Reflection Questions:

Take some time to read and answer the following questions before coming back to share.

1. Why are you doing this? What are you really hoping to accomplish?
2. Read the parable of the soils in Mark 4:1-20. Which soil do you most identify with at this time?
3. Where have you been stuck?
4. What is God speaking to you? What realizations are you having?
5. What will you have to let go of? What are you afraid of losing in this process? Who might you have to "let down"?
6. What persistent problem don't you understand?
7. In what ways are you currently living as Christ's disciple? How do you hope your life will look in a month from now? In a year from now?

Week 5 – Escaping Diversion/Eliminating Poison

Ephesians 4:17 - 5:1-16 – 17 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. 20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned 21 when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. 25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold. 28 Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

1 Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. 3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. 4 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. 5 For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. 7 Therefore do not be partners with them. 8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord. 11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 13 But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. 14 This is why it is said: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." 15 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

The Purpose of Month 2: Subtraction and Experimentation

In the Second month of Rule of Life we are going to do two things. First, we are going to subtract as much distraction as you are willing to from your life – anything unessential. **It is a month of detox, removal, fasting, minimalism, quiet, solitude, even turning over the tables of what has choked your life, cluttered your soul, distracted your mind, fractured your attention, and sapped your strength.** Second, we are going to experiment with the most Biblical habits and ordinances¹ of spiritual growth, often called "spiritual disciplines".

Making Room:

Our lives in the busy, consuming, infinity scrolling world are more like this than we are ever willing to admit. **Our lives are jammed "full."** We go through days and haven't done basic things, though we have spent a lot of time doing unintentional things. It's like the 16-year-old boy that games for 8 hours but didn't take the time to brush his teeth. For example, do you have any tasks in your life that need to be done, but you "haven't had time" to do it, though you have watched hours of videos, or scrolled through a few hundred memes? There is a Gibson parenting saying, "Work responsibilities before leisure activities." We have to have this saying because my kids would rather play video games than do their chores. We also have it because if we don't, their dad will leave a new light fixture replacement boxed up in the hall for three weeks, even though I've logged 12 hours on YouTube.

The problem is that our bodies and minds literally prefer what makes us comfortable. Something in us actually prefers just watching. We prefer watching stories, gawking over memes, clutching our pearls over the news, and drinking high fructose corn syrup like it's a vitamin over doing what we "should." There are YouTube videos of people mowing a lawn with comments from people saying that watching it is "so satisfying." Meanwhile, the commenter's lawn isn't mowed. Our senses are never full enough to defer our attention and time to meaning. They will fill every moment of our time, and occupy every second of our attention with amusements, vanities and sensualities. In order to incorporate God's will into our lives, we have to make room.

Scripture both teaches and shows us spiritual disciplines of making room. In some ways, these are less disciplines that are practices, and more disciplines that make room for what God wants to do in and with us. They make room for reflection and meditation. They make a time and place to do spiritual practices. They make time and space to do good works which God has called us to do. They make time for other people. They make time to enjoy God and reconnect with him. They make space for the things that are most needful, but which are crowded out by more urgent things. As Jesus told Martha, sometimes the most important spiritual choice is in choosing the most important thing even if it makes you look irresponsible to the otherwise responsible, industrious, or busy people (Luke 10:38-42). Making room as the first priority is the spiritual insight that caused Martin Luther to say, "I have so much to do today that I shall have to spend the first three hours in prayer." Or as he said elsewhere, "The less I pray the harder it gets; the more I pray, the better it goes."

Yet for all our good intentions to do the best thing with a calm, intentional, and attentive spirit, we will never do anything spiritual or obedient without first making room. **The Devil would love to damn men with great acts of passionate wickedness. But his most effective tool is to make men busy with urgencies, and displace spiritual goods with constant diversions and crises, until these come on their own and the person expects nothing else.**

The first practical step of applying our faith in the way of Jesus toward his "joy in progress" is to make room for him in key ways in order to abide in and with him. In the famous parable of the sower (Mark 4) there are four soils, but only the fourth produces fruit. In the first soil, "along the path," the person never believes: the seed of the word just gets swept away; the birds eat it. In the second rocky soil, there is no room for roots among the rocks. There is no room inside of this person for a deeper hold of the gospel. In the third soil, thorns and thistles

grew up around the growing plant, choking it in making it unfruitful. Jesus says that this choking comes from the "worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth;" in Mark's gospel Jesus says "the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things" choke the word and make it unfruitful. For these two soils faith cannot bring progress, perseverance, and joy because there is no room for it – either inside or outside the person. In the second soil, there is no real change of attitude to be like Christ. In the third soil, the pressures of external life crowd in on the faith and squeeze it.

Thus, one of the most fundamental actions of trusting God in faith is making room. Imagine inviting someone to move in with you when you have been living alone for years. Your stuff is everywhere, while they are bringing new things. The only way this works is if you get rid of some stuff. You have to make room. And since Jesus is Lord and King, Savior and Master of a new way that is saving us, we're going to need to get rid of a lot. In this process, one of the first spiritual disciplines is making practical room in our hearts, in our time, and in our priorities to abide in him. We need space for God in our attention, and we need time in our lives to pursue his way, his truth and his life.

Remember the great irony of the nativity is that Jesus was born in a stable because there was "no room for him at the inn." No room? Seriously? Are we to believe that every person in that inn was rightly a higher priority than a woman in labor? Of course not. The people in the inn got there first. They had more money. They knew people. They were unwilling to move. Maybe the owner was so concerned with his customers, he didn't make Mary's needs an issue. We don't know exactly why it happened that way, but everyone knows it was wrong. Like making an 80-year-old woman stand on the subway because no one gets up – everyone knows it's wrong, but no one does what needs to be done. This is human nature. This is why people are the second soil with no root and the third soil that is choked by the world. Both are willing to believe, but neither makes the right kind of room. They just go with the World's flow and hope to be like Jesus.

Imagine being an inn keeper in Bethlehem when Mary arrived at your door. How hard would it have been to tell some fat, rich, self-important middle-aged woman from Hebron that she needed to give up her room for a poor pregnant woman? You can almost feel the spraying spit and hot breath of her berating you four inches from your face. Yet think about what is said in Galatians 5:25, "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

Making room for living by the Spirit and keeping in step with the Spirit means crucifying the flesh. The amount of spiritual ferocity needed to combat the flesh is the kind of brutal energy it would take to nail someone to a cross. To enjoy the glorious improvisational liberty of keeping in step with the Spirit, you have to cut back what's choking everything off, and keeping you from having deep roots. Otherwise, you will wilt or be choked in your faith, and there will be no room for our Lord in the inn of your life. You have to make room.

When I was in seminary I worked at a very busy and popular restaurant. We often served 3000 people a night, and wait times were up to 3 hours. I was a host, and I was the only host that chose door duty. Door duty was the place you were most likely to get screamed at by some important Chicago businessman in front of his attractive third wife when you told him the wait time. People were mean, cutting, dismissive, angry, and sometimes threatening. Everyone

wanted to push, cuss, flatter or bribe their way to the front of the line. Yet, no matter what they said or did, it was my job to make room in accordance with the commands of the owner: "treat everyone the same." Without someone with absolute authority to decide who, how, and when someone got a table, the restaurant could not have functioned fruitfully. Even the toughest people were actually well-served if the doorman host was gracious, organized, and had a will of steel. I learned a lot about being ready for conflict to flare at any moment, how to never be badgered into a "yes," and how to repay blessing for insult.

I don't know of any class that trained me for ministry better than that job. I learned the importance of gatekeeping and space-making for organizations and individuals. **You can make space for a lot of things if you know how to host.** In fact, in the ancient world, the doorkeeper was a "low" position in court because it was a soldier, and yet it was considered a position of incredibly high trust and authority. The doorkeeper kept the king safe, and the king was the heart of the kingdom. Xerxes, the king of many kingdoms, who defeated the Spartans, was almost assassinated by his two doorkeepers, Bigthana and Teresh (Esther 2). He only survived because Mordecai sniffed out the plot and alerted him through Esther. Xerxes was the most powerful man in the world, but he almost died because he had bad doorkeepers.

Ask yourself, is the "doorkeeper" part of your character more like a Teresh or a Mordecai? **Is what comes into the chamber of your attention and time shaped by a godly man seeking your true good and justice, or a vain official pleasing the worst parts of you and giving you the worst for you of what you crave?** We need to do what the owner of the inn would not. We need to have the faith to crucify our relationship to the world. We need ferocity and integrity to make room.

In some ways, making room in our attention and time may be the hardest it's even been. We have 1000 things pushing their way into our lives, seeking our attention, and trying to tell us how to spend our time and energy. If we let social media, news apps, video algorithms, infinite scroll memes, gambling games, shopping apps, and the like push their way into our lives, they will control us. It's a slow assassination – what Mark 4 calls a choking weed. Other people's intentions will drive us, and our unwillingness to be the doorkeeper of our own lives will make us slaves. We need to hand the Technopoly a number and tell it that the wait is going to be 3 hours. We need to make a paying customer see that she needs to give up her room for Mary. We need to take control of who and what is taking up our time, energy, and attention and start making room.

There are two parts to this work: the internal work of our attitude, and the external work of structuring our time. We might think that the first will make the second work. Get the right attitude and then you'll do the right things. That makes logical sense, but it isn't psychologically insightful. It's not how humans actually work. We can make the small decision to make room for God, but we aren't strong enough yet to maintain a focused, God-centered attitude 24-7. We could instead make the decision to do something structured and scheduled: I'm not to work between sundown on Saturday to sundown on Sunday. Or, I am going to pray between 8:05 am until I'm done or 9:00 am comes. Or, I'm going to read the Bible for 15 minutes and journal a half page before I play any games or watch videos. We can make decisions to do things that will make us the kind of person that can have an attitude that is

more like Christ Jesus. We can start with making room in the ways God commanded and Jesus displayed in his ministry.

Temporary Minimalism: Escaping Diversion and Eliminating the Poison

Weakness can come from at least two sources. First is a lack of nourishment and conditioning. Someone liberated from a concentration camp is weak for this reason. Spiritually, someone that has not grown in discipleship or grown as a person may find themselves in this condition. Strength and maturity are not just the result of time. They have to be earned through the difficulty of development. This is a prevalent problem today.

There is another key dynamic that produces weakness: toxicity. Poison. An otherwise well fed and well-conditioned person can be poisoned and become weak, even unto death. The solution for this is not more food and more exercise, it is a removal or countering of the poison. Remove the toxin, and health can naturally return. Sometimes in order to add, you need to subtract. The only way forward is back.

In our spiritual lives, we often try harder when our problem isn't deprivation but toxicity. Some think faith should work effortlessly. These people are the first to quit when things get hard. Others believe that when faith makes things harder rather than easier that it doesn't work. These people quit next. Yet others face the hardship with effort, thinking that more effort must be the answer.

However, if the problem is toxicity rather than deprivation, this doesn't work. It fails because they don't spend their effort subtracting, they just try to push forward harder. They try to become inhumanly strong, when what they need is to drop the weight they are carrying and heal. They are trying to concentrate, but they have 10 things fracturing their attention. They want to be pure, but they tolerate many sensualities. They try to believe with confidence, but they carry wounds that are unhealed. They want to believe in God, but they constantly listen to people that act like he is unbelievable. They want to seek God's peace, but they anxiously connect themselves to a pipeline of news algorithmically designed to make them angry and afraid. They want to eat well but are eating foods made to create cravings. They want to climb a mountain with their conviction of faith, while tying their feet together with their other choices. The only way to add in this equation is to subtract.

Many gym personalities have said, "You can't exercise your way out of a bad diet." You can spend 3 hours on a treadmill and burn 900 calories and then eat that much in 10 minutes of anxiety or habit. The people I know that have lost weight permanently all tell me the same thing, "I fundamentally changed my relationship with food. It was the only way. And that change had to happen between my ears and in my emotions." The same is true of your mental and emotional life. To have a heart, mind, soul, and body that can be devoted to God, you will have to fundamentally change your relationship to all the ways you "eat" what is offered to your senses – especially in tech, news, media, gaming, consumption/shopping, politics, and everything else.

Many people don't make this change with food until it's killing them. Or they don't really try to change their marriage until someone leaves. Or they don't reevaluate how they parent a child until that kid has a major meltdown. We wait too long to realize we need deep

change – it's too painful otherwise. So, I have compiled a list of toxicity effects which have been pointed out are the result of the modern technology array. I hope when you read these it will sober you and motivate you to fundamentally change your relationship with technology, and anything else that need subtraction so you can experience Jesus' additions.

One of the best ways to determine what is slowly killing you in a busy world of gadgets, apps, screens, and a million other distractions is to cut everything that isn't 100% necessary for at least a month. If in doubt, cut it. In a month or so, you can add it back if you want to. If you REALLY don't want to stop it or want to add it back in less than 3 days, you really need to cut it for at least a month. If you can't, it is, by definition, something like an addiction.

This next month is a month of **strategic deprivation**. It isn't just fasting. We're not sure we are going to add it all back when we're done. **What we need is distance and simplicity in order to make intentional decisions. It's nearly impossible to get perspective when you're in the middle of something. This is especially true for things that provide us with comfort, ease, excitement, approval, control or power – and that are with us all the time. You need some distance to see that they are unhealthy, unholy, or just out of proportion.** It's hard to see what they are doing to you when you are up close. Distance is often necessary even in extreme circumstances like abuse. I can't tell you how many people I've known suffering consistent abuse that couldn't recognize it until they got perspective either from distance, or another person that could give them perspective.

This month, we aren't going to take someone else's word for it. All kinds of people with perspective have been telling us we need a new relationship with things in our lives – especially technology and consumption. It hasn't done it. We need to do it in the context of *personal* training. We need to find out for ourselves. We need to do an experiment in austerity and see what we learn. **There are many lessons that can only be learned in simplicity, solitude, quiet, distance and discomfort.** It is a better place to pay attention to deeper things and to take stock of who we are meant to be. When our attention isn't being drawn around by our senses, we can think about what we want our lives to be about.

☐ "We don't have good perspective because we're living in it."

The focus of this month is the elimination of everything that contributes to a life of diversion and distraction. Become something of a minimalist. Eliminate everything that can address itself to your attention, or to distract you from the deeper pursuits of the heart, the mind of Christ and what is health for bringing peace to your body. Remember though, that this is not your "new life." This is a temporary situation of fasting, asceticism, and deprivation. Some of you may keep a lot of these changes. Most won't. That's not the point. This is the month to be a fanatic. **You should feel anxious about it. Feel and face that reaction. You want your mind racing, saying, "this is crazy! I don't need to do this."** Stick with it. That's the addiction talking. It'll get worse for about 3 days and be mostly gone after 5 days. The challenge here is to cut away everything you can for one month, to be as minimalist as possible. In order to create an intentional life pursuing God's purposes, you have to really purge.

Last, choose an accountability person or small group and share what you did and didn't eliminate. Get some perspective from others. **If it isn't scary, if you aren't feeling an internal rebellion inside you, you aren't playing.** It should feel scary. Each of us will have to decide how far to go with elimination. However, **it is never the seed of Jesus' message or the living water of his life that fails us – it is always the choking distractions, the additional gods created by our**

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fear of missing out, the hurry of worry, and the other diversions of worldliness that block out the work of God in the heart. My advice is to overdo it. A month is barely any time at all. Unplug from as much as you possibly can that connects you to the whirling vortex of attention and consumption and let the world pass you by and see if something really good happens in your heart, soul, mind, body – and your mood. Although we aren't going to shame anyone for eliminating less, doing things together gives us accountability, solidarity, and opportunity to choose the good with each other.

- Step 1: Look over your measurements from last month and see what they reveal.
- Step 2: Make an aggressive list of things you could eliminate and make increasing levels of elimination for each thing on the list.
- Step 3: Choose which you will do, with the goal of having minimal pull on your attention and time. *→ "mentor" figure*
- Step 4: Have a **non-peer** look at your plan and give you honest feedback. Do they think this will accomplish the goal?
- Step 5: Have an accountability plan. Who is going to ask you how this is going?

Practical Good

Challenge: "Who is the type of person who won't let me off the hook?"

Here's a list of things to eliminate to get you going:

1. **Turn off all notifications** that are not necessary to receive at the time they come in (which is virtually all of them). I allow only text messages and Slack work messages at certain times. Everything else is silenced or cannot give me notifications.
2. **Put your phone on DND (Do Not Disturb) for everyone other than those selected as favorites.** Key people can reach you, but you'll have fewer disturbances.
3. **Unfollow everyone.** You can add them all back later.
4. **Minimize the number of apps you use** to the bare minimum.
5. **Delete every app with infinite scrolling.** These are the worst and most addictive. They are the biggest time sucks.
6. **Get news down to a couple weekly newsletters/digests** at most. No apps, sites, or cable news. I like Mike Woodruff's Friday summary.
7. **Make an email auto-reply that you will not be responding to emails** or will only be responding on certain days.
8. **Only watch video services like Netflix or sports with someone.** It is only ok as a social event that includes talking and hospitality.
9. **Have power down hours,** or power down for whole days at a time. Set a phone curfew. No use of it after that time.
10. **Eliminate online shopping.** Create a "want-it list." Add to it anything you want to research or buy. Then put it off. More specifically, decide not to purchase anything for the next month that isn't essential to life. No shopping at all. Zero.

