

## How We Grow: Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines

### Week 1 - Prayer

March 17, 2024

#### I. Teaching Time (*Teaching Video provided*)

A. Teaching Narrative: We have been created for connection. Because God is love and because we have been created in the image of the God of love, we've been made for love. Each one of us has been intentionally crafted with a number of different means through which we can love our God and love one another. We have been created to think logically, feel deeply, listen intentionally, remember faithfully, experience bodily, and dream imaginatively in order that we might know God more fully and become more and more like Jesus. That's where spiritual disciplines come in! Richard Foster writes that spiritual disciplines are intentional practices that give us space to "place ourselves before God, so that he can transform us."<sup>1</sup> Curt Thompson writes that they "create space within us for God to work."<sup>2</sup> More than anything, these disciplines open us up to God's empowering presence. They empower us to love and to release that which prevents us from loving. As we engage with our God through these practices, we are being transformed more fully into the image of God. This is the goal of our spiritual formation—Christlikeness—and as we are being formed by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit seeks to engage our whole self: mind, body, and will. Over these next nine weeks, we are excited to both learn about and practice together nine sets of spiritual disciplines. We are eager to see what happens as we create space as a church family for God to work through these disciplines.

This week, we are focusing on the spiritual discipline of prayer. Foster writes that prayer is "the most central [discipline] because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father."<sup>3</sup> Ruth Haley Barton writes, "The fundamental purpose of prayer is to deepen our intimacy with God."<sup>4</sup> Simply put, prayer is all about how we communicate

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperOne, 1998), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships* (Colorado Springs: Tyndall Momentum 2010), 178.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 33.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 63.

with God. Prayer is the root of many of the spiritual disciplines we will be studying and practicing during this series. But prayer is learned. In Luke 11:1, one of his disciples says to Jesus, “Lord teach us to pray.” And if the goal of these spiritual disciplines is that we become more like Jesus, it makes sense for us to look to Jesus to learn how to pray. First, Jesus made prayer a habit. Throughout his life and ministry, we find Jesus going out *early in the morning to lonely places* to pray (Matthew 14:23; Mark 6:46–47; Luke 6:12; John 6:15). He also encouraged his followers to have a sacred, private place to pray (Matthew 6:6). By setting aside a place and a time to pray, we can help make prayer a regular part of our daily routine. So what might it look like for you to have a certain place that is set aside as a place of prayer? Perhaps a certain chair in your home or on your back porch? Or maybe a trail or walkway near your home? And also do you have a time (for yourself or for your family) that you’ve set aside to pray? Setting aside a time and a place can help make prayer a habit and can help invite the Lord into our everyday.

Jesus also prayed along the way. He models prayer without ceasing. While Jesus was going about his day-to-day ministry, he looked to the Father and relied on the Spirit. Before feeding the 5000, Jesus looks to the heavens and gives thanks just as he does throughout many of his miracles (Mt. 14:19). He listens to the Spirit who leads him to Samaria to meet the woman at the well (John 4:4). And in one of the most poignant moments in all of the Gospels, as Jesus sees his dead friend, Lazarus, we read, “And Jesus looked up and said, ‘Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.’” Jesus models what it looks like for us to regularly invite the Lord into our day-to-day life and ministry. So what might it look like for you to do the same? What does praying without ceasing look like in your context?

Finally, Jesus teaches us to pray authentically. We ought to pray to a God who already knows us and sees us as we are. Jesus teaches his apostles in Matthew 6:7–8, “And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” If one of the goals of prayer is intimacy with God, we can trust God to be our wholehearted selves. We can entrust him with our darkest fears, deepest struggles, and greatest joys.

B. Here’s an initial question to discuss as a class: What are some models of prayer that have been helpful for you throughout the years?

II. Discussion Time (Questions Provided by Jason)

III. Invitations of the Week: Choose at least one of these prayer practices and walk through them throughout the week. Be intentional about choosing a place and a time to pray. Also, at

least one time this week, practice one of these guided prayers in the context of a community (with your spouse, family, roommates, small group, or group of friends).

A. Praying the Lord's Prayer (**Guided Prayer Video provided**)

1. *"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."* Let's take a moment to share with God those things (character traits, attributes) that you adore about God. Thank God for those attributes and actions.
2. *"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."* What are some ways in which you can partner with God for his mission. At school? At the ball park? With your family? At dance class? Pray about those opportunities.
3. *"Give us this day our daily bread."* Spend some time thinking and praying about those things that we need and those things that the people closest to us need.
4. *"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."* Let's spend some time in confession, as well as thinking of those who we may not have forgiven in our lives.
5. *"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."* Spend some time thinking about the ways that Satan tries to tempt you at school and at home, and pray that God will keep you away from those temptations. Pray that you can get through them!
6. *"For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever."* Finally, close by remembering the ways that you have seen God's kingdom and power at work in your life throughout the day. Try to be specific. Thank him for those moments.

B. Praying the Psalms (**Invitation Video provided**)

1. The Psalms can be an excellent way to enrich our prayers lives and in many ways is like a prayer book. During your prayer time this week, choose a psalm to pray through. Allow the psalmist's words to become your own.<sup>5</sup>
  - a) To begin your day with God: Psalm 5, 19, 20, 23, 25
  - b) When you are sad: Psalm 13, 22, 42, 77
  - c) When you are in distress: Psalm 57, 60, 6
  - d) When you are scared: Psalm 27
  - e) When you are hurt: Psalm 10
  - f) When you ache for more of God: Psalm 63, 84
  - g) When you want to repent: Psalm 51
  - h) When you are grateful: Psalm 9, 103
  - i) When you want to worship: Psalm 8, 148-150

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<sup>5</sup>List adapted from John Mark Comer's Prayer Guide (<https://www.practictheway.org/companion-guides>).

