

The Practicing the Way Course

Teaching Notes

Session 01: Following Jesus

Intro:

- Who are you following?
- Everybody is following *somebody*.
- Or something.
- Put another way, everyone is a disciple.
- The question isn't, "Are you a disciple?"
- It's, "Who or what are you a disciple of?"
- Two thousand years ago, a Hebrew Rabbi by the name of Jesus, made this invitation:
 - "Come, and follow me."
- He invited anyone and everyone to become his disciples — or students in living.
- Over the last two thousand years, millions of people have said yes to Jesus' invitation.
- It's changed not only their lives, but the course of human history.
- And it can do the same for you ...

Set up:

- "Following Jesus"
- You likely recognize this language if you've spent any time in the church, but what exactly does *it mean*?
- Does it mean we believe in a set of ideas called "Christianity"?
- Or go to church on Sunday?
- Or try hard to be a good person?
- And this raises another question: How do we follow Jesus in the modern world?
- Where we're all so busy, in a hurry, and distracted by our devices?
- Where burnout is a rite of passage and anxiety is like an electric pulse in our bodies all day long?
- Living in cities that are noisy and full of people with totally different worldviews?
- What does it look like to "follow Jesus" today?

Primer disclaimer:

- This eight-session course is a primer on spiritual formation.
- The goal is to lay a foundation for you to begin a lifelong journey of apprenticeship to Jesus.
 - You may be here and you're a brand new Christian — just getting started on your spiritual journey.
 - Or you may be here and you've been a Christian for your entire life, but you're ready to take your discipleship more seriously ...
 - Or you may be a serious follower of Jesus, but you want to learn more about the *practices* of Jesus, or how to craft a Rule of Life.

Seam: *Wherever you come from, we're so happy you're here.*

Welcome:

- Hello everyone, I'm Yinka; I'm your host for this course alongside John Mark, and on behalf of all of us at Practicing the Way, *welcome*.
- We designed this course as an introduction to spiritual formation that will set you up for a *lifetime* of learning the practices and relational rhythms of the Way of Jesus.
- And it's designed to be done in community, with the people to your right and left.
- In each session, we'll learn about apprenticeship to Jesus.
- And then we'll send you away with spiritual exercises, to take what you learned and, in the words of Jesus, "put it into practice."
- Afterwards, we will invite you to *reflect* on your experience, and pay attention to what God is doing inside you, with prompt questions in your Companion Guide.
- Then we'll come back together and process it all in community, where you'll get the chance to share honestly about your spiritual journey.
- This cycle of *teaching, practice, reflection, and dialogue in community* is the pathway to transformation.

Seam: For Session One, let's explore together what it means to follow Jesus.

Set up:

- Let's circle back to the story of Jesus calling his first disciples ...
- The story is from Mark 1, and in it, Jesus is walking along the the Sea of Galilee, when he comes upon Simon and Andrew, two brothers running a fishing business off the beach.
- Jesus says to them, "Come, follow me," and then we read this:
 - "At once they left their nets and followed him." (Mark 1v18)
- If you've read this story before, it's easy to lose sight of just how bizarre it is.
- What would make Simon and Andrew drop *everything* ... I mean, literally walk out of their business ... with no advance planning ... all to follow a Rabbi with no income stream, no organization, no home
- Can you imagine? You're just sitting at the office or wherever you work; Jesus comes by and says "Come, follow me"; and you just walk out of your job right then and there?
- What would move Simon and Andrew to give up everything?

Seam: Let me offer you a little backstory ...

"What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?":

- In first century Israel, you would regularly see rabbis walking along the road, or teaching at your village synagogue.
 - The word rabbi means "master" or "teacher."
 - Rabbis were the revered teachers, not just of the Torah, (the Bible of their day), but of life with God.
 - Most of them were itinerant; they would travel from place to place, to teach ...
- And behind them would be a small group of students called *talmidim*.
 - The Hebrew word *talmid* literally means "learner"; but it can also be translated "student," or "follower."
 - The most common translation is "disciple."
 - But a growing number of scholars argue the best word we have in the English language to capture the full meaning of the Hebrew word *talmid* is *apprentice*.