Turn me 3 or 4 key to files

*Podcast | Sexily
News | Memes
 | Pictures*

7

11. **Use an app like Pocket to save articles or web pages** that grab your attention to read later. This allows you to know you aren't missing out, but this is not the time to read it.
12. **Make your device black and white.** This can substantially decrease how interesting it feels.
13. **Greatly narrow down what you do by email.** Unsubscribe to marketing emails, and if possible, use an auto-respond to tell people to get in touch with you another way.
14. **Buy and wear a watch.** Taking out our phones to see the time shows us our silenced notifications. Have the time on your wrist.
15. **Question EVERY time you reach for your phone:** Why am I taking my phone out, and do I need to?
16. **Switch to a flip phone** and add a tablet if necessary.
17. **Run apps only through a web browser** in a laptop or computer and delete the app from your phone.
18. **Eliminate all use of unnecessary tech:** shows, videos, video games, etc. Go to ZERO.
19. **Tell people you are disappearing** from tech communication for at least a month for your spiritual and mental health and ask them to respect that.
20. Delete most of the apps from your phone/tablet. You can reload them very easily. Delete all social media apps, meme apps, games, everything that isn't necessary for logistics or work.
21. **Take down any TVs** or remove their power cord for the month.
22. **Remove your gaming system** or tell all of your gaming buddies that you will not be on for the next month. Zero video games on any device.
23. **Eradicate the snacks.** Completely empty any area that contains snacks or fun drinks in your house. Have no non-food food available.

Spiritual Discipline and Gracious Striving

Spiritual disciplines are different from "life hacks" or "self-help" in that *God* makes them work. A spiritual discipline is something we do routinely and ritually for spiritual reasons and for a spiritual good. It is something we practice that God shows will help make us able to do something else that is in God's will for us – either something he has called us to change in our character or something he has called us to do. For example, **if you knew you needed to run a half marathon in four months, you would not prepare by trying to run a half marathon right now.** You might stop eating fast food. You might go for a jog, adding distance and intensity each day as your body gets stronger. You'd build up to it in strategic ways. **You would do things you are able, so that later, you can do what you can't yet do.** Similarly, a spiritual discipline is something you put into practice so that God can use it to enable you to do something you can't yet do.

Simultaneously, it is crucial that we recognize that God graciously empowers us to pursue these disciplines. They are done spiritually in that we do them in response to the Father's providence and choice, in our knowledge of Christ and his promises, and in the Spirit's presence and transforming power. In the same way that eating better and exercising pays off because of the way God made the human body, spiritual disciplines help us because God has ordained them as things He uses to accomplish His purposes in and through us. It is the work of the Spirit that allows our disciplines to strengthen, deepen and transform us. We do them spiritually – which means in and by the Holy Spirit.

To do a discipline graciously is to do it knowing that its effect on us is a gift of God, something our discipline would not have otherwise produced. When we achieve something graciously, our first impulse in success is to thank someone that made our effort matter. This is why almost every time the apostle Paul starts a letter, he starts it by thanking God. Whatever he did or the Christians to whom he was writing had done, he credits the good that has been accomplished to God. We may sweat and put forth great effort, but we prevail because of the gifts, promises, wisdom, and work of God.

The fact that God's contributions are spiritual in nature should not distract from the fact that they are what make change possible. The apostle Paul says it this way in 1 Corinthians 3:6 – "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So, neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who makes it grow." This is not only true of the original salvation we receive when we believe; it is true of all of our sanctifying growth as well. Our sweaty striving only makes a difference because of God's spiritual work through the disciplines, ordinances, obediences, and sacred times we devote to Him.

Without God's Word and Spirit we are called "dead" and "dry bones" (Ezekiel 37). We have "hearts of stone". We need to be "born again" and "saved". All of these references to our salvation and transformation treat us as the passive recipient—they are done *to* us. This does not diminish our effort. **It emphasizes the decisive importance of God's power and teaches us humility, thankfulness, peace, and joy: humility, because we can't brag; thankfulness, because it would not have happened if God had not been generous with us; peace, because the God who started this work will complete it and the one that gave his Son will gladly give us all we need; and joy, because he has done incredible things for and in us.** The Apostle Paul said it this way: that everything God does for us is for our "progress and joy in the faith" (Phil 1:25).

God has ordained to work graciously through what he has ordained. He uses the things he said he would use: sacred space, ordinances, disciplines, and obedience. This is the "way of life" we are taught that is in line with the truth that is in Jesus. Notice in Ephesians 4 there are three areas of restoration: our way of life, the attitude of our minds, and our self. Faith in Jesus continually changes us by changing what we do, how we think, and who we are. We are literally putting off an old self and putting on a new one. The new self is one that is still faithful to who God made us in creation – our humanity, our sex, our temperament, our abilities. The "self" in the context of this passage is who we make ourselves to be, based on our way of life and the attitudes of our mind. It is who we become because of what we believe in and what we come to believe because of what we do.

Scripture gives us no hope of progress or joy through the spiritual and gracious work of God if we refuse the way of Jesus, with its sacred times, its ordinances, its disciplines and its

Good
Section

obediences. Believing in Jesus means following the master through discipleship. It means trusting the Lord, and trusting him enough to put off the old self and put on the new self. It means forsaking the old way of life and the old attitudes of our mind, and to instead pursue a new focus of our attention and a new path that is laid out by Jesus' example and completely worthy of our imitation. Ironically, we become this best original version of our self, this new self being renewed in the image of its creator, when we imitate Jesus in his way and in his attitudes. Thus, we should make every effort to embrace these disciplines spiritually, vigilantly mindful that they operate by grace. At High Point, we often call this "gracious striving." If we do this, it will keep us from both discouragement and pride. Both discouragement and pride lead to quitting and misery. Pride says I don't need disciplines, and discouragement doesn't believe they will make any difference. The gracious work of the Spirit says you need them, and they will make all the difference. We accept that God has both ordained a sweaty spiritual pursuit of Him through his ordinances, and that He is always graciously working in us through them.

4 categories of Ordinances: Space, rituals, disciplines, and obediences.

In order to achieve our overall goal of a more intentional life in God, it's helpful to distinguish the different sorts of ordinances that God has ordained, or appointed, for our progress and joy. I have divided them into 4 categories:

1. **Space.** God has ordained sacred spaces to eliminate distractions, make room in our lives for good works, find the silence and solitude necessary for reflection, meditation, illumination and have the focus needed to seek God through prayer and worship. But if we don't make room, the cares of this world, persecutions, and desires for other things "choke the word and make it unfruitful" in our lives (Mark 4:19). Without developing the discipline to make space for what God has ordained, we won't "have time" for anything else. Disciplines of sacred space are what allow for the other spiritual ordinances and disciplines to take place. Disciplines of making space would be:
 - a. **Public worship** – gathering and worshiping with the local Body of Christ
 - b. **Sabbath** – making room for God and others through rest. Sabbath is ceasing from work and focusing on God's restoration for one appointed day each week. In creating an attention economy, we have created a world of noise, consumption, activity, constant novelty, and amusement. God's pre-eminent discipline is the only one listed in the Ten Commandments: Sabbath, a word that literally means to rest by ceasing. God didn't "rest" so much as he stopped. After 6 days of the activity of creation, he stopped. He came to be "at rest." He parked himself, turned the key off, and sat. God commanded that his ceasing should be honored by a workweek consisting of six days of fruitful labor, and one day of rest. His first discipline was the discipline of making room. God knew from the beginning that we needed that. The first thing God told us we needed to do was to have one day a week in which we needed to do nothing.
 - c. **Fasting** – making room from the distraction of sensual desires through strategic deprivation. In Scripture, fasting is refraining from eating food for purposes of

□ consider:
introducing
environment
- practices
- obediences

(you began to
dive into it
more
later weeks

spiritual growth and divine petition. Additionally, many use it as a discipline of subtraction, because refraining from eating frees up time for prayer, worship and devotion. Fasting is now sometimes also connected with other intentional deprivations to make space for God. People speak of fasting from technologies, or shopping, or other things that distract our singular focus on God, though they are not bad in themselves. For example, in 1 Corinthians 7, married couples are encouraged to fast from regular sexual intercourse, "by mutual consent and for prayer". That is, they do not engage in an inherently good act of natural enjoyment for a time to make room for prayer in their shared life together to increase their spiritual intimacy with God and each other.

How do You do Solitude?
* * * * * as a
family?
How do You do family
devotions?
"in the presence
of no other
minds."

d. **Silence and solitude** – having time and space with no mental distractions where you are only present with your own mind, and what your mind needs to focus on – often prayer, worship, Scripture, or meditation. Many important mental and emotional processes for spiritual growth and maturity require a calm and quiet mind, and usually a calm and quiet space.

e. **Fellowship** – making room to spend time in sacred relationships with other believers, and making relational space to receive God's work from others.

2. **Rituals.** Baptism and communion/the Lord's Supper/the Eucharist (Greek word for "Thanksgiving") are sacred rituals ordained by Jesus for us to use in the gathered body. These rituals, or sacred actions that point to greater spiritual truths, are ordained by God for all believers as a lasting set of sacred rituals. Although Christians have disagreed vehemently about precisely how God is graciously present and working in the ordinances, all Christians have believed God uses these ordinances for the good of His people and has important intention in our faithful honoring and use of them. In most cases, if you make time for public worship, you will automatically be making time for these ordinances.

a. **Baptism** – this is our individual profession of faith that confirms our conversion and names us as a disciple of Jesus publicly among his people. It is the rite of initiation and belonging among the disciples that make up the church, and a recognition to the church's leadership that this new disciple is one of Christ's sheep. It symbolizes belonging to Christ as his disciple, cleansing from sin, death, and resurrection to a new spiritual life, and anticipating resurrection to new life from the dead. The church celebrates the gospel as still living and active as exemplified in the life of the new disciple.

b. **Lord's Supper** – a ritual ordained by Jesus where believers receive bread and wine that represent three realities: the broken body and shed blood of Christ, the nourishment that comes from the spiritual life of Jesus (a meal of bread and wine), and a pointing forward to a celebration supper that will happen at Christ's return. All of these are done to worship Christ as God and to, "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." In it, Christians also come penitently and are mindful to forgive others as they come to receive forgiveness and receive the atoning gift of God's mercy. The Lord's Supper points us to the mercy of God in

Fasting - Area of Interest + Confusion

11

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his atonement for sin, reminds us to humbly forgive as we remember we live by forgiveness, joyfully recognizes the promise of God in making our absolution, celebrates our coming resurrection and the return of Christ and his triumph, and assures us that God is spiritually nourishing us as the one who gave up his Son for us and will surely give us all things (Romans 8:32).

3. **Disciplines.** Spiritual disciplines are practices of spiritual training in which the Spirit helps us become able to do what we are not presently able to do. These would include prayer, worship, fasting, listening to and preaching the Bible, studying the Bible, and Scriptural memorization and meditation.
4. **Obediences.** Obeying is to live in righteousness motivated by faith, and using our liberty to ethically love our neighbor as ourselves by doing good works. This is to love others as Christ loved us. And to fulfill all the law of God in Christ.
 - a. **Avoiding Sin** – Refrain from known sins and live in ethical imitation of Jesus. This entails living in righteousness and seeking to act justly.
 - b. **Do good works in the service of others** – Out of love for the other, not love of reward or personal gain.
 - c. **Giving/generosity** – To be generous to those in need and the work of God. Three areas where God calls for generosity are to those in need, the ministry of the church, and the expansion of the ministry in what we call “missions” or what the New Testament called the work of “apostles” (means: “one who is sent”).
 - d. **Avocation** – Being purposeful about our leisure. God wants us to rest and have some leisure in a just society, but not all leisure is created equal.
 - e. **Hospitality and Fellowship** – Welcoming others who are our family in the Lord, who are strangers, and even who are enemies, is a critical part of peace-making and showing love. Giving up time, privacy, and other private goods to make a space of belonging and refreshment for others is a foundational human practice and a key spiritual obedience. You must decide when and where, but you should do something. Hospitality does not need to be done in a space you own, but it can be done in any “space” you can create that is refreshing and protecting of the person welcomed.
 - f. **Submission to authority** – God has given us ‘superiors’ in authority and experience that are here to help guide, nourish, and discipline us. God has given us overseers to submit to, shepherds to be fed and protected by, and elders to look up to and imitate. A posture of acceptance, and even a pursuit of spiritual discipleship or mentoring, is integral to progress and joy in Christ.

Though this may seem like a long list, many of these ordinances are done simultaneously. For example, going to public worship on the Lord's Day could incorporate all of the following: Sabbath, hospitality and fellowship, obedience to authority, generosity, prayer, worship, Bible reading and preaching, sharing in the Lord's Supper, or baptism. When you set aside a devotional time, you are engaging in silence and solitude, Bible meditation, prayer and worship. Further, avoidance of sin is not an additional act and takes no additional time. It instead saves much time repairing wrongs and injustices you might have otherwise created. **In the end, pursuing God's ordinances or commands is not a burden, but a path of liberation. The apostle John says it this way in 1 John 5:3 – 4: "this is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith."**

Week 5 Reflection + Discussion Questions:

1. Making Room:
2. Temporary Minimalism:
3. Spiritual Discipline and Gracious Striving:
4. 4 categories of Ordinances: Space, rituals, disciplines, and obediences.



1000

1000



1000



One must create space for solitude in order to

Week 6 – Giving Direct Attention to God

Colossians 3:1-11 - Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. 5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. 7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8 But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. 11 Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Mike: We are God's Temple. That realization supports pursuing God's attention & abiding to him.

What is the most important thing about you? I think you could probably answer that question number of different ways. You're a human being made in God's image. You are loved by God. The gospel is available to you. There are probably several reasonable answers. One possible answer is this: *what you give your attention to is the most important thing about you.* We look around in our world until our attention fixes on what is beautiful, admirable, powerful or competent – our attention fixes on it and studies what it does and how it functions. We feel a loyalty to it, and we treasure it in a certain kind of way.

Ultimately, because we imitate that which holds our interest, what we pay attention to will determine what we believe, how we develop, and even for eternity, what and who we are. The main way human beings develop and change is through imitation. In fact, humans imitate virtually everything they pay attention to, even if they don't want to. This is why your screen time matters. This is why your friends matter. This is why the books kids read in school matters. This is why who your teachers and coaches are matters. This is why the behavior of politicians and presidents matters. We express the worth of whatever object holds our gaze and imitate it. In this process, we become increasingly like the thing we pay attention to.

Intimacy with God

Once we can see that the thing that has value in our eyes and holds our attention becomes the most important thing about us, basic faith should tell us we should be paying attention to God. Contemporary Christians often talk about having a "relationship with God," or sometimes having "intimacy with God." In some sense, I think both of those phrases have validity. There are some places where biblical authors talk about their relationship with God in a way that seems to exude relational intimacy. Consider this verse from King David: "One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple." (Psalm 27:4) Or consider this one from Jeremiah: "Call to me and I will answer you, and tell you great and hidden things that you have not known." (Jeremiah 33). Hear what Jesus says in the farewell discourse: "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all

Review of the Need for the Environment of Solitude + Silence + Stillness.

Importance of quiet times for kids
Eg. Small children.

Should Silence Be incorporated in the Talk to NK:
Worship Services → prayer
↳ Worship
↳ Communion

truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you."(John 16:13-14)

This final except in John sounds a lot like Jesus is saying that the Holy Spirit is going to talk to us – like in speech somehow. It sounds like the Holy Spirit is going to tell us everything we need to know, that we are going to receive "all truth" from him through a deep, intimate relational connection.

However, although this is clearly an aspect of how God works with people, at the very least in the spiritual gift of prophecy, it doesn't seem to be the bread-and-butter of what Jesus or his apostles are telling us to focus on when they are telling us to focus on God. In 2 Peter 1:3-4, we are told that God gives us his power through our "*knowledge of him who called us [that is, Jesus] by his own glory and goodness, through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world.*" (2 Peter 1:4)

To do this we are told to pursue virtue through faith: to add to our faith all of the cumulative and constructive virtues until we arrive at love. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us to pursue him by recognizing we can't serve two masters, by putting away worry through faith, and by seeking "his kingdom and righteousness," promising that if we do so, everything else will be added to us. That is, we are to have faith in what God has spoken and shown about Himself; that we are to pursue God's revealed will concerning what He is doing in the world (His kingdom); and to pursue His will morally, in terms of what He desires in the world (His righteousness). We are not trying to see God face to face or hear his voice in a mystical encounter with his Spirit. We are to exercise faith in the objective content of what he has spoken and shown about himself in Jesus, and through his verbal inspiration, and in how He has displayed his actions in the history of his people.