## How We Grow: Implementing the Spiritual Disciplines

### Week 2 - Fasting

March 24, 2024

#### I. Sharing Time

- A. How was your experience practicing the discipline of prayer this week? As you practiced throughout the week, did you notice or experience anything surprising, challenging, comforting, confusing, helpful, or encouraging? Invite your class to share with the people beside them, and then open it up for sharing with the class at large.

#### II. Teaching Time (*Teaching Video provided*)

- A. Teaching Narrative: This week's spiritual discipline we are studying as a church family is fasting. We find examples of fasting throughout the biblical narrative. It was a regular part of the Jewish culture in the first century and a central rhythm of the life of the early church. There are a number of examples in the Old Testament of the people of God fasting and praying as they sought to receive strength or guidance from the Lord (1 Samuel 7:6; Nehemiah 1:4; Esther 4:16).<sup>6</sup> We also find that the early church incorporated fasting as a part of their regular worship (Acts 13:2–3). And of course, we find that in preparation for His ministry, Jesus is led into the wilderness to fast for forty days.

There are a number of ways people define fasting that include fasting from food, pleasure, or some sort of technology or social media. However, biblical fasting is always connected to fasting from food or water and of course is tied to spiritual intentions. Fasting is an act of self-denial. Calhoun shares that it is “an opportunity to lay down an appetite—an appetite for food, for media, for shopping...Through self-denial we begin to recognize what controls us.”<sup>7</sup> Fasting trains our bodies to not get what they want. We deny ourselves in order to receive from God. Richard Foster shares, “In experiences of fasting we are not so much abstaining from food as we are feasting on the word of God. Fasting is feasting!”<sup>8</sup> Dallas Willard reminds us that as we fast we are able to recognize

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<sup>6</sup> Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 246.

<sup>7</sup> Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 246–247.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperOne, 1998), 55.

our “utter dependence” on the Lord.<sup>9</sup> It is he who sustains us—who keeps us going. He is the source of all of life—beyond food! And so as we fast, we are able to prayerfully recognize this dependence.

Jesus teaches us about fasting by reminding us to stay connected to the heart of the discipline—connection with and reliance on God. He teaches, “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” Fasting is not meant to bring you clout. It is not to be used to impress others or to get people to feel sorry for yourself. It is an act of submission and sacrifice and should always be connected to prayer. So instead of going out for lunch or going to the grocery store, take some time to walk and talk with the Lord. Or instead of picking up your phone recenter yourself toward the heart of God. We fast so we can feast on the Bread of Life.

B. Here’s an initial question to discuss as a class: Have you fasted before? Create some space for your class to share about one another’s experiences with fasting.

### III. Discussion Time (Questions Provided by Jason)

IV. Invitation of the Week (**Invitation Video Provided**): Choose one of these fasting practices and walk through it one day this week. You can either practice this discipline individually or within the context of one of your communities (with your spouse, family, roommates, or group of friends). Remember to stay connected to the heart of the discipline of fasting.

- A. Fast from food until sundown one day this week, focusing on offering yourself to Jesus.<sup>10</sup>
1. Pick a day that works for you. Try to choose a day that provides an opportunity for you to really slow down to connect with God.
  2. If possible, pick a day to do this together as a community; this will help to encourage and enliven your practice. You can encourage one another, as you rely on the Spirit!
  3. Fast until sundown that day. Then eat a simple meal in gratitude. Drink lots of water to stay hydrated, and drink coffee if you’d like, but just have it black. Coffee is 99.9% water and will not keep your body from entering the fasting state.

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<sup>9</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1988), 167.

<sup>10</sup> This is adapted from John Mark Comer’s fasting companion guide: <https://www.practicingtheway.org/companion-guides>.

4. If a full day is too much for your body or soul, start smaller. Skip breakfast and break the fast at lunch or 3 pm. Remember: The goal is to make fasting a part of your regular life, not try it once or twice, hate it, and never try it again. Start where you are, not where you feel like you “should” be.
  5. In the time you’d normally be grocery shopping, cooking, eating, or cleaning, give yourself to prayer. Let your desire for food point you to Jesus as you open yourself to Him. The more time you can give to prayer and reflection and the less busy you are that day, the better. Make it your goal to slow down the day you fast, and be present to your body, and to God, as much as you possibly can.
  6. Resist the urge to judge your experience. Release thoughts like, “I liked it; I disliked it; I felt close to God; I didn’t feel close to God.” Just let the experience of fasting be what it is; and offer it to God in love.
  7. In your dedicated times of prayer, or each time a hunger pain comes, you may want to pray Romans 12:1–2, or simply, “God, I offer my body to you in worship. Please transform me.”
  8. As you go about your day, just enjoy God’s company and attempt to open your heart to him all throughout the day.
  9. Take time to reflect on the ways you experienced the Lord through this practice.
- B. Unplugging—An alternative for those unable to fast from food (***Invitation Video Provided***)
1. So often, one of the biggest reasons we are unable to experience the Lord is because of the way our mind and our body is distracted. Unplugging is a physical way that we can intentionally release one of those attachments. Here are a couple ways you can practice this discipline.
    - a) As a family, declare a time of the day that is technology-free. Dinnertime or evening and nighttime is a great option. You might consider keeping the family’s phone in a central location to help hold each other accountable.
    - b) Another option is a media fast—social media, television, streaming, or video games. Allow each family member to choose what they would like to give up for the week or for a day.
  2. As you unplug, be intentional with your extra time as an opportunity to connect with God together and individually.
  3. As you unplug, use the time you’d normally be using your cell phone or watching TV to give yourself to prayer. Let your desire for your device point you to Jesus as you open yourself to Him

4. In your dedicated times of prayer, or each time you want to look at your phone, you may want to pray Romans 12:1–2, or simply, “God, I offer my body and my mind to you in worship. Please transform me.”
5. As you go about your day, just enjoy God’s company and attempt to open your heart to him so He can transform you.