- The philosophy of education in the ancient world was nothing like ours in the modern West, where you go to class, sit through a lecture, and take notes for a test.
- It wasn't *informational*; it was *formational*.
- The goal wasn't just to learn about *something*, but to become *someone*.
- And discipleship — or “apprenticeship”—was the pinnacle of the first century Jewish educational system.
- Jewish kids started school around five years old at the *Bet Sefer*, or “The House of the Book,” which was the equivalent of elementary school.
- The primary textbook was the Bible, but it was an oral culture, and by the age of 12 or 13, most students would have memorized the *entire* Torah — the first five books of the Bible.
- At that point, the vast majority of students went home, to apprentice in the family business or work the family farm.
- But the best of the *best* would go on to a second level of education, called *Bet Midrash*, or “The House of Learning,” where they would continue their studies.
- It was built off the side of the synagogue and run by a full time scribe or teacher.
- By the age of 17 they would have memorized *the entire Old Testament*.
- At this point, the vast majority were done.
- But the best of the best of the *best* would go on to apprentice under a rabbi.
- Let's say you were one of the lucky few who became an apprentice to a rabbi: from that point on, your *entire* life was organized around three driving goals:

1. First: **To be with your rabbi**

- You would leave your family and your village and follow your Rabbi 24/7.
- Apprenticeship was deeply relational; you walk behind your rabbi on the road, eat every meal with them, keep Sabbath together — be *with* them all day long.

2. Secondly: **To become like your rabbi**

- The heart and soul of apprenticeship was to be with your rabbi *for the purpose of becoming like your rabbi*.
- You would imitate their whole life — copy their mannerisms, adopt their figures of speech;

You wanted to *be* like them.

3. Finally: **To do as your rabbi did**

- The goal of apprenticeship to a rabbi was to one day become a rabbi yourself!
- And if you made it through the long process of apprenticeship, then, when your rabbi felt you were ready, he would turn to you and say something like, “Okay, I think you’re ready: Go, and make disciples.”

Seam: This was what it meant to be a disciple. And, this is *still* what it means to be a disciple.

Apprentice to Jesus:

- If you flip the Jewish model of apprenticeship around, from the first century to the twenty-first, a clear picture of apprenticeship to Jesus comes into focus.
- To “follow” Jesus is to organize your life around the three driving goals of an apprentice ...
 1. To be with Jesus
 2. To become like Jesus
 3. And to do as he did
- A short word on each.
- First ...

1. **To be with Jesus**

- Jesus himself called his disciples to “be with him.” (Mark 3v14)
- This is the first goal of an apprentice of Jesus; to spend every possible moment in awareness of and connection to him ...
- ... in what the Dutch monk Thomas a Kempis called “a familiar friendship with Jesus.”¹
- Jesus himself said to his apprentices, “I have called you friends.” (John 15v15)
- And through friendship with Jesus, we enter into the inner life of God himself — the trinitarian community of love; through Jesus, we are enveloped in the love and joy and peace that is flowing between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. And we live in connection to this love all day long ...

- Jesus called this “abiding.”
- The French contemplative Madame Guyon called it “continuous inner abiding.”
- The pastor A.W. Tozer called it “constant, conscious communion.”²
- But one of my favorites is from Brother Lawrence, who called it “the practice of the presence of God.”³
- We *can* live this way — in *connection* to Jesus.
- But — it takes *practice*, in turning our mind and heart to God, all through the day.
- Dallas Willard, a teacher of spiritual formation, said this:
 - “The first and most basic thing we can and must do is to keep God before our minds ... This is *the* fundamental secret of caring for our souls. Our part in this practicing the presence of God is to direct and redirect our minds constantly to Him. In the early time of our ‘practicing’ we may well be challenged by our burdensome habits of dwelling on things less than God. But these are habits — not the law of gravity — and can be broken. A new, grace-filled habit will replace the former ones as we take intentional steps toward keeping God before us. Soon our minds will return to God as the needle of a compass constantly returns to the north. If God is the great longing of our souls, He will become the pole star of our inward beings.”⁴
- So the first goal of an apprentice: to be with Jesus.
- Our next goal is ...

2. To become like Jesus

- This is the bleeding heart of an apprentice — to be transformed from the inside out to think like Jesus, feel like Jesus, talk like Jesus, live and love like Jesus.
- Jesus had this great line about how “The apprentice is not above the rabbi, but everyone who is fully trained will be *like* their rabbi.” (Luke 6v40, paraphrase)
- Notice his language — “everyone who is *fully* trained.”
- This is a process; none of us become like Jesus in a flash from heaven, but through a long process of *training* and apprenticeship to him.
- The word we use for this process is “spiritual formation,” which is the process by which our “spirit” (or our inner woman or man) is *formed* to be like Jesus himself.
- Imagine what Jesus would look like expressed through your personality, gender, ethnicity,

stage of life, culture ...