Even in Psalm 27, when David says he wants to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life, and to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord, and to seek him in his temple – this is poetry. In Psalm 119, David talks about pouring over God's precepts, ordinances, and commands in all of his written word. He talks about how this fills his heart with joy and how it leads him to better understand God. It forms him in wisdom, pushes him forward in courage, and restrains him from doing evil. I'm not sure David had a literal beatific vision of the face of God in its complete beauty – one that Moses didn't even have. I think that Psalm 27 is a poem and is using a poetic depiction of the passion by which David is seeking who God really is, to love him with all his heart, to be where he is, and to be always in his service. This doesn't require any mystical event. We can share this passion, and pray Psalm 27:4 for ourselves, even if we feel like we have never "heard God's voice" in our hearts or minds in some kind of prophetic way.

Colossians 3 gives a very standard expression of what seeking intimacy with God is like. This is how the apostles, and Jesus, normally encourage us to seek to have a relationship with God. By believing in Jesus and God's intimate heart towards us, we are to do what Jesus did, love what Jesus loved, and set our hearts and minds on his kingdom and righteousness. So, the apostle Paul tells us to set our hearts and minds on things above, where Christ is at the right hand of God the Father. In this passage, seeking intimacy with God is a passionate vision rooted in faith that comes out in the mortification of sin and putting on the virtues of Christ. **Seeking intimacy with God is to have a heightened vision toward heaven, to "put off"**

the old life of sin, and to “put on” the new life of divine virtues that produce true righteousness, real justice, and enduring love.

I say this not to discount the idea that God can “speak to people.” Lots of Christians believe that God has mystically spoken to them – that they have heard his voice in their minds/hearts, or that they have had a prophetic experience of something they should tell others, or a vision of something that has important meaning. The presence of the gift of prophecy in Scripture demonstrates that God does speak to people. Yet, the prevalence of this is not universal. In fact, 1 Corinthians 12 explicitly states that not everyone has the gift of prophecy in a rhetorical question that, in Greek, is framed in the negative. In contemporary English versions, verse 29-31a is translated: “...are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire the greater gifts...” These are rhetorical questions. The answer to each is, “of course not.” However, a more literal translation would be “not all are apostles? Not all are prophets?...” and so on. Paul uses a negative particle to make extra clear that not everyone has these gifts.

This is to emphasize his theme, that we all have different gifts, and that this leads to two spiritual conclusions. First, the Holy Spirit is completely sovereign in who he chooses to give any gift to. Secondly, the Holy Spirit gives the gifts he pleases to whom he pleases in order that together we are made a “whole body.” That is, the giving of the gifts to each person is intentionally incomplete individually. This is meant to draw us together to be a complete body, and in being united, increase in our bond with, concern for, and love of one another. I don’t know of anywhere in the New Testament that decisively teaches us that we should all expect to hear from God by him revealing things directly into our consciousness in words or pictures. I believe this just as strongly as I believe that we *should* expect that some of us will have things revealed directly into our consciousness from God prophetically as a particular gift of the Holy Spirit. If we understand that possessing this gift is not a determination of intimacy or how much God loves us, then it will also not be a point of jealousy.

Direct Attention on God

So, then what does it really mean to pursue intimacy with the author and creator of the universe? I have settled on this phrase: we must “give direct attention to God.” This phrase focuses on our action, not God’s. By faith, we trust that God’s attention is always on us. He has told us this is the case. We also know that our attention is rarely on God. Our mind tends to be filled with the desires of the flesh and the cares of the world.

However, as we work through what the Bible describes as devotion to God, we can see that it doesn’t have to be reduced to God speaking into our consciousness directly, or a strong feeling of his immediate presence in our bodies, or in direct miraculous healing events. I do not in any way discount God working in this way. I even agree with my more charismatic brothers and sisters who would argue that God is willing to act this way more if we would seek it. To quote the apostle James, “we do not have because we do not ask.” Jesus said in John 14 that we would do “even greater things than these,” referring to his miracles. But when we read what Jesus said our spirituality would be like without him in his farewell discourse (John 13 – 17) or look at the description of Christian spirituality in the writings of the apostles, it looks a lot like Colossians 3:1 – 11. If we read through Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Romans, and the like we will find a spirituality of believing what has been

- consider presenting 3 strains
- rituals for God
- word of God
- power of God

revealed in Jesus and applying it through obedient faith, trusting that the Holy Spirit is with us and working in us even if we can't feel it. In fact, it is assumed that we normally will *not* feel his presence.

Therefore, direct attention on God means to focus our attention on God himself, and the things God has told us to focus our attention on. Scripture teaches that the main work of giving direct on God to God is to attend to what he said and what he is doing. Second, we are to do it in spite of what our flesh is drawn to attend to, which is everything else. Diogenes Allen, a respected author of spiritual theology, offers this perspective: "The task of paying attention is demanding. It can be performed only as one gains some freedom from self-importance and self-concern." We can contemplate God himself – "to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord." We can also contemplate his revelation of himself in Christ. We can set our hearts and minds on what he did, and what he taught. ~~We can consider what he said to~~

We place our direct attention on God through spiritual disciplines of reading scripture, praying and engaging in worship – whether we feel anything or not. Doing good works we believe he has prepared for us to do (Ephesians 2:10), pursuing him in obedience, or doing anything He has told us to do are ways of putting direct focus on God. God has taught us to believe that when we set our gaze on him, the Holy Spirit is with us and is working. He is not just with us, but in us. Part of trusting him as a loving Father or Husband to the Bride of Christ is to submit to his operation in our relationship.

Myths and fairytales have always taught that it is a waste of our emotional energy and a temptation to our minds for us to second-guess the ways of a goodhearted superior. In the myth of Eros and Psyche, Eros the God of love takes Psyche, a beautiful human woman bride, but comes to her in darkness and does not allow her to see him in the light. Though she is rapturously happy in the marriage, she is tempted to take in a candle and get a glimpse of him while he is sleeping. She ultimately does so, and a drop of wax falls onto his skin, waking him. Eros departs forever, leaving Psyche alone and devastated. Greek myths seek to embody tragic faults – faults or temptations that may seem small, but that can ruin everything. Because Psyche didn't accept the stipulation of her superior and how he loved her, it destroyed the relationship, and her happiness forever.

Cinderella doesn't question why she has to be home at midnight. She recognizes that if she asks, "why should I have to be home at midnight?" the fairy godmother might ask, "well why should I be here making you a magic coach and ball gown in the first place?" The gracious generosity of the superior has to be accepted on the terms in which it's given.

You can see this in the book of Job in the Bible as well. Job is broken down into misery, but his misery is made worse by his desire to get an answer from God as to why he is suffering. Asking why we are suffering is perhaps the most natural question you could possibly ask if you believe in a good and loving God and you are suffering. And yet, Scripture continually reveals that it is also the most unproductive question you can ask while you are suffering, unless you know that you have been committing a grievous sin that can be repented of. Demanding that God answer your "why" questions will only corrode your faith, it will not force God to behave as a mortal and to be manipulated by your demands.

Scripture teaches that God has his own good and inscrutable reasons for how He interacts with suffering, and why He reveals himself as He does, and hides Himself as He does. We may seek God's immediate manifest presence as much as we want, and sometimes we may experience amazing things. Sometimes other people will experience amazing things, and we

won't. But if we trust God in real faith, we should take His lead and instructions about how to fix our attention on Him. **There is part of our minds which will always demand explanation – the part of our minds that is filled with idolatry. The part that thinks that we are gods too.**

This dynamic of the strange hiddenness of God, and how it affects our faith, our sense of ourselves, and our sin was taken up and retold by C.S. Lewis in his book *Till We Have Faces*. In it, he implicitly argues that God cannot reveal himself to us meaningfully "till we have faces." Until then, we will think it is God who doesn't have a face, who hides himself and who leaves us alone with our questions.

So how has God instructed us to pay direct attention to Him? On this, Christians have virtually all always agreed. These answers have not been controversial. God has ordained several practical means for us to place our attention on him. Among them are prayer, worship, ordinances of the Lord's Supper and baptism, attending to Scripture, and contemplation. All of these ordinances of attention to God are done individually and corporately in Scripture. Virtually all of these practices of attending to God are done in most churches on the Lord's Day. God-centered worship services will include worship, usually incorporating music and theological poetry in the form of "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." Churches will celebrate the ordinances of the Lord's Supper and baptism, both of which focus us dramatically on the work of Christ and the gospel, and what it means to be his disciple. There is the inclusion of the public reading of Scripture and preaching on the basis of Scripture. The goal of this is to lead to further meditation and contemplation on the meaning of God's word. Worship on the Lord's Day should also include fellowship with other believers before and after the service.

Incorporating Disciplines of Direct Attention to God

In the second month, consider several ways to incorporate the disciplines of direct attention to God into your life. As you review these disciplines, *notice that all of them are practices already built into most worship services when we gather together on the Lord's Day.*

Gathered worship has been a key part of God's people's lives since the tabernacle in the desert. It is a place where they rally to each other regularly and feed off each other's faith. It is a place where we worship God, embrace humility, learn from his Word, and rehearse and remember his promises through key rituals of faith. Sadly, most professing Christians who say their faith is very important to them still only attend church about twice a month. A single generation ago the average American Christian attended church at least three times a week – Sunday morning, Sunday evening and Wednesday night. It was also very common to additionally attend Sunday school. Thus the average American Christian, in a single generation, has gone from 16 hours of corporate disciplines to attend on God to four hours. Additionally, sermons and services have, for the most part, gotten shorter, the music has less theology in it, less prayer is incorporated in worship services, and teaching overall has been dumbed down and made much less theological and moral.

Decide that you are the sort of person who goes to church every Sunday. I encourage you to plan to be at church every Lord's Day for the full duration – that usually means two "service times." Make sure that during one service time you go into corporate worship. With the second service time, either serve or attend a class. Make this a predetermination, not something you decide based on how good you think anything is. Decide you are going to go

to a Sunday class before you even know what the Sunday classes are. If they stink, you will only have clout to help them improve if you are going to one. You should definitely fight for the quality of teaching and worship at your church, but you can only do this as a committed insider who everyone knows wants the best for the church and those seeking to serve it.

1. **Prayer** – Almost all references to prayer in the Bible are corporate in nature. God's people are praying either with one another or for one another. Jesus did say that when we pray, we should "go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (Matt. 6:6) This has led to the notion of a "prayer closet" where we do all of our private and secret praying. There is nothing wrong with this in particular, but the actual argument Jesus is making is not actually that prayer should be in private, but that it shouldn't be for show. The 18th century revivalist John Wesley, in his journals, once referred to private prayer as "unscriptural." Not that he didn't pray alone or to himself ever, but he noticed that it was virtually never spoken of in Scripture. I say this not as a fundamental truth, but to balance the common conception that prayer is something that we do alone.

In Jesus' very next saying starting in John 6 verse 7, he says that we don't need to pray with many words because God already knows what we need, and then he starts what we now call "the Lord's Prayer" that begins with the word "our." That is, he is assuming the prayer is being stated in a group. If we apply this teaching and connect it with the rest of the biblical teaching on prayer, we will most commonly pray in a group, we will not pray in a showy way, and we will not use many words in our prayers. This is helpfully straightforward.

Further, if more people prayed with fewer words in corporate prayer meetings, we might not have as much trouble getting people to come to prayer meetings, or to pray with each other. The babbling that happens at Christian prayer meetings which sound like drawn out magical incantations and constant repetitions, is not only babbling in the magical sense of pagan thinking, it is also profoundly tedious in the presence of other believers.

Schedule additional time for prayer into your week. This can be short morning and evening prayers. It can be time with a prayer partner at work. It can be a zoom call at midnight with believers in Africa. It can be with your church's scheduled prayer meetings. It can be during a personal devotional time. The opportunities are infinite. If this intimidates you, I would encourage you to start praying with someone you respect. Find someone who prays like Jesus teaches us to pray as outlined above. Find someone who clearly has grown deep in their love for God, and who you believe their prayers are powerful and effective. And then pray with them on a regular basis until you have learned how to pray.

2. **Practice the ordinances: baptism and the Lord's Supper** – If you believe in Jesus for your salvation, and recognize his Lordship makes you his disciple, then you should be baptized. If you have not been baptized on the basis of your own profession of faith, you should pursue baptism in the local church. Although baptism can be done privately, it is better done as a public ordinance of the church if you live in a culture

Manokaa - Baptism + TLS are not "magical"

that does not persecute Christian baptisms. If they do it in India publicly, then you could probably do it publicly too.

This is also true of the Lord's Supper. Some people refrain from taking it because they don't feel "worthy." However, if you are a believer, we received the Lord's Supper on the basis of mercy and faith. We come to the meal hungry, as needy sinners, who seek forgiveness as a gift. As long as you are willing to trust Christ, and you recognize you are coming to a sin offering, then you should receive the Lord's Supper. Scripture says that we should "examine ourselves" before we come to the Lord's Supper. This examination means that we need to "[discern] the body of Christ as we eat and drink." (1 Corinthians 11:29) The "unworthy manner" of coming to the Lord's Supper in that chapter focuses on excluding other people from the Lord's Supper by eating it without them – especially for people who came to church late because of their work. To "discern the body of Christ" is to recognize that the death and resurrection of Jesus is for everyone – and that everyone should be treated with equal dignity and respect in coming to the Lord's Supper. It probably also includes a recognition of our sin, but the main focus is coming respectfully – recognizing what the broken body and shed blood of Christ has done for us. If you are a believer, and you are not receiving the Lord's Supper, you should speak to pastor immediately.

3. **Attend to Scripture and its preaching** – We believe that God is a speaking and showing God. He tells us to listen to Him, and to believe Him. He calls us to actively respond to He has spoken. He has told us to be careful to attend to and properly understand what He teaches.

Additionally, we believe that Scripture is the word of God written. The apostle Paul says that it is "God breathed." Jesus said even of the Old Testament that not one stroke of the pen would pass away until it was all fulfilled. Scripture presents itself as divine revelation, and thus the Word of God. It claims divine authorship in addition to human authorship. Therefore, Scripture expresses the teaching of the human author in the idiom of their personality, but it is also the testimony of God through God's inspiration. Therefore, attending to what God has spoken is one direct means of attending to him. This means we can and should participate in reading Scripture ourselves, listening to Scripture read, listening to instruction and preaching rooted in Scripture, and meditating and contemplating on the meaning of Scripture and its application to the way of Jesus in our lives. This also includes seeking to memorize key passages of Scripture so that we have their meaning with us all the time. In modern America, with modern printing and literacy rates, this probably means you need to have a Bible and read it, as well as attending to Christian teaching regularly and attentively. Disciples are literally intense and holistic students under the complete authority of their teacher. We must see ourselves as intense students of Jesus.

4. **Utilize musical art and poetry, and forms of beauty in worshiping God** – Most churches have musical worship. They sing psalms, hymns or other kinds of spiritual songs. The lyrics of the songs should be theologically truthful and "doxological" (doxa- glory, logos- word/logic of) or oriented toward expressing the glory of God in word.

There is additional value to attending to other artistic forms of expressing our love for God. God has always incorporated art and music in His worship. In fact, the first people in the Bible to receive the Holy Spirit are artists – craftsmen who are making items for God’s worship. Although God commanded that no one make images of Him, He also instructed that many of the items in His worship be constructed with beauty and artistry. To neglect this is to neglect the emotional nature of the human heart and our hunger for beauty. It also neglects that God is not just true and good, but He is also beautiful, and that beauty is the wellspring of pleasure and joy. Without experiencing and glorifying the beauty of God, we will not enjoy God as both we might and He deserves.

5. **Meditation/Contemplation** – Contemplation is to spend time slowly and calmly thinking more deeply about something important. Study isn’t the same as thinking about what things mean for *you* in the deeper sense. C.S. Lewis said the work of devils was to keep our attention on the “stream of immediate sense experience,” while God wants to lead us to a consideration of ultimate and meaningful things. The longest chapter in the Bible (Ps 119) is a long celebration on how transforming and fulfilling a life of meditation and contemplation of God’s Word is.

In contemporary usage, the word “meditate” often means a set of psychological practices seeking to bring about a certain state of mind in ourselves. We may not be focusing on ourselves in the practice of meditation, but we meditate, in effect, for ourselves. When the Bible uses the word meditate, this is not what it means. In Scripture, the word meditate is used to speak of deep mental and emotional contemplation on what God has shown and spoken about himself. In Joshua 1:8 God says, “do not let this book of the Law part from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.” In Psalm 48:9 we read, “Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love.” In Psalm 119:23 David says, “let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders.” In verse 48 he says, “I lift up my hands to your commands, which I love, and I meditate on your decrees.”