## How We Grow: Implementing the Spiritual Disciplines

### Week 3 - Generosity

March 31, 2024

#### I. Sharing Time

- A. How was your experience practicing the discipline of fasting this week? As you practiced throughout the week, did you notice or experience anything surprising, challenging, comforting, confusing, helpful, or encouraging? Invite your class to share with the people beside them, and then open it up for sharing with the class at large.

#### II. Teaching Time (*Teaching Video provided*)

- A. Teaching Narrative: One of the most beautiful themes in the Old Testament is the chosen identity of the people of Israel. Beginning in Genesis 12, YHWH names this identity to Abraham and to his descendants that will follow them throughout the biblical narrative. God chooses Abraham and chooses his people. He sets them apart. He says that they will be a great people. He says that he will bless them. But God doesn't choose Israel for Israel's sake. He chooses Israel for the sake of the world. And this theme is at the heart of our spiritual discipline for this week—Generosity.

YHWH tells Abraham—The world will be blessed through you. Israel was chosen for the world's sake, and Psalm 67:1–3 and 7 sums this up well.

*May God be gracious to us and bless us*

*and make His face shine on us—*

*SO THAT your ways may be known on earth,*

*your salvation among all nations.*

*May the people praise you, God;*

*May all the peoples praise you...*

*May God bless us still,*

*SO THAT the ends of the earth will fear Him.”*

Israel is a “so-that” people. Not chosen because of anything that they had done! They were blessed *so that* the world might be blessed. Chosen so that the world might know God. And we are a *so that* people, too! Not chosen because of anything we have done. Not chosen because of how great we are. But we are chosen despite our insignificance and imperfections. Chosen *so that* the world might see and experience the grace and love of God through us! We are a vessel of God's goodness and kindness to the world. Chosen for the sake of one another, for the sake of our families, our co-workers, our neighbors, the city of Huntsville. Chosen *so that* the world might be blessed.



And this is what generosity is all about. Because of God's Spirit that indwells us and out of an overflow of the love that has been freely given to us, we are generous. We bless those we meet along the way. And we do so intentionally. John reminds us that we love because he has first loved us. And it only makes sense for us to lean into this discipline during the week of Easter Sunday, as we remember the gift of life we receive through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Because of our God's unfathomable generosity, we in return are generous. We love and we give and we bless and we share. Out of an overflow of the greatest gift that has ever been given—Jesus.

- B. Here's an initial question to discuss as a class: Share about a time when someone was generous with you. What made that experience of generosity meaningful to you?

### III. Discussion Time (*Questions Provided by Jason*)

IV. Invitation for the Week: As we seek to practice the discipline of generosity together, bless three different people this week, one of whom is not a member of our church family.<sup>11</sup> These acts of blessing ought to be in concert with a listening and prayerful posture. Who is the Spirit leading you to bless today? Here are three examples of what those blessings could be: (*Invitation Video Provided*)

- A. Words of Affirmation: Send someone a note, e-mail, or text. Or you can speak some words of encouragement to someone in person. As we bless someone with our words, we are communicating love and modeling the blessing we receive from God as His beloved sons and daughters.
- B. Acts of Kindness: How can you serve a neighbor this week? "Who doesn't feel blessed when someone does them a favor or provides some kind of practical support? Cutting a neighbor's lawn. Babysitting an exhausted couple's kid. Helping a neighbor move to his new house. These acts of kindness literally add strength to their arm; they lighten the recipient's load."<sup>12</sup> As we seek to practice generosity in the way of Jesus, we can serve as Jesus served.
- C. Gifts: When we think of generosity, this is probably the first thing we think of! How can you bless someone through gift-giving this week? Maybe there's someone you meet along the way who could use a meal? Maybe you could bake some cookies for a neighbor? Or make a co-worker's morning with Starbucks? When we bless people in this

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<sup>11</sup> This prompt is adapted from Michael Frost, *Surprise the World: The Five Habits of Highly Missional People* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2016), 29–39.

<sup>12</sup> Frost, *Surprise the World*, 32.

way, we are communicating to them that we see them and that we love them, just as the Lord sees us and loves us. We are giving in the way of Jesus.

- D. In order to stay rooted in the Spirit as you practice this discipline, it could be helpful to connect each of these opportunities to bless with prayer—praying that the recipients feel seen, loved, and cared for and that they are able to experience God’s grace and goodness through this humble act of generosity. If every member of our church family blesses three people, thousands of people in our city will experience an expression of God’s love this week.

## How We Grow: Implementing the Spiritual Disciplines

### Week 4 - Meditation

April 7, 2024

#### I. Sharing Time

- A. How was your experience practicing the discipline of generosity this week? As you practiced throughout the week, did you notice or experience anything surprising, challenging, comforting, confusing, helpful, or encouraging? Invite your class to share with the people beside them, and then open it up for sharing with the class at large.

#### II. Teaching Time (*Teaching Video provided*)

- A. Teaching Narrative: If the goal of spiritual disciplines is to place ourselves before God in order that we might be transformed more fully in the way of Jesus, our relationship with Scripture has to be at the heart of that transformation. And while study is a part of that transformation (we'll talk about that discipline in a few weeks), this week our focus is on the spiritual discipline, meditation. There are two Hebrew words that are used more than fifty-eight times in the Old Testament to convey the idea of meditation. Richard Foster writes that these words have various meanings: "listening to God's word, reflecting on God's works, rehearsing God's deeds, ruminating on God's law, and more. In each case there is stress upon changed behavior as a result of our encounter with the living God."<sup>15</sup> One of the central passages connected to the discipline of meditation on God's Word is Psalm 119. Here are a few excerpts: "Turn my heart toward your statutes (vv.36)...Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long (vv. 97)...How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth (vv.103)...Your statutes are my heritage forever, they are the joy of my heart (vv. 111)." In our culture today, when we think of meditation, a lot of the time you are meditating in order to empty your mind, but that isn't Christian meditation! Christian meditation is all about filling our mind with God. Adele Calhoun writes, "Christian meditation opens us to the mind of God and to his world and presence in the world." We meditate on the words and works of God so that we might be filled with God more fully.

