

Practicing the Way : The Practices

In our course looking at Practicing the Way – being with Jesus, becoming Like Jesus and doing what Jesus did, we have looked at the topic of spiritual formation - how we are all spiritually formed but most of that formation is unintentional. If we truly desire to follow Jesus and be spiritually formed as apprentices of Jesus, we need to more intentional. The last sermon I preached used the parable of the Sower and whilst a lot of the seed of faith fails to bear fruit, the seed planted in good soil bears a hundredfold.

So how can we find good soil for our faith. Where our faith life, our desire to follow Jesus, can be fulfilling and fruitful, bring us joy and those we know joy.

How do we live life like Jesus – who we regard as having a fulfilled life – close to God, loving and just to others. What can we learn from the way Jesus did life – we are apprentices of Jesus.

I don't know if you have ever been an apprentice. I read a article in the paper the other day that said graduate job opportunities are highly competitive and more school leavers are choosing to start an apprenticeship instead. Changing times..

John Mark Comer in his book Practicing the Way says learning theorists frame apprenticeship as a four-stage training process:

1. I do; you watch
2. I do; you help
3. You do; I help
4. You do; I watch

You can map that exact process onto Jesus' training of his apprentices, his disciples. At first, they just followed him around and watched. Over time they began to help Jesus. Then they began to do Jesus' work and follow his way of life, a little at a time, receiving feedback as they took their first steps. By the end they were sent out in Jesus' name to continue what he started.

Comer says we all may know that acrostic WWJD What Would Jesus Do? But a better question is WWJD IHWM - What would Jesus Do If He Were Me?

The odds are that you are not a first century Jewish rabbi! It's a bit hard to ask WWJD if your current job is raising a family, or writing software, or driving buses or working in the supermarket or factory or school. Instead ask how would Jesus live if he had my gender, place, personality, age, life stage, job, resources, and address? How would he handle whatever! That the million dollar question.

And we are not Jesus. The Son of God had a few advantages going for him, as well as a few more responsibilities and burdens. But he did it all in the power of the Spirit and that is something that we need to cultivate. Our spiritual life and connection to God.

I hope we would crave the intimacy and relationship Jesus had with his Heavenly Father.

So what kind of things did he do to foster that relationship and keep him strong in faith and hope. What practices do we observe Jesus doing and are they still valid for today.

Sabbath

Sabbath is a twenty-four hour time period set aside to stop, rest, delight, and worship. It is the best day of the week. In our era of chronic exhaustion, emotional unhealth, and spiritual stagnation, few things are more necessary than the recovery of this ancient practice.

Stop

God built a rhythm of rest into the fabric of creation. When we live in alignment with this ancient rhythm, we find peace and joy, but when we fight it, we fracture our souls.

Rest

Sabbath isn't just a day off to take a long nap — it's a form of resistance that requires us to fight powerful forces that war against Sabbath spirituality.

Delight

Sabbath is a full day set aside to celebrate our life with God in his world, and it is designed to be done in community — a life-giving day of delight.

Worship

Sabbath isn't just a day to stop, rest, and throw a feast in community — it's a holy day set apart and dedicated to God himself.

Prayer

The Prayer Practice will help you learn to set aside dedicated time to intentionally be with God, in order to become like him and partner with him in the world.

Talking to God

As we learn the pragmatics of prayer, we'll begin habituating and fine-tuning a daily prayer rhythm.

Talking with God

In prayer, we bring our pain, hopes, joys, and fears to God in a personalized way.

Listening to God

Prayer is not just when we talk but when we listen to hear his voice.

Being with God

Learn about the type of prayer that goes beyond words to simple loving presence, or what the ancient Christians called “union” with God.

Fasting

Fasting is one of the most essential and powerful of all the practices of Jesus and, arguably, the single most neglected one in the modern, Western church. The Fasting Practice will train you in this ancient discipline, integrating your whole body into life with God.

To Offer Ourselves to God

Fasting is one of the best disciplines we have to offer our whole selves to God in surrender.

To Grow in Holiness

Fasting has many physical benefits for our bodies that mirror how it benefits our souls.

To Amplify Our Prayers

When we combine prayer with fasting, it’s like a chemical reaction that amplifies our prayer.

To Stand With the Poor

Fasting is an avenue of biblical justice, standing against evil and with our neighbors in need.

Solitude

In an increasingly distracted and noisy world, we need solitude more than ever. The practice of solitude mimics Jesus’ rhythm of retreat and return: retreat from people and distractions to be with God, in order to return to community in love and service.

The Quiet Place

Solitude helps us break free from noise and distractions to be in the presence of God.

Encounter with Our Self

Through solitude, we face emotions that live below the surface of our lives and bring them to God.

Encounter with Our Enemy

Solitude helps quiet us so we can hear scriptural truth and fight against the enemies of our soul.

Encounter with Our God

Solitude's highest purpose is found by opening ourselves to God's personal voice and enjoying his love.