In each case, when the biblical author meditates, it means that he is deeply contemplating what God has given us to consider about himself. Mainly, this contemplation is directed at God’s written word, and what it tells us about who he is and what he has done. This is meant to lead us to deep understanding, powerful experiences of wonder and worship, and useful applications of God’s instruction. For this to happen, we have to spend considerable time in deep conversation, and also meaningful time in thought in which our minds are not distracted by more frivolous things. For many, this will best happen with the addition of memorization and journaling.

Because the technological world has so fractured our concentration and clarity of mind, memorizing Scripture allows us to hold it more clearly in our minds, and journaling allows us to focus on what we are physically writing on paper. The physical act of writing something down strongly reinforces what we inscribe. We have to think the thought clearly enough to write it down simply. Then we have to say it to ourselves again as we write it and hold it in our mind as long as it takes to actually write it down. We also write it down with our hand, and this bodily connection in the writing re-inscribes it back in our minds.

Manokak: the addition of corporate disciplines. + 1 Lent

The act of writing things down is powerful. It also allows us to come back to things and have continuity. We can read back through our journal and see the previous fruit of our contemplation, allowing us to benefit multiple times from a single act of contemplation. This allows us to remind ourselves of what we have learned, and continue to build our understanding, the depth of our devotion, and the wisdom of our practical actions.

Week 6 Reflection + Discussion Questions:

1. **Read Colossians 3:1-11.** Of all the things we are instructed in this passage, which directive feels the most necessary for you when it comes to actually directing your attention to God?
2. How does this week's explanation of "intimacy with God" differ from common contemporary Christian interpretations? What are the implications of this difference?
3. "*What you give your attention to is the most important thing about you.*" Do you agree with this statement? How does this perspective impact your understanding of spiritual formation?
4. What has been your experience in hearing God's voice? What do you think has either inhibited or enhanced your ability to hear Him when He speaks to you?
5. In what ways do you think communal spiritual practices differ from individual ones, and why might both be important?
6. Which of the practices covered this week will bring your heart and mind to their most worshipful state? Why do you think so?
7. Reflect on this summarized premise regarding prayer: *prayer should primarily be corporate and concise, rather than private and lengthy.* How does this perspective align with or differ from your experience with prayer—either privately or with others? What are the benefits to abiding by this premise, and what are the drawbacks?
8. What challenges do you anticipate facing when implementing the practices of meditation or contemplation?
9. What forms of artistry and beauty have been the most helpful in directing your attention to God?
10. Which of the practices covered this week are you most looking forward to trying?

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Week 7 – Welcoming the Ordinary

Ecclesiastes 3:10-14 – 10 I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet[a] no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. 12 I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. 13 That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. 14 I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him.

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St. Thomas Aquinas is perhaps the greatest theologian of virtue in the history of the church from the time the Bible was written to the Protestant Reformation. He believed that the virtues of temperance, justice and liberality were interlocking in the life of godliness. **That is, the right forms of discipline didn't choke life. Rather, they made us more just and generous, more virtuously lively, more loving towards others, and more fulfilled in our hearts.** The reason for this is that temperance puts a limit on what Aquinas called "sensible goods," or the objects of our desire and the sources of our sensual pleasure. If these are not restrained by reason, they will cause us to disregard other's rights and needs. Desire for the pleasures of the senses will eat up all of the resources we have--what the Medievalists called "*superflua*" or "that which runs over"--that you don't need for yourself and could be used for justice or liberality. Aquinas believed that all our wealth that isn't "necessary" is owed to others in the form of investment, justice, or generosity. In western culture, this principle has been used to justify taxes, but for the theologians like Aquinas, this was a personal moral matter, enforced by conscience before God. We have to decide the shape of temperance in our lives, acknowledge what we owe our neighbors in justice, and recognize what of our wealth is unnecessary for us and is owed in liberality to those people and pursuits God has put before us.⁴

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Aquinas' insight, which is certainly Biblical, is also psychologically practical. For instance, researchers had determined by 2011 from over 450,000 surveys that there was a level of income over which people did not experience increasing happiness. That level was a *household* income of \$75,000. In 2011, that was solidly middle class outside the cities, and low middle class in them. This tells us that up to a point, increases in wealth support growing happiness. But once your needs are met, increasing wealth stalls or even decreases your level of happiness. The very psychology of our happiness is determined by orienting our lives toward ordinary ends and simplicity in temperance and liberality, and as we pursue more and more, our happiness is more likely to dramatically decrease.

This reality is, ironically, in complete opposition with what John Mark Comer's calls "the Gospel of America": the idea that **the more you do, the more you'll have, and "the more you have, the happier you will be."** Worldliness constantly calls out to us: *"You are best off trying to live an extraordinary life! Living typical, uninteresting, repetitive, stuck, traditional, lives without risk or passion is boring, miserable and a*

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waste. It will leave you resentful, weary, and angry. Don't settle down; see the world! Don't settle for some ordinary lover, find your soul mate! Don't settle a job you don't love, find work that is almost play, and that changes the world! Don't get stuck doing the same thing every day, see what's new in the world! To be happy means to be ready to change, to risk, and to be bold!" Wisdom calmly responds with an alternative outlook: "Mammon is all promise and no substance. Embracing that which is ordinary isn't selling out, it's accepting the wholesome identity of a creature living in a world of rhythm and repetition. Travel some, but do it mainly to open your eyes to the infinite discoveries within your home. Acknowledge that work is toil, but see that it can be good and productive. There are no soul mates, but you can pour out your heart and soul for your ordinary mate. You don't need to see what is new in the world nearly as much as what is divinely lovely in it." Taking heed to wisdom's call not only produces in us a richer, more substantial understanding of life's purpose. It also produces in us a reliable happiness that is found in our relational bonds, in the duties we accept and perform, and in trusting the wholesomeness of how God has related us to creation. Things like caring for friends, being married and having children, helping others, pleasing God, building up a meaningful institution, and contributing through your work are the sorts of things anyone can attain and experience "positive life-evaluation." Our emotional wellbeing comes from rich, loving family and lasting friendships, and positive life-evaluation comes from setting ordinary, reasonable goals.

Solomon had the time, access and money to learn these lessons and way of wisdom the hard way. It ruined his life and legacy; his life is one of the most tragic there ever was when we compare his potential to his actual life. Yet the gift he gave us at the end of his life--the book of Ecclesiastes--is meant to help us escape these traps that he sprung. He cries out for us to see that vanity is vapor. Instead, we can recognize that worldly and fleshly brokenness, matched with the "burden God has laid on men" (Ecc. 3:10), actually push us toward holiness and happiness, love and fulfillment. God's strange limitation squeezes us back into reality and the simple road of ordinary fulfillment. He uses the ordinary to frustrate worldliness, forge substance, and remake your heart. Many of us experience these limitations and frustrations as an emotional "wall" where our life simply runs out of energy, hope, and strength. The reason for this is because whether we realize it or not, we Christians believe in the Gospel of America more than we'd like to admit. Thus, we taste its fruit: the anger, the burnout, the sense that our faith is "not working," the disillusionment. This leads some to "deconstruct" their faith and leave God's way. The problem is that we were not on God's way: either we were never on it to begin with, or somewhere along the way we strayed from the narrow path. However, the disillusionment of "the wall" is a mechanism meant to make us face our illusions. Walking away from Jesus confirms the illusion even if it stops the pain. God's work of bringing us to a point of disillusionment, with all the anxieties and depressions that come along with it, is also the way He ultimately burns off these

illusions. While good disillusionment hurts, faithfully walking through it ultimately frees us from the harmful illusions by which we live. Even God's presumed harms will often turn out to be gifts if we face them with painful honesty and humility.

Chasing the extraordinary and the pleasurable is the most predictable way to experience self-made misery and meaninglessness. We have to accept the good limitation of being a creature, while not accepting the limitations of our lack of substance. True happiness is found in ordinary toil; and in the burden of our mortality and desire for eternity, we should remember our Creator and know him. This is true wisdom, and a gateway to blessing, and a burning off of the mist of vanity that proves to be vapor.

Roles, Rhythms, Responsibilities, and Repetitions

The front lines of the argument between God and Mammon, or godliness and worldliness, is in the realm of our relationship to ordinary life. Extraordinary spiritual formation is marked significantly by its ordinary structure, and embracing the ordinary is a form of spiritual simplicity. What I mean by 'the Ordinary' is similar to what other spiritual writers have called the discipline of Simplicity. Simplicity was considered a key virtue in the ancient and medieval church--in times much less busy and with many fewer consumption opportunities. If this was important then, it may be 10x more important now. Mature spirituality has to learn to embrace the ordinary--to welcome it. This requires not just the theological conviction that the ordinary repetitions of life are good. It requires the emotional attention and space to actually welcome each ordinary moment and person: that is, to make people your object of hospitality, curiosity, generosity and avocation.

Michael Horton notes in his book *Ordinary* that "an observer of our culture might guess that we believe nothing is worse than being ordinary." We want life to be amazing. We want our life to be social media worthy. But real human life *is* ordinary, and it flourishes best when it is structured around the **4 R's: Roles, Rhythms, Responsibilities, and Repetitions.** The 4 R's apply equally to our participation in spiritual environments, spiritual disciplines, and spiritual obediences. I want to offer three areas of our lives in which we could apply the call to embrace the 4 R's and learn to embrace the ordinary: make room, give generously, and press into avocations.

□ consider expounding on these (chpt. in substance)

1. Make Room: Minimalism/Simplicity/Frugality. Clutter in our life and soul crowds out our capacity for emotional hospitality in the moment. We need simplicity. Frugality is a form of temperance that seeks to offset the deadly sin of avarice/greed. The ancients taught that avarice (desire for more than you need) is vanquished by generosity. However, to practice generosity, you must practice the intermediate virtue of frugality (not spending more than is needed). Only when we spend less (money, time, etc) than is needed do we save the extra that can be directed in the

virtue of liberality to the act of generosity. Frugality also recognizes the principle of simplicity—that everything we acquire increases the complexity of our lives. Everything we acquire is not only an expense in acquisition, it requires space, use, upkeep, time and attention. This is how our possessions end up confusing, controlling and complicating our lives. They steal our money, attention, energy, and time from the ordinary components of our lives and our capacity and supply for liberality towards others.

Consider: What if you sat down with someone wise that cares about you every few months and talked about what you needed to get out of your life? What if you did an intentional pruning at set, disciplined intervals, with someone that could push you in love to attain liberating simplicity? What things don't I need that need me? What apps, programs, channels, subscriptions are diverting my time, attention and resources?

2. **Give: service and financial generosity.** God gives to us so that we can give to others. We seek to work responsibly in order to achieve a surplus of time and wealth. We remember God's hand in our prosperity and his love for others by generously giving our surplus time and wealth to things God cares about. Our priorities are best determined by how we use the time and money that could be spent otherwise. Giving and service need to be both budgeted/planned and spontaneous outworkings of our availability. However, giving time or money can be neither if we have not prepared to have something to share. Consumerism must be replaced with contentment before we can be consistently generous.

We must sacrificially give of ourselves. Aquinas rightly understood the Biblical doctrine of giving. Jesus and the apostles taught the importance of serving others and giving financially as generously as we can. John Wesley said it very simply: Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can. Otherwise, the virtue of industry (unrestrained by temperance) will lead to vanity and worldliness. Thus, one virtue alone destroys the good and our souls. To grow in industry without temperance, justice and liberality, is to "scoop a fire into your lap."

3. **Press into avocations: voluntary cultivation.** Since WWII, advertising propaganda has been designed to convince us that consumption will make us happy, and the newest thing is a trend that should please us. This has shaped the emotions of 5 generations. Because of this, we tend to spend our free time pursuing things that do not foster love or service. Love and service is the act of making other people and their needs our avocation. An Avocation is a "non-vocation". "Vocation" comes from the Latin "*vocatio*" meaning "calling". Historically your vocation was your 'job'. Avocation is something we are not called to do as a job, but do because we just like doing it. We often call this "leisure", but it is your non-job life that does not include

hospitality
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your social vocations (like being a dad or neighbor). It's your elective life. Some think of it as our "hobbies and leisure". Jesus' call to loving service is his call to make people and their needs a significant portion of our avocation.

We must take a hard look at what we find interesting and worthwhile. Most of us no longer really have avocations. We just watch videos and scroll. Watching stories and memes of other people living vainly takes the time God has given us to live ourselves.

There are good and life-giving things that we might pursue outside of our main work. Some of these things are forms of service. Some are in the form of what we call hobbies. Some hobbies are places of escape for us. This can be fine. However, some of these pursuits can be used to gather people for good purposes or love others. A fisherman can get people outdoors having fun together. Someone that loves to weld or garden can share their skill with others. **Even administering a fantasy football league or hosting poker night can, if done with grace and wisdom, gather people into enjoyable fellowship and fun.** Some hobbies can be organized mainly as acts of charity. For example, I knew a man whose hobby was helping men build wheelchair ramps for people in need. It was a skill he had mastered, and he loved doing it. It also helped hundreds of people, often at the worst moments of their lives. Being intentional about our avocations can be an impactful part of our Rule.

Examples of redeeming avocation: (less intense to more intense)

1. Include someone in your hobby that would enjoy it
2. Use your hobby to serve someone--give them produce from your garden, change a single mom's or your pastor's oil.
3. Teach a younger person a useful hobby or skill- handyman stuff, car maintenance, welding, etc.
4. Make maintenance labor into fellowship- get together with two other families and do your spring yard work together on three days together, rather than each family doing it alone. The same thing gets done, but there is fellowship, and it is often easier to involve children.
5. Use your hobby to form new relationships with non-church people. Ride motorcycles in a group, join a hiking outing at REI, join a runners club, get in the local bass fishing tournaments so you can meet other people. This is a great way to meet non-Christians and not struggle with what to talk about .

Ordinary Evangelism

I should say one last word here about sharing Christ with people. Emotional hospitality, making room for people, making people your business--or your avocation--these are all ordinary pre-requisites for leading someone to Jesus. Evangelism usually only has three parts:

1. You have to get around people and have a relationship. You have to make them your avocation and a recipient of your liberality.
2. You have to already have made Jesus a supernatural-ordinary part of your life. If he is in every area of your life, he can come up in any conversation in a very ordinary, natural feeling way. Growing in spiritual substance will achieve this, and will prepare you to speak with clarity and conviction instead of parroting religious sounding ideas that you don't really understand or live out.
3. You have to practice not losing your nerve when it's time to say something about God. You don't have to say everything at once. Just what's natural, and what meets the demand in the other person. "The Lord has really helped me in this third child transition" said naturally can be more effective than a forced explication of the 4 spiritual laws. The more we grow in the virtue of paying attention to people as people- the more we will sense their level of interest.

If we do these three things, we will find ourselves in much better spiritual conversation moments in which we can have meaningful spiritual "touches", that lead to conversations, that might lead to prayer, or an appropriate moment to invite them to church, or to believe.

Specific ideas of what to incorporate into your life in order to welcome the ordinary:

1. Enjoyable leisure
2. Intentional reading
3. Hospitality, sacred and unstructured conversation and enjoyment with friends. Take turns eating with another family in their home.
4. Direct focus on family – meals, cooking together, etc.
5. Pursuit of art and music
6. Unrushed activities of enjoyment – looking at stars, listening to a complete record, cooking with others, listening to someone with your full attention
7. Spiritual pursuits – mentoring, spiritual direction, extended Scripture reading and prayer, personal retreat
8. Physical rest and invigoration – sleeping, exercise, etc.
9. Restoring relationships – apologies and reconciliation
10. Unaccountable mental pursuits – meditation, contemplation, reverie
11. Helping and serving others – ministry of availability.
12. Finish and upkeep of neglected things
13. Redeeming an avocation for love and service

link
John 1
Simon
"Come & see"

note: this
a significant
shift in
mindset when
you didn't
grow up with
it.

Week 7 Reflection + Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the relationship between temperance, justice and liberality in regard to our use of our resources- esp. income/wealth, talents, and time.
2. Have you experienced the disillusionment of "the Wall"- the spiritual "dark night of the soul"- where God seems absent and your faith not make sense, and your soul full of doubt, with no obvious way forward? What do you think about the claim that this is a gift of God in spiritual maturing to force us to face things that are illusions/delusion that have been durable in our spiritual lives. Illusions that we will only give up when our combination of truth and illusion can take us no further?
3. What do you think of the \$75,000 happiness cap for acquisition/consumption- and that most of our happiness has to come from emotional wellbeing that comes from relationships, and positive life judgment that comes from achieving ordinary wholesome goals?
4. In what ways it is hard for you to make people your avocation? To make love and service more central than entertainment and consumption?
5. Where do you have a good frugality/simplicity operating in your life, and where don't you? What is the practical difference between spiritual frugality and an ungracious "poverty doctrine"?
6. If you have not had meaningful productive spiritual conversations recently, what do you think are the real blocks to you participating in evangelism- or being naturally public about your faith in the presence of non-Christians?