The Scriptures are a gift to us from God that helps us to see and experience God. It is like a window that allows us to see God more clearly and more fully. The Bible has been given to us relationally. Scot McKnight writes that God communicates through the

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<sup>15</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperOne, 1998), 15.

Bible with His listening people [that's where meditation comes in] in conversation so that we might have a relationship with the God of the Bible.<sup>14</sup>

We practice the spiritual discipline of meditation not simply so we can acquire more knowledge of God's Word, but instead, we meditate so that we might *know God* more deeply and see the work of the Spirit of God in our lives. The discipline of meditation helps us to *slow down* so that we can *hear* God's voice and be filled with His words.

- B. Here's an initial question to discuss as a class: How have you practiced the spiritual discipline of meditation before? Share with the class about your past experiences with meditation.

### III. Discussion Time (*Questions Provided by Jason*)

IV. Invitation for the Week: This week, we want to invite you to practice one or both of these meditation guides four or five times. At least one time this week, practice the discipline within the context of one of your communities—with your spouse, family, roommates, or group of friends. (*These are to become a guided prayer videos. We will make multiple Lectio Divina meditations as well as an Imaginative Reading video*)

#### A. *Lectio Divina*

1. This spiritual practice has been around for a long time. Because the beginnings of the Christian faith were primarily oral, this reading practice was incredibly common. The goal of the practice is to read and listen. What is this text saying? Is there an invitation in this text? Is there a connection to your life circumstances?
2. During this practice, you will read through a passage of Scripture three different times, meditating on it's connection to your life and circumstances. There are five steps to this meditation practice:
  - a) Step 1 – *Silencio* – This is the space for quiet preparation and breath. It is similar to our experience with the practice of Examen. Let's begin with our breathe and posture. Sit in a comfortable spot with feet firmly planted on the ground. Notice your breathing. As you breath, imagine you are breathing in the very breath of God. As you breath out, imagine you are releasing any stress, anxiety, nervousness, fear, and insecurity.
  - b) Step 2 – *Lectio* - The first step is called "Lectio," or "Reading." This is where you sit down, and slowly and reflectively read a passage of scripture. This can be any passage of Scripture you'd like. Listen to one word or phrase that the Spirit has

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<sup>14</sup> Scot McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 88.

given you. Don't be critical or judgmental of the word. Be open to what God is speaking.

- c) Step 3 – *Meditatio* - Begin by rereading the passage of Scripture and then “reflect” on it. Allow it to sink deep into the depths of your being. Allow the Spirit to bring to your mind and heart an experience or issue that you are facing right now that seems to connect with your word or phrase. Don't force it. Allow it to emerge.
  - d) Step 4 – *Oratio* - Step 3 is our “response” to the first two steps. As you reread once again as the question, “Is God inviting you to do or be something in the next few days?” Listen for an invitation.
  - e) Step 5 – *Contemplatio* - This final step is an opportunity to enjoy the presence of God, and allow the words you have read and meditated on transform you from the inside out. How can this passage affect the way you see the world and affect how you live everyday?
3. It doesn't matter when or where. Take your time and walk through the practice slowly and intentionally. This practice shouldn't be rushed. Use your journal to write down what you heard.
  4. Here are some options for *Lectio Divina* readings:
    - a) Exodus 3:1-6
    - b) Psalm 16
    - c) Psalm 27
    - d) Psalm 42
    - e) Psalm 130
    - f) Jeremiah 1:4-10
    - g) Matthew 6:25-34
    - h) Mark 10:46-52
    - i) Romans 5:1-5
    - j) Philippians 2:1-11

#### B. Imaginative Reading<sup>15</sup>

1. Jesus, God with us, engages our imagination. Curt Thompson writes, “In Jesus, God comes not simply to be in the same room, but rather to walk right up to us, look us in the eye, touch us on the shoulder, and speak our names out loud, smile, and share a drink with us, all the while engaging, persuading, challenging, inviting, convicting,

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<sup>15</sup> Practice adapted from Jackie L. Halstead, *Leaning into God's Embrace: A Guidebook for Contemplative Prayer* (Abilene: Leafwood Publishers, 2021), 44-45.

and empowering each of us, loving us into new creation. And in the process, our neural networks are changed.”<sup>16</sup>

2. We’re going to engage our imagination in this new practice called imaginative reading. This is a new way that you can engage your senses and your imagination. I’m going to read through a text a couple of times. The goal is for you to experience the text in new and fresh ways. Read through it slowly, and after the second reading, As you read, try to imaginatively enter the event of the text using all your senses—sight, hearing, touch, and smell.
3. Here are the instructions:
  - a) What do you feel?
    - (1) Is the weather hot? Do you feel a breeze? Can you feel the ground under your feet? The fabric of the clothes of those around you?
  - b) What do you smell?
    - (1) Animal smells? Body odor? Is it a dusty day? Do you smell food from the market? Try to imagine those very smells.
  - c) What do you hear?
    - (1) The loud voices of the crowd? Animal sounds? Birds? The voice of the disciples arguing with Jesus? Do you hear the voice of Jesus?
  - d) What do you see?
    - (1) Is this sky blue? Do you see the crowd? The disciples? Do you see the woman touching the hem of Jesus’ garment? Do you see Jesus?
  - e) Where are you in the event?
    - (1) Are you in the crowd? Are you standing beside Jesus? Are you the person in need of healing?
  - f) Now take a moment to watch the event take place. What does Jesus look like to you/ What do you notice about his eyes? The way he talks to people? His clothes? How does he walk?
  - g) Stay right there and let everything fade but you and Jesus. Go to him. Sit beside him. How do you respond to his presence? Do you talk to him? What do you feel called to share? Maybe you don’t say anything? Does he say anything to you? Don’t try to control it. Spend some time with just the two of you.

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<sup>16</sup> Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships* (Colorado Springs: Tyndale Momentum, 2010), 139.