Generosity

When Jesus said there is more joy in giving than in receiving, he turned our vision of the good life on its head. Through the practice of generosity, we tap into God's joy, find freedom from greed through contentment, and embody God's concern for those in need.

There Is More Joy in Giving Than Receiving

Jesus' teaching on money and possessions sounds absurd or even reckless to our modern ears. Yet financial generosity is a pathway to happiness, and displays trust in a generous, happy God.

Watch Out for Greed!

Jesus understood that greed makes us anxious, distracted, discontent, and lonely. But generosity opens us to the beauty of contentment.

All We Have Belongs to God

In the biblical paradigm of stewardship, God owns everything, we are entrusted with his resources to do good, and he blesses us so we can give more.

Be Generous to the Poor

Concern for the poor holds a prominent place in God's heart. Apprentices of Jesus reflect this priority by coming alongside those in need, creating a new kind of family.

Scripture

The library we call “the Bible” can connect us to God and change who we are, but distraction, hurry, and confusion can hinder our experience with these ancient texts. Rediscover how to engage Scripture as an apprentice to Jesus.

Read

Learn why following Jesus and immersing our minds in Scripture are inseparable and how to read with a heart posture attuned to his presence.

Meditate

The digital age teaches us to read quickly and move on, but the library of Scripture was created for slow, prayerful reflection so that God’s thoughts inhabit our minds completely.

Study

The library of Scripture isn’t easy to understand. The process of learning what the text says — to the original audience and to us today — helps us listen to God and obey whatever he says.

Memorize

In the age of easy access to information, we’ve lost something crucial: the practice of storing truth deep in our bodies, so that we can anchor ourselves to an “inner library” of passages throughout the day.

Community

Despite the unprecedented connectivity of the modern era, genuine community is vanishing. Isolation, transience, and superficiality can sabotage our formation into people of mature love. But through Jesus, we enter a new kind of family that offers intimacy, joy, healing, and commitment.

Be family around a table

To apprentice under Jesus is to join a new kind of family – a highly relational, joyfully-connected kinship group that follows Jesus not just around a stage, but in growing intimacy around a table.

Share your joys and sorrows

In an individualistic culture prone to despair, followers of Jesus form micro-communities of defiant joy that resist the black hole of fear and anger, and mutually carry burdens of sorrow and pain.

Confess your sins

Many modern barriers to community are symptoms of shame. But as we learn to courageously name our wickedness and woundedness in the presence of loving community, we begin to heal.

Stay together to grow

As we draw closer in community, periods of conflict, pain, and disillusionment are inevitable. But as we accept these challenges and remain connected, we grow into mature love together.

Service

Love is the hallmark of Jesus' followers, but what does it look like? In the Way of Jesus, it means offering hidden acts of service to those right in front of us, allowing ourselves to be interrupted by unexpected needs, and overlapping our lives with those on the margins.

Love

In the Way of Jesus, love isn't just a warm feeling or a general sense of goodwill towards those in need. It is embodied, practical actions of self-giving service, modeled by Jesus and given to us as the hallmark of true apprenticeship.

Hiddenness

Jesus grounded service in ordinary places, and among everyday relationships. And so we're often invited to embrace hidden service to those right in front of us before more visible acts of service to the marginalized.

Availability

Jesus was both intentional and interruptible. And as we apprentice under him with intention, we increasingly respond to the unplanned and the unexpected in the same way Jesus would: with loving presence and willingness to help.

Kinship

Jesus' calling to serve those in need is radical, because it involves more than giving from a safe distance. It is a call to kinship—to embrace those outside our circle and outside our comfort zone as if they were family.

Witness

Everyone is preaching a gospel: recent poll 96% of millennial Christians said that part of their faith was being a witness to Jesus and the best thing that could happen to

someone is that they came to know Jesus. Yet 46% also said 'It is wrong to share one's personal beliefs with someone of a different faith in the hope that they will one day share the same faith' – we are very sensitive to proselytising. We are socially conditioned to keep our mouths shut: faith is private not a public matter. Who are you to tell me what is true? Any form of truth claims no matter how graciously presented, pass implicit judgement on other claims. Secular culture is a dizzying bazaar of competing truth claims. Everyone is preaching a gospel. We preach the gospel of Jesus. But not to do it in an unsophisticated, manipulative and at times mean spirited way that often leaves people degraded and demeaned.

Do it in a Jesus way:

Offer hospitality

Find where God is already working and join Him

Bear witness – live a radiant and compelling life

To possess God we must give Him away. Otherwise, our faith will devolve into a private individualized coping therapy and our spirituality will wither on the vine. If you want more of God, give Him away.

Do you think these practices are helpful to you? Will they provide the good soil to foster your faith and keep your hope alive?

For more resources and comment on all these practices go to:

<https://www.practicingtheway.org/resources#the-practices>