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□note: This is the Sunday of the weekend of the leaders retreat (you are gone)
Week 8 – Belonging to the Formational Community

Colossians 3:1-17 – Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. 5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. 7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8 But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. 11 Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. 12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

We humans learn in approximately four ways. First, we can accomplish learning through spoken word, most often by way of hearing or reading. However, most of what we learn is accomplished through practice, absorption and imitation. The thing about these three ways of learning is that we often don't even know what we're learning or that we're in the process of learning it. We humans are made to learn from our experiences, our companions and our environment. We take mental imprints from our experiences, or what people call "muscle memory." We naturally imitate our peers and superiors. Lastly, we absorb the ethos and dynamic of our environments. Each of these are less obvious to us in their operations. We know we are learning from verbal teaching. We feel we are learning from practice. We can learn to perceive the process of imitation happening in us. It is hardest to see how slowly and subtly we are absorbing our environment.

The fact that we often don't see how we absorb our environment makes our relationship to our environment all the more important. This is why we are so susceptible to social media, film, certain advertisements, and the ethos in the structure of institutions. It's why some people see "privilege" or "injustice" in some environments and others are mystified by the accusation. The old proverb is: "don't ask a fish about water." He doesn't even realize it's there. You might think, "stupid fish." But how much do you really know about respiration and the air you breathe? Respiration deeply affects everything about your life--concentration, physical ability, development, energy levels--but how much do you really understand it? The more foundational the environment, the less we pay attention to it, and the less we understand how we are absorbing it.

Our need for a counter-environment

Jesus said that the global human culture lives without recognition of its creator. This environmental delusion of obliviousness and rebellion affects every human society. Jesus called this creator-denying human counterculture "the World." The environment of the World is what we are born into, and we therefore absorb it from the day we are born. It is filled with many good things and common graces that come from God's good creation and His image in us that makes us better than our beliefs, but Jesus is clear: this World is what we have been absorbing. It has turned creation upside down. It has darkened our understanding and hardened our conscience. It has made God's ways seem wrong and unbelievable. It makes us want to run from exposure to even the light of God's love. Jesus claimed that the World's lack of recognition of its creator has left it in darkness that is a fundamental, self-inflicted ignorance that breeds a pervasive wickedness. This wickedness is not as bad as it can be, but without God, humans produce false gods he calls "idols." These idols bear some resemblance to God, since their makers are made in God's image, but they are also terminally flawed and deformed. Thus, devotion to them inevitably leads to sin, sin to corruption, corruption to injustice, and injustice to violence.

In this state, God does not only speak to show himself, He teaches us in every way. He calls us to do things, so that through obediences and disciplines we learn by experience. He gives us spiritual peers and superiors as fellowship and leadership for us to imitate and be influenced by. Lastly, he created the church, which is both an ecosystem and an institution to be an environment in which we can absorb the life of the Kingdom and character of God. Through the church, He also seeks to restore the first institution of the family so that it is the environment of absorption it was originally intended to be.

The church is God's counter-formation plan

Jesus' claim is that we not only need to hear his words and believe. He has also given us commands and disciplines to gain spiritual "muscle memory." He has given us a spiritual family that contains peers and shepherds to imitate. This is meant to happen in a particular environment: the local church. He calls the church the Body of Christ, and other Christians our brothers and sisters. These pictures are meant to make us see how vital it is to belong to the visible people of God in the institutional ecosystem of the local church. To not be part of the church is to think one can be a finger without the rest of the body. It would be to have fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, and never come to family times or functions. Both are unthinkable unnatural. Jesus has not made an intimate connection to the local church an optional part of being his disciple.

Spiritual Environments, Disciplines and Obediences

As you think about all the different things we are called to do as Jesus' disciples, it can feel daunting. Fasting, church involvement, meditating on Scripture, prayer, acting virtuously, serving the poor, responsibilities to family, seeking shepherding, and so on. It can feel like a lot. There is a level of complexity at which we all go blank and stall. However, pursuing discipleship as Jesus intends can be greatly simplified if you are willing to embrace a few of his directives. If you want to do it your way, then you have to know everything. If you're willing to do it his way, things become much simpler.

First, let's break the practices of godliness down into three sectors. I'll call them spiritual environments, spiritual disciplines, and spiritual obediences. A spiritual environment is something you can "enter into" in which elements of discipleship are happening. To use a **spiritual environment** is to go to the place where discipleship practices are happening with Jesus people. Examples of this would be corporate worship, small groups, prayer meetings, youth group, Christian education, and so on. A **spiritual discipline** is a practice that is designed to help us grow to be able to be or do what we cannot reliably be or do right now. Disciplines help us grow or "stay in shape" in our relationship with God. They are a kind of obedience, but they are not the ordinary acts of love that make up our life in the world. Disciplines prepare us for what we are sent out to do. Lastly, the **spiritual obediences** are good things God has commanded us all to do as expressions of his kingdom and character in the world. These are acts of virtue and service that make up most of our lives as disciples. The remainder of our lives are acts we live before the face of God in enjoyment and devotion. The Apostle Paul says it this way: *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.* (Col. 3:17 NIBO) You might ask: why the emphasis on the church as a transformational *environment*? The answer is that a few golden environments can simplify our use of disciplines and obediences drastically.

The church is a golden environment

Some years ago an author on habits said that there are some habits, that if you do them, you'll naturally do other good habits. He said morning exercise was like this, and he called these "Golden Habits." If you do a golden habit, you'll naturally do a bunch of other good habits.

I think that if you adopt a few spiritual environments into your life, you will find yourself doing most spiritual disciplines and doing many spiritual obediences God has planned for you. I'll call these "Golden Environments." The most comprehensive of these is church attendance. Think about this for a moment: corporate worship is a time when the body of Christ rallies together. See how the author of Hebrews exhorts the early church: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, *not giving up meeting together*, as some are in the habit of doing, but

□ consider:
add examples
of golden
habits
(ask
staff)

encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:24-25, emphasis added). The church forms a temporary ecosystem that is a kingdom environment. We form it with each other, and we inhabit it together. Participating in a guided environment that uses well developed spiritual structures helps us participate with others in seeking Jesus with our heart, soul, mind and strength. Doing this together gives us a sense of humbling equality with others and helps us overcome our inhibitions and personal distractions. In these moments we are absorbing the emergent spirit of that fellowship. Second, we are here to pursue Jesus as his disciples. This we do through numerous spiritual disciplines together. We pray, we worship in art and song, we read and meditate on scripture, we hear preaching, we fellowship with peers and are overseen by shepherds, we serve each other, listen to each other, and put up with each other. Everyone is called to be a disciple, and in many places, it is assumed this is not just directly under Jesus. Being disciplined, guided, and shepherded by other believers whom we can imitate are key disciplines. Also, church membership designates that elders are your pastors, whom you submit to and who have the right to spiritually discipline you. The New Testament has no notion of a Christian who could be part of such a relationship but isn’t. In fact, though we usually think of reading the Bible as a more fundamental spiritual practice, in the early centuries almost no one had a Bible, and many could not read. Discipleship relationships of training, imitation and practice were how faith grew and was strengthened.

Witnessing, or sharing Christ, is another spiritual obedience, and the church can be a key place of proclamation and experience in the process of bringing someone to Christ. Sharing Christ, and having places and people that share Christ, is part of the shape of any disciple. Not only is it fitting to share the most valuable thing in the universe but almost nothing builds courage and identity like publicly living and speaking as someone that belongs to Jesus. Remember, Jesus only gave two conditional “if” statements about our salvation. First, if we forgive our brothers, he will forgive us. (Matt 6:14) Second, if we confess him “before men”, he’ll confess us before his father in heaven. (Matt 10:32) Remember, being a witness has nothing to do with results. We confess to be faithful. We try to be persuasive to be helpful. But only God can give faith in the mysterious dynamic between human responsibility and divine revelation.

People are both easy to love since we regard them as brothers and sisters, yet they are also hard to love since the only organizing principle is that we love Jesus. We may have little else naturally in common. Thus, we have the perfect context to learn how to love. The church is both spiritually divine and humanly difficult. It is a place where you can see God moving if you look for it, and in which you’ll face problems, difficult people, strange conflicts, and mundane tasks of service. It will force you to find both assertive courage to make it great, and the constant humility to take people as they are, in grace, and to “bear with one another in love” (Col 3:13). To be clear, “bear

with one another” means, “put up with one another even when it is really hard, like you are carrying the whole weight of the relationship yourself.”

The church is a comprehensive environment

The church is not only a “golden environment”; it is a comprehensive environment like no other. All forms of spiritual learning are practices: we hear teaching, practice disciplines, imitate others in fellowship through example, and we absorb the spiritual ethos of the kingdom community. God works through all these means.

It is also the only institution that can be thoroughly submitted to Jesus’ leadership. We form and shape it in Christ’s name. It is not subject to the authorities of the World. If it is not shaped like Christ, in his Spirit, then we have no one to blame but ourselves. We may have a complicated system of authority at work, in commerce, or in government. But here, we can have an unconflicted environment in which we can seek godliness in the unity of spiritual family.

The church gathered for worship is the most comprehensive spiritual environment. We should show up and participate passionately every week. We should make this part of our family routine before sports, music, or other schedules determined by the world start competing with it. We should embrace that the Church will be as difficult as being part of a big family, but is the very Body of Christ. We must embrace the local church through immersion and intimacy.

If we do, we will find it to be a comprehensive and golden environment helping us grow on all levels and in multiple ways all in one place. A healthy church can do this—especially if you are part of it in commitment and sacrifice. The three steps of commitment that will help you do this are:

1. **Commit to attend worship every week you possibly can.** I recommend going to a church when you are out of town, and even on vacations. Worshipping and seeing how other local churches express the Body of Christ can be an enriching experience, and doing it when you travel reinforces its importance.
2. **Become a member of your church.** Membership isn’t a biblical word, but all the things it stands for are deeply biblical. The formalized commitment of membership helps us recognize the spiritual commitment we are meant to have with each other.
3. **Serve in at least one way through your church and give something to its financial needs.** Our hearts are where our money and time are spent. Jesus said that where our treasure is our heart will be. (Matt 6:21, Luke 12:34). Always serve in your church in some way, and be 100% reliable. Think in terms of military service, not consumption.

Other key environments:

What is true of the local church's gatherings can also be true of some other environments, in that multiple good things are happening at once. I will offer two more: fellowship and private worship.

Fellowship is being with other Christians in a micro-environment where Jesus is acknowledged as king. Small groups are a particularly powerful version of fellowship since they also have spiritual leadership and engage in spiritual disciplines. Small group and corporate worship mutually reinforce each other and increase your dose of time in the transformational environments of the body of Christ.

Private worship is oftentimes referred to as having a quiet time, doing devotions, or having "God time." Historically, "private worship" meant worship that you initiate outside of the gathered church. Presently, this usually means a personal, private time of spiritual solitude. But, through most of Protestant history, this phrase has meant family devotions. Family devotions are times in which your family seeks to grow in godliness as a family. You can read Scripture and talk about it. You can read a devotional book. Some families do this at bedtime, while others do this during a meal. Most do nothing because they have failed or feel embarrassed to lead. My own family has never had regular family devotions over more than a year. But my wife and I have re-started it many times. While this is a good topic for small group discussion or Sunday classes, don't underestimate family devotions on the way home from church talking about what the kids learned in kids church. My advice is to keep at it. Keep *unfailing* by not quitting.

Personal, private worship is essentially a micro-environment of quiet dedicated to pursuing God and devotion to him. Just start by picking a time, a place, and a few "environmental aids" that will help you make a quiet space. This micro-environment of solitude, especially when done regularly, can have incredibly positive effects on your faith and life. Most evangelical Christians do a simple liturgy: reciting or saying a short prayer, reading a passage of Scripture, meditating on what you read, and praying in response to what Scripture says in that passage. Some people may journal, while others may do morning and evening prayers as well. They may pray the Lord's prayer, or read a psalm, and take some time to pray. A couple of minutes of devotion at the beginning and the end of the day can have a really positive effect--especially if you are leaving your bedroom for bedlam in the morning. It'll get your heart right in order to enjoy the crazy rather than resent it.

God loves you, and also doesn't believe in your excuses.

I feel obligated to recognize two things here. The first is that we must make and keep commitments to carve out these environments consistently in our lives. Second, **God understands but does not believe in your excuses.** God completely understands our failures. He knows that faithfulness to well-meant commitments is hard, and is spiritually resisted by the world, flesh and devils. He knows our weaknesses and

□ consider adding command to this "private worship" section

infirmities. He knows how hard it is to turn off a screen and to try to find a quiet mind amidst our thousand anxieties. He knows how annoying some of the people at church are for you. He cares about you and understands how you feel and why.

However, He also doesn't accept these excuses. **He can accept our failure, but He won't change his command.** He can accept that we feel our frustrations or aversions, but He doesn't recant His demands to be part of the body of Christ. Remember this: God's unwillingness to accept your excuses is an expression of His gracious love for us in our failures and His gift to us of Christ's righteousness. He simultaneously accepts us and does not affirm our excuses. Do you think, "He should accept me!" Perhaps, you should accept him. In one sense, a lot of our faith comes down to the challenge God gave to Job, "Will you condemn me in order to justify yourself?" **The things you most want to avoid in God's commands are also the things you need the most.**

The church is God's invitation by display

The last thing to remember is that the church is not only for its present members. An English pastor said, "The church of Jesus Christ is the only institution on earth that exists primarily for its nonmembers." The Church is itself a word to the World. Jesus called us the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and a city on a hill. The city on a hill has to be a visible, untied community. The church is a taste of the kingdom in their midst where grace and truth are its animating principles and Christ is revered and imitated with devotion. It is a picture of what it could be if the world gave up its rebellion, and creation received its creator as savior.

We are all called to be witnesses for Christ. However, our witness is primarily amplified or marginalized by the public impression made by the visible local church. Say what you want about the universal spiritual church spreading through eternity with Christ as her mystical head. The people of the World don't believe in any of that yet. All they see is us. They see an institution and group of people in their community. All they see is the city on the hill. We are the display of the kingdom of God for all people. Will they want to leave the World for the Kingdom through experiencing us?

Week 8 Reflection + Discussion Questions:

1. Share an example of how you experienced *absorption* or *imitation* as the primary means of learning and becoming like the thing you were absorbing or imitating.
2. In what specific ways has the church played a role in your spiritual formation as a child? As a teen? As a young adult? Later in life?
3. Has your experience been that the church functions as a counter-environment to the environment that the world provides? If not, how has it been similar to the world? If so, what has been the most distinguishable factor?
4. Both corporate and private worship have necessary parts to play when it comes to fostering spiritual health. How do you balance these two aspects of worship in your own life? What challenges do you face in either realm or in maintaining this balance between the two?
5. What are the common "excuses" you make when it comes to embracing spiritual disciplines and church involvement? What are the road blocks or hurdles you face?
6. The church is described as "both spiritually divine and humanly difficult." When have you seen this dual nature of the church displayed?
7. The final section this week presents the church as "God's invitation by display" to the world. How can we, as individuals or corporately, contribute to making our local church a more attractive and authentic display of God's kingdom?

□ consider: adding a specific exhortation to welcome ~~to~~ college students into your homes.

We need to define what a RoL is in WK 1. - How does this relate to the Way of Jesus

Week 9 – How to Build a Rule of Life

2 Peter 1:3-9 - 3 His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. 5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

1 John 2:6 whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

From scarcity to abundance.

As much as you may hate to admit it, you *are* missing out: it's not a question of *if*, but a question of *what*. In this life, you are going to miss out on almost everything. There is too much you are missing out on to think in those terms, because you are missing out on almost everything. The question is, what are the very few things you refuse to miss out on? What is your most significant set of priorities? What is the most important? Or in spiritual terms: What is God's will for you in Christ Jesus?

Emphasize
YOU CANNOT
DO
EVERYTHING

Let that sink in for a bit. You might find love – with one person out of billions. You might do fulfilling work – in a few careers out of thousands. You'll have a few dozen real friends, tops. You'll see a fraction of the planet – and probably no other planets. You'll have few hobbies compared to all human interests. You'll notice a billionth of what happens around you.

You will only really do and experience the tiniest fraction of what exists in this life. If you are anxious about missing out, you should have a daily nervous breakdown. Yet, the human creature is programmed to look around to see what others are doing. Like fish in a school, we tend to immediately want what someone right next to us has. There is probably some good survival purpose in this, but it can also ruin our lives and loves in a world where technology allows us to see so much that we are missing out on.