## How We Grow: Implementing the Spiritual Disciplines

### Week 5 - Confession

April 14, 2024

#### I. Sharing Time

- A. How was your experience practicing the discipline of meditation this week? As you practiced throughout the week, did you notice or experience anything surprising, challenging, comforting, confusing, helpful, or encouraging? Invite your class to share with the people beside them, and then open it up for sharing with the class at large.

#### II. Teaching Time (*Teaching Video provided*)

- A. Teaching Narrative: This week's spiritual discipline, confession, may be good for the soul, but it's really tough to do. Forgiveness is perhaps the most central tenet to the Gospel—that no matter where we stray, our God always welcomes us home. This is why one-third of Jesus' parables are about forgiveness. But sometimes it's difficult for us to actually receive that forgiveness. Because at its core, sin creates a barrier that prevents us from living as we were created to live. It builds a wall between us and God. It keeps us from loving God and loving one another. And *receiving* God's love. I really appreciate the way Bonhoeffer describes the isolation of sin. He says, "Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him...Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed it poisons the whole being of a person."<sup>17</sup> But we know and can have confidence that nothing can ever separate us from the love we receive from God through Jesus. And the spiritual discipline of confession actually helps us receive that forgiveness. Frederick Büchner writes, "To confess your sins to God is not to tell him anything he doesn't already know. Until you confess them, however, they are the abyss between you. But when you confess them, they become a bridge." In Proverbs 28:13, Solomon writes something similar, "he who conceals his sin will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes it finds mercy." Through confession, we find the mercy we receive through Jesus.

But confession doesn't merely build a bridge between us and God; it builds a bridge between each other, too! There is both a vertical and horizontal aspect of confession. James tells us, "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed." Confession to each other actually leads us to freedom and healing, but it's so vulnerable! Vulnerability is tough because sometimes we're not sure

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<sup>17</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 112.

how our vulnerability will be received. We are afraid to be perceived as weak, but vulnerability takes so much courage. Brené Brown writes, “Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity. It is the source of hope, accountability, and authenticity.” Vulnerability breeds more vulnerability. Your courage to be vulnerable encourages me to be vulnerable. Confession is such a beautiful and powerful discipline because it reminds us that we are not alone. It builds solidarity and openness between us. I would love for our church family to create a culture through the power and gift of the Holy Spirit that makes vulnerability safe. What might it look like for us to have a confessing culture that builds bridges over walls and values accountability over isolation?

- B. Here’s an initial question to discuss as a class: How can we help to build on a culture of vulnerability here at Mayfair? What role might confession play in that?

### III. Discussion Time (*Questions Provided by Jason*)

IV. Invitation for the Week: Below you’ll find two practices that can help lead to confession. Walk through the discipline of Examen daily this week. You might choose to journal your prayers or create a note in your phone. The power of this discipline is in its habitual nature. Second, we’d like to encourage you to meet with an accountability partner who can help you navigate the struggles you are walking through during this season.

#### A. Prayer of Examen (*Invitation Video provided*)

1. Practice by Ignatius of Loyola, a 16<sup>th</sup> Century Theologian.
2. Examen is all about noticing. It’s the daily practice of noticing the work and presence of God in your life and noticing the spaces in your life that desperately need the presence of the Lord. It has been most helpful for me, as I have practiced it habitually.
  - a) Ignatius taught that there were these two forces at work in our lives all the time: the true Spirit and the false spirit. He invites us to become attentive to those two competing forces so that we can “discern what is best and that we may be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus.”
  - b) Ignatius writes that when we are living in the false spirit, the spirit of the enemy, we experience desolation. Mark Thibodeaux summarizes the characteristics of desolation:



- (1) “I am in desolation when I am empty of faith, hope, and love and the sense of God’s closeness and full of some combination of disquietude and agitation, boredom and tepidity, fear and worry, and secrecy.”<sup>18</sup>
- c) Furthermore, Ignatius writes that when we are living in the true Spirit, the Spirit of God, we experience consolation. Thibodeaux summarizes the characteristics of consolation:
- (1) “I am in consolation when I have faith, hope, and love, the sense of God’s closeness, peace and tranquility, great desires, and transparency.”<sup>19</sup>
3. The practice of Examen has given me space to discern what is from God and what is not. It is a practice of attentiveness, allowing me to slow down and discern the movement and presence of the Spirit at work within me and around me.
4. Here’s the prayer practice:
- a) Through the practice of Examen, at either the beginning or end of the day, we take time to notice the moments where we experienced desolation. When did we feel far from God? When were we agitated or bored, fearful or anxious? We simply notice each of those moments. We name them (not writing a novel about them), and invite God into those moments.
- b) Then we move on to Consolation. When did we experience faith, hope, and love? When did we feel close to God? When did we experience peace or tranquility? We notice each of those moments. We name them, and thank God for them.
- c) Finally, look toward tomorrow. What are you excited about? Anxious for? Fearful of? Do you have a test or a conversation or a ballgame or a meeting that you’re worried about? Is God inviting you to love a friend or neighbor or family member? List those items, asking God to join you in them.

**B. Accountability Partner<sup>20</sup> (*Invitation Video provided*)**

1. If you would like to have an accountability partner, begin by asking God to bring someone to mind. An accountability partner does not have to be older and wiser than you but simply should be someone you love and trust deeply. He or she simply

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<sup>18</sup> Mark E. Thibodeaux, SJ, *God’s Voice Within: The Ignatian Way to Discover God’s Will* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2010), 57.

<sup>19</sup> Thibodeaux, *God’s Voice Within*, 57.

<sup>20</sup> Adapted from Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 144 and a guide from [https://downloads.24-7prayer.com/prayer\\_course/2019/resources/pdfs/25 How to Confess Sin.pdf](https://downloads.24-7prayer.com/prayer_course/2019/resources/pdfs/25%20How%20to%20Confess%20Sin.pdf).

needs to share the desire to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the transformation process.