One of the things that astounds me about Jesus and his disciples is how focused they are. This was hard won for some. Paul said to Timothy, "a soldier doesn't get involved in civilian affairs." This meant, "when you minister for Jesus or are his disciple, it's like you're in the military. You have a focused mission, and you stay on it even as people all around you are living leisurely, ignoring what you're doing for them." He knew focus was a key to discipleship, in a world with much less potent distractions. This was long before 100,000 to 5,000,000 marketers and 100,000,000 "influencers" were trying to scatter your intentional attention and then capture your distracted attention with their diversions and desires every second of the day. **As we grapple with a world designed for distraction, we need Jesus' prescription for focus more than ever before.**⁵

To live as Jesus' disciple, you'll have **to choose the tiny number of things you are really going to give yourself to**. Most will have to start with a kind of minimalism – getting down to almost nothing. Find the discipline to say no. Then, we have to move to some kind of “intentionalism” – making sure everything in our lives is intentional. Why? Because our unintentional choices are taking up years of our lives and hours of every day.

Jesus and his apostles describe certain *environments, disciples and obediences* as making up Jesus' Way—that is, they chose to build their life around one way of living and not others. On one level, Jesus claimed not to *model* the way, but to *be* the way (“*I am the way...*John 14:6). Colossians 2 tells us to be very careful about claims that certain days, practices or doctrines are “the key” to the spiritual life, and thus are necessary additions to plain faith in Jesus. Paul's caution is that celebrating certain days, or harsh disciplines or speculative mysticism will often function to lead us away from Jesus and the good news of the Gospel that he re-outlines in Colossians 2:9-16. The special days are “shadows” of the reality of Christ. Mystical “additions” to the Gospel distract from the heart of the Gospel message--the opposite of pure belief. He also says that lots of rules and harsh treatments of the body are not God-imposed, but self-imposed worship. They display a false humility toward God and others.

Yet for all this needed caution, the apostle seemed to pray constantly. He studies the scriptures diligently. He participates in worship alongside other believers consistently, for instance when he worshipped Jesus with Silas bleeding-backed in prison after being whipped. He fasts privately and then publicly at both his conversion in Acts 9, and before his missionary journey in Acts 13. He encouraged and utilized Christian fellowship throughout all of his letters. So while he makes a point of caution in Colossians 2 that fleshly and worldly uses of environments, spiritualities and disciplines will “disqualify” us from the “prize” of knowing Jesus and believing the Gospel of his forgiveness and freedom more deeply, we see Paul embrace godly spiritual practice because it points him (and us) to Jesus and his message. We are looking for components that point us to Jesus and the dynamics of his salvation and life.

In this way, we have to stop short of dogmatism about any environment, discipline or opinion. However, when we look at the life of Jesus, his apostles and his Church in the New Testament, we consistently encounter a spiritual way of life Christians consistently pursue. ***None of these practices are treated with dogmatic regularity, and yet none of them are neglected in the life of the faithful. They are not commanded for our justification; rather, they are given for our transformation so that we can grow to become like the master.*** These practices are not a part of saving faith itself, but the person converted by faith longs to please God, and so longs for sanctity--to become godly or holy. Grace always fuels a passionate pursuit to know God, His will, and to walk as Jesus did, and authentic faith should generate in us the desire to seek some forms of spiritual practice that aid our growth in faith.

The question is not just, “does God want me on Instagram this much?” or “I wonder if all this infinite scrolling is good for my soul?” Of course it isn’t. But that isn’t the worst part – ***the worst part is the opportunity costs you are paying.*** Somehow, we have no time for works of love. To listen to people. To tutor kids. To invite people over. To watch someone else’s kids. To go to driveway firepit talks with our neighbors. To do what fights isolation and loneliness. To grow in skills and be able to earn enough money to support a family. To get outdoors and improve our mental and soul health. To listen to someone struggling. To build relationships with unbelieving people in our lives. To disciple younger people in the church. To serve in the ministries of the local church. The possibilities are endless.

There are two ways to live your life. One is to be entertained. But this suffers from being wicked and meaningless. It will punish you through the Hedonist Dilemma. The more you get the less pleasure you’ll really feel. The second is to live for meaning. To do what you intend to do because you care about what it means. Jesus can fill all the different parts of our life with meaning – and so open a gateway to almost unlimited fulfillment – even in incredibly hard circumstances. Living for “meaning over expediency” is a universal of all human happiness. Jesus is the perfect example and perfect leader away from all expediency and towards the deepest meaning we can be a part of: the redemption of all people and turning creation back to its Creator, King, and purpose.

Rule Summary

A Rule of Life isn’t just a list of spiritual disciplines we plan on doing. It’s not a Bible reading plan. ***A Rule of Life includes a plan, a measure, and a structure. It is a measure of the kind of life you plan to live in Christ by faith, and the structure you intend to use to do it.*** This structure, or trellis, is stated out in the open so that you can easily measure if you are doing it. It is the work of giving our best, conviction-driven choices a structure to rule our lives instead of being ruled by our impulses or circumstances.

Ironically, *the less we want a Rule of Life, the more we probably need one.* The less we want structure, the more we often need it in order to live in the kind of liberty we were made for. We might fear the tyranny of our own Rule, but it is at least of our making from our own convictions. *Submission to our own best aspirations is nothing like the slavery of obeying our cravings, whims and broken desires.*

Therefore, as you start to build a Rule of Life, ***don’t think in terms just of spiritual disciplines; think in terms of a structured “lifestyle,” an artistically disciplined life. You’re not trying to build a miserable life, but a life of deep joy and love. Yet, this can’t start with whimsical fantasies about your dreams. It has to start with a starkly clear, scriptural picture of who and what we are and need as a human being. Like a grapevine needs a***

↓
*People fear worldly stuff does make them happy
Can you still have meaning or happiness?*

particular kind of trellis, or an apple tree needs a specific kind of pruning, we humans need similar things in our training and life.

Before we look at some spiritual disciplines as possible components, we have to start with the end in mind. Our goal is godliness pursued by faith, fueled by hope, and expressed in love. However, this comes not from a stoic training course or a list of brain hacks but a "way" of following with Jesus in a manner that "abides" in him spiritually. It comes from walking by the "law of the Spirit of Life" or, said another way, "walking in the Spirit." This "abiding," "walking," or "following" requires calm attention. Therefore, now perhaps more than ever, *our Rule of Life must be focused on making space and building our capacity for the right kind of attention* – to God and to what matters. Consequently, we also need to give intense attention to whatever will distract and divert us from this frame of abiding that requires calm, sustained attention.

Some of the key practices of Christian spirituality are designed toward these ends – attention and transformation. As you chose them, it is important to know that every "spiritual discipline" is a "Means of Grace." That is, though every discipline is an exertion of our energy and effort, it works in us through the presence, power and promise of God. God is giving to us (grace) through this means (the discipline). Remember John 15 and Jeremiah 17. Otherwise it will become the "self-imposed worship" with all the destructive results outlined in Colossians 2.

Although your Rule is for all of life, one of the main things it specifies is your training in Christ. Any good coach will tell you that they teach all of their players key skills, but they also have to find ways to help each individual player be the best they can be. Your Rule, even regarding training, will look like others, but should vary from other people's in certain ways. In some ways it should take into account your positive differences that are personal strengths. If you love being around people, you might have a lot of spiritual practices that include others. If you're very analytical, you might have more study than others. Or, if you're dyslexic, you might listen to the Bible in audio format a lot more than you read it. (The Bible was actually written to be heard more than read anyway).

However, there should also be aspects of your training that are designed to shore up your weaknesses. You can't just play to your strengths. In life there are a lot of situations we can't pass on. You can't sub out and let another player do that part. So we have to have parts of our training that attack our weaknesses. These can be painful, but they are absolutely necessary. If we neglect them, then the devil, the world, and the flesh get a foothold and can undermine all the good of our strengths. To neglect our weaknesses is like building a great fortress and leaving open a side door for our convenience. Evil always enters opportunistically. It will find your weakest point and exploit it. There's an old saying, "a chain is only as strong as its weakest link."

So as you form your Rule, think about growing your strengths for enjoyment and impact. However, also look to discipline your weaknesses so they don't undermine your

perseverance and security in pursuing fruitfulness. If you don't know what your weaknesses are, the people that love you and hate you both know. If you won't ask, then start with assuming pride is a weakness. It's usually a safe bet anyway.

So what Spiritual Disciplines should you be looking at in building a Rule of Life? When considering the lives of Christians over many centuries, several components come up again and again. Some seem essential in Scripture. **These disciplines include: Sabbath; Fasting and Solitude; Prayer, Meditation, and Worship; Service and Avocations; and Fellowship, Shepherding, and Witnessing.**

All of these spiritual practices are listed in general and do not make up a Rule, or training and living schedule for life. You have to make choices and describe how and what you are going to do. This is where your theological convictions or learning about spirituality become a "Rule." When and where are you going to worship? What rhythm of prayer or tool of prayer are you going to use? If you want to practice solitude, how are you going to do that?

Components of a Rule of Life

A Rule of Life is a traditional Christian way to seek to train ourselves in godliness and to really experience the life giving Way of Jesus; doing God's will by "...walking as Jesus did" (1 Jon 2:6). Romans 12:1-2 famously says that our spiritual offering of worship should consist in no longer being "conformed to this world" but by being "transformed by the renewing of our mind" so we can know what God's will is, and do it out of loving devotion. Being Jesus disciple, or apprentice, means that we are supposed to not just be a "follower", but to be intent learners submitted to the authority of our teacher-master (rabbi) who is Jesus and his apostles.

A Rule of Life is a tactical plan for our spiritual intentions. It is your practical plan to live an intentional life. It is a schedule or a structure you are using to live according to your deepest convictions. **It is a set of commitments you have already made in order to escape living by reaction, distraction, bad habits, and other obstacles you have a hard time overcoming.** A Rule of Life usually includes *three* things:

1. **Environments: Schedules and physical spaces to focus on our intentions and God Himself and to accomplish our greatest priorities.** ex: I've been going to Sunday worship about 2 times a month. Instead of going when it fits, we are going to fit our lives to going to church. ex: make sure my family goes on three overnight camping trips this year to spend time together, so we don't just end up being home bodies on screens apart from each other. Or going on 20 minute walks with a spouse 3 times a week.
2. **Disciplines: A plan to use certain spiritual practices faith to grow spiritually-** ex: I'm going to pray for 5 minutes, three times a day for the next three months, and I'll start with the Lord's prayer each time. I'll do one first thing when I get up, and one right before bed.

□ consider adding: what is additionally effective is

① pre decision and
② verbalizing your commitment to people who want to help you succeed

did the Franciscans have a rule of life

3. **Obediences: A plan to intentionally obey key priorities of God in our lives to please him and love others.** Ex: I'm going to give and serve this year to build up our church instead of spend that money and time on myself.
-

Some Rules of Life only focus on the first two categories. Anything really is better than nothing. However, in this series, I'll encourage you to *eventually* include all three. Therefore, you have a Rule of Life *plan* when you make a specific set of commitments in these categories. You actually have a Rule of Life when these commitments actually rule what you do in your life.

Dynamics of a Rule of Life

For a rule of life to robustly follow Jesus' Way, it should not only include the above components; the way by which a Rule is composed should have 4 basic dynamics: *ordered, structured, measurable, and accountable*. A Rule of Life that uses these 4 dynamics, and is ordered around the components practiced and taught by Jesus and his apostles, will help us live intentionally toward God's will and experience the transformation and life Jesus promised.

- consider moving this portion:
- Week 10-12
next 9
1. **Ordered:** It should include the intended components of the Way of Jesus (Content of #1-3 above)
 2. **Structured:** we should know when we are doing it, and it should dictate an agenda to us (How you'll do #1-3 above)
 3. **Measurable:** we should know if we are doing it or not (how you know you've done #1-3 above)
 4. **Accountable:** someone else is helping us, guiding us and encouraging us. (who knows you've done #1-3 above)

Examples to help you consider how you will form a Rule of Life:

Spiritual environments: (these are different environments in which many different spiritual goods may happen)

1. Lord's day worship: coming to church we do many spiritual practices and obediences together. This assumes spiritual practices like worship singing, and the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper.
2. Fellowship: gathering for encouragement in the calling of Christ and to support each other in the family of God
3. Solitude: being with only your own self and God. Seeking the quiet, silence and simplicity in which goods of devotion, contemplation and intuition can happen.

Spiritual Disciplines: Practices to enhance devotion and heart habits that worship Jesus and that live the Gospel

1. Prayer- public and private, rote and spontaneous, thanksgiving, confession, intercession,

2. Learning Scripture- reading, hearing, preaching, teaching, meditation, memorization, etc.
3. Fasting- abstaining from food for spiritual purpose

Spiritual Obediences: vital, repetitive acts of spiritual obedience. Disciplines of doing more than training.

1. Generosity
2. Hospitality
3. Witness/Evangelism
4. Service/acts of mercy, visit the sick, imprisoned, etc
5. Mentoring/discipling/ministry

What is something that you need to do that has been waiting for you for days or weeks while you have had time to interact with technology that used 10X the amount of time it would take to do what you intended to do? Economists call this an "opportunity cost"- what we don't do because we use our resources on something else. The average American is giving more than 20 hours a week – some more than 10 hours a DAY – to entertainments and interests that amount to valuable time doing virtually nothing purposeful, meaningful, or truly intentional.

Steps to forming a Rule of Life

It can be good to start with some basics: Waking and bedtimes. Meals. Weekly worship or fellowship. Work and rest. Holidays and celebrations. If you're married, perhaps going to bed at the same time as your spouse at least some days. When are you and the people you are to love going to be most naturally together? Is there anything you want to connect to these natural moments? For example, having morning or evening prayers for about 2-5 minutes?

1. **Relax** – You are going to adjust this Rule and change it throughout your life.
2. **Spiritual Vision** – What do you want to happen in your life in the areas of pursuing and abiding in Jesus in the next _____ [amount of time- 2 yrs or less]
 - a. If you are a fairly undisciplined person, make it short – like a couple week or months.
3. **Eliminate as much distraction and diversion as you can**
 - a. **Elimination** – What do you need to eliminate?
 - i. What are easy eliminations? *
 - ii. What are clinging eliminations- stuff that you find yourself rationalizing again and again?
 - b. **Intentionalism** – What tools will you use, but need to regulate heavily to make sure you are using them and they are not using you?

→ **note:**
as you eliminate, you will inevitably sin replace, unless you identify the root issue

Jackson - checks email since other apps shut down.

Timza - What is my mood at?
- discipline of cheerfulness.

4. **Accept the ordinary measures** – Accept and place the Means of Grace God prescribes for everyone to the level of obedience to Scripture.
 - a. See lists below. However, don't assume how much these mean. To "commit to pray" isn't a commitment to pray daily, or 47 minutes every day.
5. **Start with natural rhythms of time to plan around.**
 - a. Weeks, Years, seasons, holidays/celebrations, work schedules, etc. Some families will need to include sports seasons, school years, and other rhythms that are part of their lives that require planning attention.
6. **Identify key moments (like holidays) and repetitive cycles (like weeks)** that you can shape.
 - a. Focus on the year and the week first: what special times of year will you plan to make special? What will be the rhythm of your week?
 - i. For many people you'll need 2-5 different week-cycles depending on the time of year. That's fine. Don't be afraid to plan a semester at a time.
7. **Start small:** Insert key actions that you think you can do that will make a real difference if you would do them.
 - a. **Example:** If you don't normally pray, pick a couple times a day you can pray for 2-3 minutes. Immediately upon rising and at bedtime have worked for humans for a couple thousand years as a good starting point.
 - b. **Example:** Commit to pray immediately upon hearing about something you want to pray for. Stop when you get a text, or say "let's pray right now" when someone asks you in person.
8. **Write it down**
9. **Share it with someone that is not a peer**
10. **Run it for a few weeks**
11. **Finalize it for a period of time**
12. **Have at least one exposure:** There should be at least one thing in your Rule you really don't want to do. They should not be inhuman things, but purposeful hardships that you need to grow in to overcome your weaknesses and idols. My wife works with people struggling with crippling forms of anxiety that keep them from really living their lives. There is one consistently successful therapy for this: exposure. There are things we are afraid of that can limit and control us. There could be hundreds of subtle examples of opportunities for obedience which we feel inhibited or anxious about. If you know something is a good obedience and yet you feel a bad anxiety/inhibition, the treatment is usually faith-filled exposure. I know that sounds scary. But sometimes you can break it down into more manageable steps. By starting smaller, you can work your way toward the confidence and courage you need to live out what God's loving purpose is calling you to. C.S. Lewis once said that courage is not just a virtue, but is the form of every virtue at the sticking point of action – the point of fullest reality. It turns out that many of our anxieties are founded on things worth fearing. The question is not whether this

world is full of things worth fearing, but whether we have the courage to do what we must or choose to do in the face of fear, anxiety and inhibition. This is the very exercise of faith – finding the courage to do the good even when we are afraid. In your Rule, you should always have at least one exposure. There are obediences that make us anxious just to think about doing. If you grew up poor, maybe it's financial giving. Maybe it's sharing your faith with someone. Maybe it's taking responsibility for something, fearing no one will show up to help you. Maybe it's prayer, because you feel too exposed before God. Maybe you don't want to express yourself in worship because you feel inhibited and embarrassed to express emotion or devotion in the presence of others.