2. When a name comes to mind, approach the person with your desire. Decide how often you will meet together. Have an intentional chat about how you want your relationship to become a place where you can 'bare your souls' to one another. The central ingredients for this time of relationship and ongoing conversation are accountability, wisdom and encouragement.
3. This type of practice takes an obvious healthy dose of vulnerability for it to work. As you have now established the boundaries for your relationship, then become comfortable opening up your heart to your trusted friend. Step out of your shell of invulnerability, connect with the common human brokenness of your brother or sister, share with them and pray together. You can begin by sharing your stories, temptations and desired area of growth. Pray for each other.
4. While vulnerability and openness are wonderful and endearing gifts, it is important to be wise with the practice of confession. Sometimes with the best of intentions and earnest desire to be 'pure of heart' we can naïvely share things that it might have been better not to.
  - a) Firstly, we need to be sure we are confessing to the right person. Will they maintain confidentiality? Are they mature enough to be able to hear what I need to tell them? It is also vitally important, as a general rule of thumb, that men are confessing with men and women with women. We don't want to kid ourselves into thinking we won't get drawn into emotional ties or worse, particularly when we are connecting over issues of the heart.
  - b) Secondly, we need to ask ourselves if our confession is going to cause more distress or embarrassment to the person? If we are in doubt about this, we should talk to someone who we know is wise and get their advice.
  - c) Thirdly, we may need to grow to realize that there are some things we can just take to God in confession. Sometimes those of us who have a tender conscience feel the need to spill our heart out every day to others even if we are not sure whether it is sin we are confessing or not. Don't allow this kind of therapy to become a substitute for receiving forgiveness from Jesus, the source of all forgiveness and cleansing.

## How We Grow: Implementing the Spiritual Disciplines

### Week 6 - Silence and Solitude

April 21, 2024

#### I. Sharing Time

- A. How was your experience practicing the discipline of confession this week? As you practiced throughout the week, did you notice or experience anything surprising, challenging, comforting, confusing, helpful, or encouraging? Invite your class to share with the people beside them, and then open it up for sharing with the class at large.

#### II. Teaching Time (*Teaching Video provided*)

- A. Teaching Narrative: We live in a noisy, busy world. So many of our schedules are filled to the brim with activity after activity, and in those moments where our activities finally slow down, we often fill those moments with our phones and media. Our bodies are constantly moving. Our brains...constantly thinking. And we have this deep need to slow down. Henri Nouwen said in 1981, "Over the last few decades, we have been inundated by a torrent of words: words softly whispered, loudly proclaimed, or angrily screamed; words spoke, recited, or sung; words on records, in books, on walls, or in the sky; words in many sounds, many colors, or many forms; words to be heard, read, seen, or glanced at; words which flicker off and on, move slowly, dance, jump or wiggle. Words, words, words! There was a time not too long ago without radios and televisions, stop signs, yield signs, merge signs, bumper stickers, and ever-present announcements indicating price-increases or special sales."<sup>21</sup> He said this in 1981! I wonder what he would say today!

Listen, I know we are all so busy, and there is very little margin in our schedules. Between work, school, extracurricular activities, and even church, there is very little time for anything else. But our spiritual formation cannot be made in a microwave. Our lives are a part of the slow work of God, and time and quiet are necessary ingredients to our becoming like Jesus. That's why the spiritual disciplines of silence and solitude are such important practices for us—especially in our world today. The Scriptures point to our finding God in the quiet. Habakkuk 2:20 says, "The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him." In 1 Kings 19:12 meets Elijah not in the powerful wind or earthquake or fire, but in a gentle whisper. The Lord meets us in the quiet place. Jesus models this for us as well in Luke 5:16, we read, "But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." And even in the end times, we see God revealing himself through silence in

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<sup>21</sup>Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart: Connecting with God through Prayer, Wisdom, and Silence* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1981), 57.

Revelation 8:1, “When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.” We must eliminate the noise in our lives, so we can hear God more clearly.

- B. Here’s an initial question to discuss as a class: Why is silence and solitude so uncomfortable for us today? What are some ways that you can eliminate noise in your lives?

III. Discussion Time (**Questions Provided by Jason**)

IV. Invitation for the Week: Walk through the practice of Breath Prayer at least 5 times this week. Share about your experiences within the context of one of your communities (with your spouse, family, roommates, or group of friends).

A. Breath Prayer (**Invitation Video Provided**)

1. Breath prayer “reminds us that just as we can’t live on one breath of air, we can’t live on one breath of God. God is the oxygen of our soul, and we need to breath him in all day long.”<sup>22</sup>
2. You’ll notice that many of our practices we have walked through begin with a focus on our breathing. That focus helps us to slow our minds and create an open disposition.
3. Breath prayer can help us to practice silence. It’s simple. If silence is new for you, begin with ten minutes. Setting a timer can help a beginner who is tempted to keep watching the clock. It lets you forget the time and settle into the quiet. Intentionally place yourself in the presence of God and as your mind wanders, attend to a specific phrase.
4. As you breath in focus on a name of God, and as you breath out express a desire of your heart.
5. Here are some examples of these breath prayers:
  - a) Breathe in “Abba.” Breathe out “I belong to you.”
  - b) Breathe in, “Holy Spirit.” Breathe out, “Fall on me.”
  - c) Breathe in, “Holy One.” Breathe out, “Keep me true.”
  - d) Breathe in, “Lord.” Breathe out, “Here I am.”
  - e) Breathe in, “Jesus.” Breathe out, “Have mercy on me.”
  - f) Breathe in, “Breath of Life.” Breathe out, “breathe on me.”
  - g) Or perhaps use a one phrase from Scripture that is meaningful to you, like...  
Breathe in, “Less of me.” Breathe out, “More of you.”
6. After ten minutes, reflect on what it was like for you to simply be still enough to slow your mind. Try this multiple times throughout the day—when you are surrounded

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<sup>22</sup> Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 233.

with fear, overwhelmed with anxiety, or maybe even just bored. Allow this prayer to bring you back to the center.

## How We Grow: Implementing the Spiritual Disciplines

### Week 7 - Study

April 28, 2024

#### I. Sharing Time

- A. How was your experience practicing the discipline of silence and solitude this week? As you practiced throughout the week, did you notice or experience anything surprising, challenging, comforting, confusing, helpful, or encouraging? Invite your class to share with the people beside them, and then open it up for sharing with the class at large.

#### II. Teaching Time (*Teaching Video provided*)

- A. Teaching Narrative: The Scriptures are such a gift to us. We believe that they are God's divine revelation and that they teach us about our God, our origin, and our calling. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:16, "Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, and training us to live God's way." (That's from Peterson's *The Message*). As we said a few weeks ago, the Scriptures are a primary avenue for us to come to know our God (not simply know about Him), and this week's spiritual discipline, Study, is a helpful practice for us as we seek to be transformed through the Word and Spirit. Pursuit of God's Word was a central practice in the life of Jesus. Adele Calhoun writes, "Jesus exemplified the love of God's Word in every area of his life. He used Scripture to answer those who tested him, resist temptation, find guidance, encourage his heart, comfort others, explain his actions, and ultimately face his own death."<sup>25</sup> Jesus' study of Scripture overflowed into every aspect of his life.

In an interchange leading up to Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, a lawyer approaches Jesus and asks him about what he ought to do in order to inherit eternal life. Jesus responds to him with two questions: "What does the law say?" And then he emphasizes, "How do you read it?" With this question, Jesus highlights the importance of how we interpret Scripture. Bible study is about more than simply reading. Through study, we are pursuing deeper, richer understanding of the Scriptures and the God behind the Scriptures. But sometimes finding an approach to study and interpretation can feel overwhelming.

One of my favorite classes in grad school was a biblical interpretation class with Dr. John Mark Hicks at Lipscomb. In the class, we would take a number of different

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<sup>25</sup> Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 185.

challenging passages and interpret them together within the context of our classroom community. It was awesome! Dr. Hicks was diagramming Scripture on a white board like my English teachers would diagram sentences in high school. His Bible study model was really helpful for me, so I adapted it for our students a couple years ago. I think it might be helpful to you, too!

The model consists of these 7 questions:

1. What is the passage's historical context? *This question is all about diving into the world behind the text. The stories in Scripture are real, historical events, and so studying the historical background of a text can lead to deeper understanding and insight.*
2. What is the passage's place in its book? *With this question, we try and understand the overall structure of the book and the author's intent behind his book. What role does the passage you are studying play in the overarching purpose of the book?*
3. Do you see connection to the rest of Scripture? Old Testament? New Testament? *When studying Scripture, it's important to remember that a passage should not be studied in isolation. What role does this passage play in the overarching biblical narrative? Is the passage repeated elsewhere? Does it reference another passage? Does the passage remind you of a different Scripture? Are there any biblical themes we find emphasized in this passage?*
4. Are there any terms we need to define? *It might be helpful here to look toward the original language in order to gain greater insight of the words the author has chosen.*
5. With all that in mind, what does this passage teach us about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? *At the heart of our study of Scripture is understanding the heart of our triune God of love. What does this passage teach us about His character, identity, or nature?*
6. What does this passage teach us about "the world" and sin? *Much of Scripture helps us to gain insight into ways we are separated from God. It shines light in darkness. How does this passage do that?*
7. How does this passage teach us to love God? Love others? *Our study of Scripture ought to always be tied to practice. How does this Scripture call us to live? How does it move us to participate in the mission of God?*

You know the best part about that class wasn't simply watching Dr. Hicks do his thing (even though that was awesome). It was studying within the context of our class. Getting to hear other's perspectives was so powerful. Scripture was meant to be read in community. Each of us is shaped by our own history, by our mentors, and by our churches, and through the working of the Spirit in that class, each of those perspectives added depth to our communal interpretation. And the Spirit does the same right here at Mayfair.

B. Here's an initial question to discuss as a class: Is there a Bible study model that has been helpful for you in the past? Share about it.

III. Discussion Time (***Questions Provided by Jason***)

IV. Invitation for the Week: This week, we want to encourage you to take some time to practice the discipline of study—once individually and once in the context of one of your communities. Utilize the model we shared or a model that was shared in your class discussion. (***Invitation Video Provided***)

A. ***Provide a list of Bible study resources.***



## How We Grow: Implementing the Spiritual Disciplines

### Week 8 - Service

May 5, 2024

#### I. Sharing Time

- A. How was your experience practicing the discipline of study this week? As you practiced throughout the week, did you notice or experience anything surprising, challenging, comforting, confusing, helpful, or encouraging? Invite your class to share with the people beside them, and then open it up for sharing with the class at large.

#### II. Teaching Time (*Teaching Video provided*)

- A. Teaching Narrative: On the night he was betrayed, in the Upper Room with his disciples, Jesus “got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. He then poured water into a basin and began washing his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.” After this act of service for them, Jesus shared, “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.” That story is in John 13 and is foundational to this week’s spiritual discipline, Service.

Service is at the very heart of our calling as the people of God because service is at the very heart of our God himself. A few months ago, during Jason’s sermon series *Knowing Jesus*, he led us in a study of Philippians 2:5–11, a central teaching in the early church. In this passage, Paul invites us to model our lives after the life that Jesus led, who despite being God chose to empty himself by becoming a servant, made in our likeness. And then as a man, he lived a life of humility—a life that ultimately led to his death on a cross. In that sermon, Jason urged us to make Jesus the Lord of our whole life—our whole self. The life we are called into is a life that is not our own—a life of humility.

But this life of humility and service is in direct conflict to the ways of the world and the temptations of the enemy. The enemy wants your life to be all about you, and our culture normalizes and accentuates that desire. The enemy wants our lives to revolve around our needs, our desires, and our happiness, but Jesus models the opposite. He invites us to empty ourselves, to prioritize the needs of others, and to live a life of sacrifice.