Other examples:

- Facing conflict or telling the truth rather than avoiding it
- Encouraging people when you think it may sound stupid, or they'll get a big head
- Stopping for rest, anxious that you won't get enough done

J **General Advice:**

- Start small and simple
- Take your life-stage into account
- Be flexible, but not too flexible – hold to it in time, but adjust it in premeditated ways
- Be specific. Practices should be concrete, embodied, and practical, not vague or ideological. They are for your heart, soul, mind and strength.
 - Not: "I'm going to follow Jesus with all my heart."
 - Do: "I'm going to read the Bible in quiet 10 minutes 6 or 7 days a week."
- Include the basics:
 - Scripture and prayer
 - Fasting
 - Sabbath and worship
- Including the environments of:
 - Silence and solitude
 - Fellowship
- Consider the dose
 - How much of one thing or all things do you need?
 - The answer is: is it working? Is the grace of God making progress in you life? Are you loving God more, the world less and people more in Christ's way?
 - If not, you may need more subtraction/simplicity and more ROL.
 - Or, you need someone to help you trouble shoot- a pastoral or spiritual director.

*I consider
emphasizing
is staff
thought these
were very
helpful.*

- "Couch time"

Week 9 Reflection + Discussion Questions:

1. How might different life stages affect the development and implementation of a Rule of Life?
2. What are the potential benefits and challenges of sharing your Rule of Life with someone else?
3. Are there any key components of discipleship that don't have a place in your life that need to find one? What is a modest starting place? Don't be too idealistic. What is something you **would** do that you know would be good for you and please God?
4. How are you going to embrace the good of other people in hospitality and mutual support and enjoyment? How will you love?
5. What is something you can feel you don't want to do, but that you are beginning to recognize you really need to do?
6. How does the idea of "exposure" in a Rule of Life help address personal anxieties and promote growth?

- remember. keep this hope filled. "Why should we keep going?"
□ People wondered: Is there a difference between brutality and ferocity?

Week 10 – Spiritual Brutality

Matthew 5:29-30 If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Up until this point, we have talked primarily about having a *plan*. This week we will focus on a *mentality*. When making a plan, gradual is good. It's good to be a moderate when you're planning. In planning we're prone to be too ambitious, for our eyes to be "bigger than our stomach." But, when preparing your mind, it's better to be a fanatic. The norm for our mentality is to give ourselves a break. We look back. We rationalize. We make peace with even our most tragic faults. Our plan can be moderate, but our mentality must be ferocious.

Some of Jesus' best sayings are not popular anymore. They are ferocious statements that tell people they need to be ready to do what it takes to follow him and know God. "Hate your father and mother...even your own life." "Count the cost to build, otherwise you'll be ridiculed by everyone." "Anyone that puts their hand to the plow and turns back isn't fit to be my disciple." This final statement conjures the picture of Lot's wife in Genesis looking back to Sodom and turning to a pillar of salt. When it's time to move forward and not look back, it's time to have a single focus.

One of Jesus' least popular, best sayings is, "If your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out...or hand, cut it off. Better to enter heaven with one hand or eye than hell with body intact." In the book *Substance*, I wrote about "spiritual brutality." Like this saying, that isn't most people's favorite section in the book – but it's absolutely necessary when dealing with things that want to cling to us and that we secretly or desperately want to keep. When it is time to get something out of your life, it's time to be ferocious. The Apostle Paul tells us that we are to "crucify the flesh" – a bloody, up-close-and personal, 'blood splattering on your face' brutality. But as John Owen said, "be killing sin or sin will be killing you...if it is your work to kill an adversary, if you stop striking before the other stops living, you have done but half your work." Sin, flesh, the world, and devils regenerate their work with lightning speed.

The key difference with Jesus is that his examples are not against our enemies, but against the desires within ourselves and in the dynamics of our relationships. True violence is not to be used against even our enemies, whom he calls us to love. **We are to be merciful and peacemakers in our actions in the world. However, we find the strength to be peacemakers through an inner strength forged by the brutality of a warrior that sets us free from everything that enslaves us.** Without spiritual brutality or ferocity, many changes cannot take place. In previous weeks, I've said that some changes can be broken down into smaller, more manageable steps. Spiritual Ferocity and this are compatible: what you need to do is break down the goal into steps and take each step *as ferociously as you know how*, using all the resources and relationships you have.

Think of each step as a little battle – a single blow against the larger fight you are making. To be ferocious, you don't have to win all at once. It doesn't work that way. You must sort out what you must practically do so that you can **learn both ferocity (to take ground) and vigilance (keeping the ground you've taken).**

Spiritual Ferocity: A strength you must grow

Faith is a form of courage, and sometimes it requires appropriate brutality to get free. Parasites don't willingly let go. Have you ever removed a tick? It seems like they'll never let go. Your social media account may be more like a tick than a grace. If it needs to come out, it needs to come out with prejudice, sometimes even appropriate hatred for what it's doing to you.

The resolution of ferocity is usually motivated by love or hatred. Love fuels desire, and we can grow ferocious in our pursuit of the things we are passionate about. Romantic love is an obvious example of something that causes us to neglect almost anything else because it can focus the heart and mind so much. Love of God and the things He loves can do this too. Ferocity is also fueled by hatred. Hatred is a dangerous and potent emotion. Many modern people have taught that "hate" is always bad. When anyone does this, hatred always comes in the back door - and with surprising fury. In Scripture, the key is hating the right things. Generally, it is hating what God hates (Psalm 139:21, Prov 8:13).

God is very clear about what we are supposed to hate, and it's not our enemies. We are supposed to hate sin without hating ourselves--in other words, we need to hate the flesh. We are to recognize that our enemy is not "flesh and blood," but spiritual forces of the "heavenly realms"- meaning demonic entities. **By pointing our hatred at spiritual evil in ourselves, moral evil, and demonic forces, we can ferociously fight sin with passion without hating ourselves, other sinners, or our enemies.** *① Ephesians*

This distinction may be lost on some and offensive to others. When people want to personally identify with their sin or be our enemies these distinctions will insult or bewilder them. Yet to us, who seek to love what God loves and hate what He hates, these distinctions make clear sense. **Hating what God hates, because of the evil and destruction it does to God's name and good creation, is a virtue.** Functionally, it makes us more ferocious. In a lazy, apathetic world that calls what is actually evil good, we need this ferocity to find real liberty.

□ consider adding the analogy:
"can't enjoy a flower garden
until the weeds are pulled!"

The Little Foxes

Sometimes you're not killing a monster, but a cute animal or an attractive lover. Years ago, a raccoon decided to eat my wife's chickens. It got into the coop, tore one of the five chickens to shreds, and decapitated it. So, country boy living in the city that I am, I trapped it the next night. It was really cute; and I still dispatched it brutally with an axe. It was him or the chickens. That cute little bugger would have killed all of my wife's chickens because that's what he does. There is no treaty or negotiation. You have to use the axe, wipe the blood off your face, and move on. Maybe that makes your stomach churn. While I don't love that, I need to be honest about what it takes to break free of what is harming you.

In the Song of Songs, a wedding song of romantic love, there is a strange verse about baby foxes.

Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom. (Song of Solomon 2:15 NIBO)

It seems like a throw away line, but you need to understand the agricultural issue. Baby foxes are born in the spring, when the grape vines are also blooming. As they grow they have to chew on something to cut their teeth. The easiest thing to chew on in a vineyard are the bases of the grape vines. Some vineyards have vines that have matured for decades. So these kits will chew up the base of the vine and kill the whole thing right when it's blooming. These cute little foxes have to be rounded up and exterminated. It's sad. It's also absolutely necessary if you want wine.

In this wedding song, the blooming hillside is also a metaphor for love. The bride isn't just asking the groom to kill the foxes, she is asking him to be the kind of husband that kill the threats to their life's fertility and fruitfulness. She wants to know that he will see and deal with every threat--even cute little things that would be easier to ignore. She wants him to ferociously protect their love, their romance, and their fertility.

Don't examine your life looking for monsters; something doesn't need to look like a monster to be dealt with. Look for little foxes. Look for things that are cute in themselves, but that incidentally harm other things that are meant to grow into something good. Cute little devourers of your time, energy, attention, health, trust in God, or time with His people. **Kill the foxes, or they will be gnawing on your future. If you aren't willing to be ferocious with the little foxes, you aren't going to have the harvest.**

□ note:
distinction
between
battling
a sin
vs.
battling
a
person.

SEcond Half: "I'm not succeeding and it's feels bad. I'm so discouraged!"

The problem here is not that you are failing, it's that you are internalizing your failure into self-reproach in the form of "worldly sorrow" instead of godly sorrow.

See 2 Cor 7:8ff

It is critical to distinguish between what the Apostle Paul calls godly sorrow and what he calls worldly sorrow. Worldly sorrow is a kind of internal self-reproach that is not from

You
added
this
remaining
portion
AFTER
the staff 69
discussed this
week's content

the Holy Spirit. It is a kind of manifestation of anxiety, and is the manifestation of worldly fears and self-hatred. It produces destructive results, anxious responses, and it does not lead to productive actions. The apostle says that leads to "death". The way to respond to worldly sorrow and faith is by rejecting it. In modern psychological terms, we might call this "abusive self talk", Or other forms of internal self-reproach that are self abusive and self hating.

The alternative is not to reject the concept of shame entirely, but to recognize the difference between worldly sorrow and conscientious conviction. The Holy Spirit will sometimes cause internal sorrow, or shame, through conviction in the human conscience. When we feel this godly sorrow, we know what it is about, we know what constructive action we are called to do, and accepting and believing in that course brings resolving and restorative peace. The actions we are led to our repentance, restoration or preparation, and other actions that restore our integrity and relationships.

It's important to recognize that our conscience and our anxiety both reside in our emotional self – or you might say your "intuitive mind". Because of this, it can be easy to mistake one for the other. Sometimes our anxiety wants us to do something, and it can seem conscientious. But if we agree with anxiety, the peace doesn't last. The actions aren't really constructive, and the results are not really fruitful.

We can see our anxiety for what it is, and we know the real voice of conscience – we can take the opposite approach is that each of these internal voices deserve. When we discover a godly sorrow, we can receive it conscientiously and obey its direction. When we recognize worldly sorrow, and it self-hatred, we can exert faith in rejecting it. Knowing the difference between these two forms of shame is integral to knowing and following Christ by obeying the work of the spirit.

Thus, when we are seeking to build and live in accordance with the rule of life, we are going to encounter failure. If we have any ambition in what we are pursuing, we will fail to live up to our ideals on many occasions. When our internal response is to fall into despair, self-hatred or to quit – this is the response of anxiety. It is worldly sorrow. It is not constructive. The act of faith is to reject its voice.

When we feel shame because we have not really attempted to pursue the ideal, we can recognize what we failed to do, repent and asked for Grace to try again. We can thank God for any success we achieved, and ask for his help in getting back on course. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, our punishment is put away, and the only necessary use of guilt is to elicit honesty and develop humility. When we receive God's

intended shame, our mind will be clearer, and our heart more peaceful, we will know exactly what it is we need to do, we will find peaceful resolve in our hearts to try even if we think we are going to fail. Because when we are a failure in the midst of God's love, we know that he cares whether we try, not whether we succeed.

We quit pursuing something that we believe is right and good, we value not feeling bad over pursuing what is actually noble. That is cowardice. But when we are not afraid to try and try again in an area in which we fail, we acknowledge that the thing we pursue is of the utmost importance. The thing we are attempting is good, true and beautiful – and we will attempt pursuing it forever, even if we fail forever. This demonstrates that we believe that the ideal is worth pursuing, no matter how we feel in failing to reach it. Thus our continued attempt in the midst of failure is a form of worship – because the goal is worth attempt after attempt, and quitting is unthinkable because of the value of what we pursue.

Week 10 Reflection + Discussion Questions:

1. How does the concept of "spiritual brutality" contrast with typical approaches to personal growth? When might this approach to change be more harmful than helpful?
2. How can one cultivate "spiritual ferocity" without becoming harsh or unkind towards others or oneself?
3. What does this mean in practical terms, and how might it differ from unhealthy forms of self-denial?
4. The text mentions breaking down goals into smaller steps, while maintaining ferocity. Can you give specific examples of how one balance gradual progress with intense dedication?
5. The author argues that "Both love and hatred can fuel ferocity." How do these motivations differ in their effects on personal change?
6. What are the potential benefits and risks of channeling hatred towards sin and evil rather than people?
7. What are your thoughts on the raccoon anecdote? How does it illustrate the concept of necessary "brutality" in dealing with obstacles?
8. In reference to Song of Solomon 2, what might be some examples of "little foxes" in your own life?

- consider giving more examples (other than pornography) of how to be brutal or ferocious.
- Add quote: "My constant failure is better than my self-justification in not doing this." -NG

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Week 11 – Empowered by the Holy Spirit

Romans 8:1-4 – Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

When I was a kid, it seemed like I could only do two things right: I was a natural outdoorsman, and I was a decent athlete. I really loved playing sports. It was one of the times I experienced the joy of flow, comradery and growth all at once. Yet I remember one coach I had in 7th grade who took all the fun out of sports and made me want to quit. He knew the mechanics of sports pretty well, he had played baseball in college and was a gym teacher, and he had all the qualifications you'd look for in a coach. But for all that, he took all the fun out of it. He had completely the wrong spirit about it. Every time he coached one of our teams, we underperformed – by a lot. Having coached my daughters over the years, I've tried to keep this in mind, that the spirit of the discipline is the difference between bringing life or driving slaves.

Dallas Willard, a philosophy professor and deeply spiritual man, wrote a book on the spiritual disciplines. The title is telling: *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. It had a double meaning. The Holy Spirit is *the* Spirit inhabiting the disciplines, and it is God who makes them work for change in us. However, just as important, the disciplines lose their heart when they lose their spirit – the emotional and spiritual principles by which they are supposed to operate. The only way to grow and enjoy your spiritual life is by keeping the “spirit of the disciplines” as the matter of first importance.

The Spirit of the disciplines: God the Holy Spirit

God the Holy Spirit is *the* Spirit of all spiritual devotion. The Holy Spirit is a person, not a dynamic. “Spiritual” in Christian faith always includes the meaning “of the Holy Spirit.” Spirituality is to act in a way that cooperates with the Holy Spirit. That is why repentance and faith is the basis of spirituality: we agree with God, take His direction, and receive His gifts. All Christian disciplines that are spiritual are offered in imitation of Jesus the Christ as an offering for the Holy Spirit of truth to use to sanctify us. God, the Spirit of Holiness, is the Spirit of the Disciplines. This is true of all the different kinds of spiritual engagements we offer:

1. **Spiritual Environments:** Spaces and places set aside for seeking God in solitude or sacred company. Think worship, fellowship, or solitude.
2. **Spiritual Obediences:** Doing the things Jesus did and commanded. Good works, acts of love and service, the “multiplying and taking dominion” of the creation mandate offered to God in love.
3. **Spiritual Disciplines:** repetitive acts that direct us to God and disciple us more fully into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

4. **Spiritual Virtues:** seeking to exhibit strength of character flowing from real love. Think love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, temperance, fortitude/faithfulness, self-control, etc. These form good character.
5. **Spiritual Gifts:** using spiritual enablement from the Holy Spirit for the good of others, especially the body of Christ, as an offering to the God that gives them.
6. **Habits of the Heart:** renewing of our mind by thinking God's thoughts as he has revealed himself. Applying the Gospel, finding peace in God's care and sovereignty, rejoicing in mistreatment, counting others as better than ourselves, renewing our minds away from the world, and embracing responsibility as a privilege of stewardship. These are mental/heart disciplines that can happen inside us all the time. Staying in this place emotionally takes time. It is a discipline in itself. It's the truer and better form of what psychologists call "improving our self-talk." We return our minds to what God has told us is the true and better internal voice. As we grow in this habit of the heart, we may begin to notice when others, or our church, are getting off track.

All of these can be done in faith, seeking to do them in accordance to God's spiritual will and knowing that we are being empowered by his Spirit when we seek to act in faith. Doing any of these "spiritually" in this way, Romans 12 says, is also worship and pleases God. The "Law of the Spirit of Life" will make all these things work for God's glory, as well as our joy and progress. This can only reliably happen when we seek to walk in step with the Spirit of the disciplines.

The *spirit* of the disciplines

There is also a "small-s" spirit of the disciplines. We might identify this "small-s" spirit with what Richard Lovelace called the "Dynamics of Spiritual Life." These "dynamics" are essentially what we believe when we try to follow God's way.

Lovelace argued that the most important dynamic is that a Christian must emotionally pursue their sanctification on the basis of their justification. To say it another way: you have to pursue growth *because* God has accepted you and given you everything you need, *not so that* he will love you and give you everything you need. Tim Keller said it this way, "I obey because God loves me, not so he will love me." The one-word doctrine for this is **grace**. Because Jesus died for our sins and rose for our justification, through faith we are pardoned from sin and united with Christ. Grace refers to all this being an act of generosity. It's all a free gift. **The question is: *What is the appropriate emotional response to this much free favor and generous gift?***

I have seen generosity, when received improperly, destroy relationships—and it's one of the saddest things I've ever seen. Sometimes a person will be in dire trouble. Someone will generously interpose and "save them" because they have the resources and the willingness. But the person who was in need isn't able to accept the gift with

joy. They feel like they are in debt. They feel humiliated. They want to pay the person back. They secretly think the one who saved them secretly resents that they "had to" bail them out. The rescued person moves from gratitude to resentment, and a deeper alienation sets in between the redeemed person and the rescuer. This is the reason Jesus told us to cancel our debts with people, to keep this from happening.

But, even when we properly receive grace, it can be hard to live by it. We might believe that we received pardon for sins by grace, but we might think we have to earn everything else. Or we might think that God saved us because He's good, but that He resents us in his heart. However, the Apostle Paul saw this objection and responded this way:

(Rom. 8:29-32 NIBO) *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

The Apostle saw things just the opposite way. Jesus was *not* the first grace of God. God has been giving to us from eternity past. He foreknew us before there was time. In that foreknowledge he chose us out of grace. No one forced him. But he didn't just choose us to be forgiven, he chose us to be and look like Jesus (conformed to the likeness of his Son) so that in eternity we would so spiritually resemble Jesus it would be like we are all brothers. Then, because his intention was to make us like Jesus, he immediately knew all of the goodwill and generosity it would take to get us there: predestination, providence, spiritual call, the justifying work of Jesus, and ultimate glorification in resurrection bodies.

Jesus told us to count the cost of coming to faith in him. He said something to the effect of "figure out how much it costs to build a tower before you start. If you don't have enough and build half a tower, everyone is going to make fun of you." (Luke 14:28-29) Do you think God didn't do this? Paul thinks that is certainly false. He makes it clear that God did not spare his Son, but gave him up for us all. That may be the 'biggest' part of the process – but it is not the only part. **There is no way God is graciously 'in' for his son's crucifixion and not in for everything else we will ever need. God didn't fail to count the cost.** He started in eternity past because he wanted to, and he is still giving us everything we need out of his loving generosity. We started by grace, and we will end by grace. Or to put it another way, Jesus may have seemed like he wanted to avoid the cross when he said, "not my will but yours be done," (Luke 22:42) but the author of Hebrews tells us what carried Jesus through: "for the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

lots of agreement in the room.

(Hebrew 12:2). He may have resented the cross, but he did it because it was a joy to the triune God save us through it.

God helps us out of joy. He is at peace. He has no resentment. He gives out of grace. We live on generosity. You can get resentful and reject it or try in futility to pay it off. Either way, you will inevitably kill the spirit of the disciplines. The spirit of the disciplines is grace. It is generosity. It is love. It is assurance. Remember when Paul said, "if I surrender my body to the flames, but I don't do it for love, I gain nothing" (1 Cor 13:3)? Don't you see that this means that God, who claims to be love, could never send his Christ to the martyrdom of the cross for some reason or feeling other than love for you? *God has not chosen us to forever enjoy Him in glory so He can forever be in the presence of those He resents.* He has made His enemies His delight. When we get that in our spiritual bones, we will never lose the spirit of the disciplines.

Once we see that change is just as much by grace as forgiveness, we can see sanctification is a gift in that it is an act of God through his generosity and resources. No matter how much effort we exert in the journey of spiritual maturing, if we see God's grace at the heart of it, we will always be in the right spirit.

Keeping in Step with the Spirit:

When we are in step with the Holy Spirit and the gracious spirit of the disciplines, we will find that these steps lead us into the spirituality that lives in God's "good, pleasing, and perfect" will (Romans 12:1-2). This is not just a description of God's will, but a promise of what it will do in us. When we are a "living sacrifice" in the spirit of the disciplines (being unconformed to the world and transformed by the renewing of our minds), we will experience God's will spiritually. It will be good for us *and* good to us. We will find it pleasing, even in suffering and mistreatment. We will find it "perfect," making us mature and complete in him. If instead you feel the way of Jesus is bad, displeasing, and inept (rather than good, pleasing, and perfect), check whether you are in step with the Spirit (person) and spirit (dynamic) of the disciplines. Much of the time, this is where something has gone wrong. Sometimes it only takes a moment of recognition to reverse your mind (repentance) and get back into a heart of trust.

Week 11 Reflection + Discussion Questions:

1. **Read Romans 8:1-4.** What does it mean to walk "according to the Spirit" or be "in step with the Holy Spirit"? How can we cultivate this in our daily lives?
2. How does the coach/team dynamic explained at the onset of this week's reading illustrate the importance of "the spirit of the disciplines"? Can you think of a similar experience from your own life?
3. Take a look at the spiritual engagements (environments, obediences, disciplines, virtues, gifts, and habits of the heart). Which of these do you find most challenging, or rewarding, to engage in when it comes to your spiritual walk?
4. How do you understand the concept of doing spiritual disciplines "in faith"? What practical differences might this make in how we approach spiritual practices?
5. How does the idea that "pursuing sanctification on the basis of justification" change the way we might approach spiritual growth?
6. Can you share an experience where you struggled to receive grace properly, either from God or from others? What made it difficult? What was the result?
7. How does Paul's argument in Romans 8:29-32 challenge our understanding of God's attitude towards us?
8. Discuss the idea that if we find God's will to be "bad, displeasing, and inept" rather than "good, pleasing, and perfect," we should check if we're in step with the Spirit. Have you experienced this? How did you address it?





Week 12 – Rest: The Trellis is for the Plant

Matthew 12:9-13 –Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” He said to them, “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other.

“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27). There is a lot of wisdom packed into that simple statement. The Sabbath is one of God’s most sacred commands. He commanded men to observe it and threatened absolute judgment if they refused. So, you might think the Sabbath is bigger than human beings, that we live to serve it. But Jesus says that this is reversed.⁶ The Sabbath is a gift to human beings. **God didn’t make us so the Sabbath could rule; He gave it to us so we could rest, remember, and worship. It’s a loving limitation.** The Sabbath keeps us from overworking each other, enslaving each other, and refusing to love each other. **God demands we rest, because to refuse to rest is suicide and idolatry.**

We were made to work productively for six days and rest and worship for one day in a seven-day week. The seven-day week is already something of a “Rule” from creation. Included in Sabbath is a remembrance of God, as well as care for your body with rest. In the Old Testament, the Sabbath was also connected with three other weeklong celebrations called “convocations,” or assemblies, which people were summoned to by the command and invitation of God himself. The word translated “convocation” means “called together.” God called his people into these key moments to receive gifts that God wanted to give. These are the gifts of rest, solemnity, joyful commemoration, celebration, and enjoyment. Sin, the Flesh, the World, and devils are the slavedrivers. Rest, enjoyment, pleasure, vacation, quiet, music, cheer, feasting, dancing, singing, laughing – are all God’s ideas, gifts, and even demands.

Although God’s rhythms in the Old Testament are not commanded for the New Testament Church, it’s important to see that his commanded celebrations were *for* the very people commanded to celebrate them. It is hard for some of us to accept that God demands we do what is for our own true good. He is seeking to make us people who find our good in a way that honors God, blesses our neighbor, and even loves our enemy. This divine life that blesses all is the result of truly virtuous love. Thus, all of God’s commands in calling us to sanctity and godliness through faith are meant to bring us to the strength and blessing of love. What he has demanded from us is also for us. We are called to grow into love, and the love we find was for us all along.

This principle of blessing is the sustaining realization. It is far beyond life hacking and self-help. It is the recognition that the disciplines of spiritual life are the means of strength, joy, life, purpose, conviction, compassion, liberty, virtue, godliness and divine love. God is not making us more cranky legalists. He is making us the kind of saints that can love the world, partly because we have let it go. What God has done for his own

name, he has also done for us to share in that name. In the world that seems always dying, he is always raising the dead. All his commands, in the end, serve the liberty of those he has made his children who will participate in his glory.

In vine-dressing, we might think that because the vine must conform to the trellis, the vine exists for the trellis. This would be a mistake. The trellis is for the vine; the vine isn't for the trellis. However, the vine doesn't decide on the shape of the trellis either. The master shapes the trellis, and he does it to fit how he is going to shape the vine. Similarly, if you want to cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit in your life, you're trying to discern what the Spirit's trellis for you would look like – not what you would make. Think, "If Jesus were here, and I asked him to put together a Rule for me, knowing me as completely as he does, and knowing what he has said, what would he prescribe?" That is what you're looking for. Don't be afraid to ask for help! Ask God and ask wise people around you.

As you seek to walk in the order of a Rule of Life, remember these things: ***you weren't made for it; it was made for you.*** That doesn't mean you should quit. It means that God's commands are a gift and are worth doing. Godliness is not a burden – it is a gift. Love is not just a responsibility; it is participation in the will of God. As you do what Jesus said, and as you adjust exactly how you practice it, keep resetting with these truths. ***The Way of Jesus is supposed to be an expression of his Truth to really lead to his life.*** When disciplines become oppressive or dull, remember these things. Stick with the ones Jesus commanded – like fellowship and worship. Maybe adjust the way you do others – like *how* you study or pray. Most importantly, remember that these were made for you. ***They are a gift. In fact, even the fact that they are commanded is a gift, or else we might quit on them and miss out what God will do if we persevere.*** And so, we end where we began – not with discipline, but with faith; not in ourselves, but in God.

Week 12 Reflection + Discussion Questions:

1. **Read Matthew 12:9-13.** In your own words, how did Jesus' response challenge the Pharisees' understanding of observing the Sabbath and keeping it holy?
2. In what ways can rest be seen as a "loving limitation" from God? How should this perspective change our approach to work and leisure?
3. In what ways can spiritual disciplines become "oppressive or dull," and how can we prevent this from happening?
4. *"Godliness is not a burden – it is a gift."* How does this idea challenge your own perception of what pursuing godliness should look or feel like?
5. How does the idea of emphasizing one's faith in *God*, rather than on self-discipline, reorient the way you understand the impetus for spiritual growth?
6. Answer this question as you transition to prayer: *"If Jesus were here, what Rule would he prescribe for me?"*

Additional Reading + Resources

Week 1 – The Life Promised and a Life Pursued

Week 2 – Honest Measures

Week 3 – Structures, Content, & Companions

Psalms 1, Proverbs 18:24; 13:20; 27:17

Week 4 – Evaluate: A Parched and Fruitless Bush, or a Verdant and Purposed Tree?

Ephesians 5:1-16, Jeremiah 2:5, Colossians 2:16-23

Week 5 – Escaping Diversion/Eliminating the Poison

Jeremiah 2:5; Colossians 2:16-23; 1 Corinthians 9:19-27; Hebrews 12:1-2

[UN]INTENTIONAL: How Screens Secretly Shape Your Desires and How You Can Break Free (Doug Smith)

12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You (Tony Reinke)

Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention—and How to Think Deeply Again (Johann Hari)

Restless Devices: Recovering Personhood, Presence, and Place in the Digital Age (Felicia Wu)

Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World (Cal Newport)

Analog Church: Why We Need Real People, Places, and Things in the Digital Age (Jay Kim)

Analog Christian: Cultivating Contentment, Resilience, and Wisdom in the Digital Age (Jay Kim)

Technopoly and the Lists (Nic Gibson)

Week 6 – Giving Direct Attention to God

Hebrews 1:1-3

Week 7 – Welcome to the Ordinary

Week 8 – Belonging to the Formational Community

Colossians 3:12-14; Matthew 28:18-20

Week 9 – How to Build a Rule of Life

<https://trinitypresfw.org/rule-of-life/>

<https://www.practicingtheway.org/>

Week 10 – Embracing Discipline: Spiritual Brutality

1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Matthew 18:8-9, 28:18-20; Acts 20:28-31; Colossians 3:5-6; Romans 8:13-14;

Galatians 5:24-25

Week 11 – Empowered by the Holy Spirit

John 14:17

Week 12 – Rest: The Trellis is for the Plant

Mark 2:27

Spiritual Disciplines: quotes and Scriptures⁹

Training and Spiritual Discipline: 1 Timothy 4:7 – 8; 1 John 2:6; all of 1 Corinthians 9, especially 9:23 – 27

Prayer

Scriptures: Matthew 6:5 – 9, 7:7, church committed to pray Colossians 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:17; private prayer: Matthew 6:6, 14:23, Mark 6:46, Luke 5:16, 6:12, 9:28; praying Scripture: Matthew 27:46, acts 4:24 – 26; Mark 1:35, Psalm 63:1, acts 6:4, Luke 11:1 – 13, 18:1 – nine, 22:42, John 15:7, Romans 8:26, 12:12,

power and God's responsiveness in prayer: John 14:12-13, 15:16, 16:23; Ephesians 3:20

Meditation on God and Scripture

Psalm 1:2, 63:6, 139:17 – 18, Philippians 4:8, John 5:19

Fasting:

examples in Scripture: Moses: Deuteronomy 9:9, David, 2 Samuel 12:16, Elijah: 1 Kings 19:8, Esther in Esther 4:16, Ezra 10:6, Nehemiah 9:1 – 3, Paul in acts 9:9, 2 Corinthians 11:27, Jesus in Luke 4:2

Key fasting verses: Matthew 6:16 – 18, 9:15 Colossians 2:20 – 23, 1 Timothy 4:3 – five, Isaiah 58, Zechariah 7:5, Psalm 69:10 Matthew 4:1 – 4, John 4:32, 34, Matthew Dan: 15

Study:

- Set aside a time
- Chose a place free of distractions
- find a comfortable position
- come as a student, not a teacher
- learn with humility
- study God's words by:
 - read smaller works in one sitting each day for a month. You will read all the smaller books in the Bible.
 - Read a major book straight through three times
 - focus on a smaller section to read slowly to meditate on for that day
- wisdom: studying life
 - the Bible is not the only thing God has encouraged us to study in Scripture. Psalm 19 says that creation declares the glory of God, but the wisdom literature also encourages us to study the dealings and dynamics of human life, culture, agreements, social relations and justice. We can carefully pay attention to what is happening around us in life and be a student, studying it. When combined with the wisdom literature of Scripture like the book of Proverbs, we can grow in a deep understanding of our human nature personally and in larger group dynamics.

Simplicity: Ecclesiastes 7:30, Leviticus 25:23, Philippians 4:11 1 Timothy 6:6 – 11, Matthew 6:13, Luke 12:16 – 21, 29 – 34, Matthew 5:37

Submission: the ability to lay down the terrible burden of needing to get your own way breaking the dilemma between self-hatred (Psalm 8:3 – six, 139:13 – 14, Matthew 6:25 – 26, 10:29 – 30) and self glory (Romans 12:3, Philippians 3:3 – 9, 1 Corinthians 1:26 – 31, 2 Corinthians 10:17 – 18) is self-denial, and in humility submitting ourselves to God's will, and our preference for others:

Mark 8:34 – 37, Philippians 2:4 – eight, 1 Peter 2:13, 14, 18, 21 – 23, Matthew 5:39, 44, Mark 9:35, John 13:15, Colossians 3:18 – 4:1, Ephesians 5:21

examples of submission in Scripture: Jesus in John 10:70 – 18, Matthew 26:36 – 39, Peter and John 21:18 – 19, Ananias in acts 9:10 – 21

limits of submission: acts 4:19 – 20, acts 5:29

where we should submit: to God in James 4:7, Ephesians 5:24, two Scripture in Matthew 7:24 – 25, two elders and 1 Peter 5:5: Hebrews 13:17, to the believing community in Ephesians 5:21, Philippians 2:4, to family in Ephesians 5:22, to authorities in Romans 13:1 – eight, 1 Peter 2:13 – 14

Worship: Romans 12:1, acts 2:42, John 4:23 – 24, Colossians 3:16, Matthew 5:23 – 26, Amos 5:21 – 24, Isaiah 1:10 – 17, 1 Corinthians 14:26 – 40, Psalm 29:2, Psalm 46:10, Habakkuk 2:20