This life of service starts with our eyes. Are we able to see the needs of our family members, our friends, and our neighborhood? Are we able to see others as God sees

them? Adele Calhoun writes, “When we are preoccupied with our own concerns, much of the world is simply invisible to us. Service is rooted in *seeing*—in seeing others as God does.”<sup>24</sup> By looking beyond our own needs and desires, we are able to see people as our compassionate God sees them and love people as our good God loves us. The spiritual discipline of service can help us transform our hearts and our eyes for the sake of the world and can help us model our lives after the life of Jesus.

- B. Here’s an initial question to discuss as a class: Who is someone in your life who has modeled a life of service and humility to you? Share about them.

### III. Discussion Time (*Questions Provided by Jason*)

IV. Invitation for the Week (*Invitation Video provided*): This week, we want to encourage you to take some time to practice the discipline of service. Here are three ways that you could practice this discipline:

- A. Every morning this week ask your spouse, a roommate, colleague, or friend, “What can I do for you today?” Then do it. Talk to God about what this is like for you. What do you learn about yourself and the needs of others?<sup>25</sup>
- B. In the context of your community (with your spouse, family, roommates, small group, or group of friends), pray together about a way that you could serve the city of Huntsville this week, and spend some time serving together. Our God is already at work in our city! How can you join Him? ***We’re going to provide a list of potential service opportunities and ministries in our city for your reference.***
- C. In Matthew 6, Jesus teaches us about the motivations behind our service: “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” This week, choose to do something for or give something to someone anonymously. Allow the Spirit to help you discover who you should choose. As you talk to people, pay attention to any need they might mention. Plan a way of following through on your desire without letting them know where the help or gift came from. Process your experience with the Lord.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 168.

<sup>25</sup> Adapted from Calhoun, 169.

<sup>26</sup> Adapted from Calhoun, 120.

## How We Grow: Implementing the Spiritual Disciplines

### Week 9 - Rest

May 12, 2024

#### I. Sharing Time

- A. How was your experience practicing the discipline of service this week? As you practiced throughout the week, did you notice or experience anything surprising, challenging, comforting, confusing, helpful, or encouraging? Invite your class to share with the people beside them, and then open it up for sharing with the class at large.

#### II. Teaching Time (*Teaching Video provided*)

- A. Teaching Narrative: We live in a fast-paced world. In his book *Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, John Mark Comer tells the story of an interview between John Ortberg and his mentor Dallas Willard. Ortberg called up Willard and asked him, “What do I need to do to become the me I want to be?” There was a long pause on Willard’s end, and then he says, “You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life...There is nothing else. Hurry is the greatest enemy of spiritual life in our day. You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.”<sup>27</sup> When we add to our crazy schedules the way our minds become absorbed with screen time, we are hurry sick. Hurry is the greatest threat to our life with God. I love the way Comer emphasizes this: “Hurry kills relationships. Love takes time; hurry doesn’t have it. It kills joy, gratitude, appreciation; people in a rush don’t have time to enter the goodness of the moment. It kills wisdom; wisdom is born in the quiet, the slow. Wisdom has its own pace. It makes you wait for it...Hurry kills all that we hold dear: spirituality, health, marriage, family, thoughtful work, creativity, generosity. Hurry is a sociopathic predator loose in our society.”<sup>28</sup> And there is only one antidote to the hurry sickness in our lives...our spiritual discipline for this week—rest.

Over the years, Matthew 11:28–30 has become one of my favorite passages. Here’s the passage from the Message translation: “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.” This passage has always been really attractive

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<sup>27</sup> John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2019), 19–

<sup>28</sup> Comer, 52–53.

me! I hear this verse and I think, “Yes! This is what I want! This is what I need! I AM tired... worn out! I long for rest! I’m over the heavy burdens!” We want this life that Jesus promises.

But sometimes we miss the point of Jesus’ invitation here. We want this life, but are we willing to adopt the lifestyle behind it? The reality is that the life Jesus describes here is the fruit of a lifestyle Jesus invites us to participate in. Jesus says, “Come to me. Get away with me. That’s how you’ll recover your life. Walk with me. Watch me. Learn my rhythms. Learn my lifestyle.” Instead we find ourselves in this tug-of-war between two conflicting worlds—the life Jesus invites us to and the life that is expected of us by the world. A hurried life leads to stress, chaos, burnout, little to no sense of the presence of God, and distraction. Life in the Spirit leads to peace, rest, joy, abundance, and freedom. That’s what this series has been all about. What habits can we build into our day-to-day life that can help us stay connected to the source of all life?

And rest is foundational to the abundant life! Sabbath is a gift from God to us. In the first century world, Sabbath was a controversial topic that the teachers of the law used to entrap Jesus, but Jesus reminded his followers, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” They needed Sabbath then, and today, we need Sabbath more than ever. Our hearts, minds, and bodies are desperately craving rest because it is in that rest we are able to encounter the Lord.

B. Here’s an initial question to discuss as a class: What does “rest” look like for you?

### III. Discussion Time (*Questions Provided by Jason*)

IV. Invitation for the Week (*Invitation Video provided*): This week, we want to encourage you to plan a twenty-four-hour day of rest for yourself and for your family. The night before your Sabbath, spend time praying for rest and inviting the Lord into the day ahead. Consider pursuing things that will nourish you. Worship, listen to music, get coffee with your best friend, spend time with your spouse, take a walk, nap, eat delicious food, go fishing, be in nature, read, do your nails, watch the sun rise or sunset, make a fire, sing, go on a picnic, take a hike, play a game, or call a friend or family member who lives far away. Take your time, being intentional to waste time with God and with people you love. You might also consider saying no to some of these activities: phone, social media, the internet, TV and entertainment, shopping, social obligations, sports, weekend work, chores, errands, and people. Listen to the Spirit to discern what you need on this day of rest, and enjoy!