- Imagine if you were to become more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, and kind ... if you were to become like Jesus?
- This is the second driving goal of an apprentice of Jesus.
- Finally, it's ...

3. To do as he did

- Remember Jesus' invitation: "Come, follow me ... and I will send you out to fish for people." (Matthew 4v19)
- In English this sounds like a cheesy pun; it's not. "Fishers of people" was a first century idiom for a great rabbi, because the most brilliant rabbis had the ability to *capture* your mind and heart with their teaching.
- Jesus is saying, "Come follow me, and I'll train you to do what *I* do."
- Think about it: if you're an apprentice to a plumber, then at the end of your apprenticeship program, your goal isn't just to know all *about* plumbing, it's to be able to plumb a house!
- In the same way, the goal of an apprentice of Jesus isn't just to know all *about* Jesus, but to be able to do the kinds of things he did — to join Jesus in his work of preaching, teaching, serving, healing, prophesying, and deliverance ...
- This may sound impossible to you, but as you are with Jesus, and become like him, you will naturally find yourself saying and doing the kinds of things he said and did.
- Be with Jesus.
- Become like Jesus.
- Do as he did.

Seam: This is what we mean by "practicing the Way of Jesus."

Practicing the Way

- The first followers of Jesus called themselves "The Way" or "Followers of the Way."
- The Way of Jesus ...
- Is not just a set of beliefs — a theology or philosophy of life.

- And it's not just a moral system — a list of do's and don'ts.
- It *is* that, but it's more.
- It's a way of life. Based on that of Jesus himself.

Seam: To apprentice under Jesus is to practice his Way, and over a lifelong spiritual journey, to be formed into a person who is like Jesus.

Set up for group conversation:

- That was a beautiful story.
- But we all have our own story.
- So let's take a few minutes to debrief this in community.
- Circle up with 3 to 5 people, and talk through the following questions:
 1. What are you hoping Jesus will do in you through this course?
 2. As you look back on your life, who or what has had the greatest impact on your spiritual journey thus far?
 - (This could be a parent or family member; a childhood experience; an opportunity, or a great loss ... What is it for you?)
 3. What do you think is the driving aim of your life? Your top goals and priorities?
 - (Please don't feel pressure to pretend or give the "right" answer.
 - We want this to become a place where we share who we actually are without fear.)
- Finally,
 4. How can we as a community pray for you over the next seven weeks?
- Take 15 minutes to talk and pray ... and then we'll return with our practice for week one ...

Set up:

- As we said, each week, we'll offer you practices or spiritual exercises to turn the idea of following Jesus into a *reality* in your daily life.

- Because *information* alone is not enough for *transformation*.
 - To be transformed, we have to get the teachings of Jesus into the muscle memory of our bodies ...
 - A few things you should know before we turn to this week's practice:
1. First, alongside this course, we are reading the book *Practicing the Way* by John Mark.
 - This week we're reading Part 1.
 2. Secondly, go ahead and pull out your Companion Guide for the course.
 - In it are weekly exercises, questions for reflection, short readings, and more.
 - If you don't have a copy yet, it's available through the Practicing the Way site as a free digital download or in a print-on-demand version, but we *recommend* you order the hard copy to stay away from your phone during prayer.
 - Finally, to begin the course, we invite you to take the Spiritual Health Reflection.
 - This is a self-assessment we developed for you to plot yourself on your spiritual journey.
 - Once you have a baseline, you can return and retake the assessment in the future in order to better name Jesus' invitations to you along the way.
 - To access the Spiritual Health Reflection, just follow the link in your Guide or visit practicingtheway.org.
 3. Finally, in each session, Ken Shigematsu, who is a pastor and writer on the spiritual life, will direct us into our practice for the coming week.

Tutorial:

Week 1: Daily Prayer Rhythm

- Thank you for joining us. It's such a gift to connect with you in this way.
- The best way to "be with Jesus" is to develop a *daily prayer rhythm* ...
- You may already have a daily prayer rhythm, or you may not, but whatever your approach, you will see in our guide that our exercise for week one is to develop a daily time and place to connect with God in solitude and silence.

- This exercise can be done in a few minutes, or you can take up to an hour. The key is to start where you are, not where you feel you should be. If two or three minutes is all you have, start *there*, and then take the next step.
- I like to get up early and go for a walk with our golden retriever and then sit in a quiet spot in our house.
- Your morning with Jesus might begin with making a cup of tea or coffee.
- Or you might sit cross-legged on the floor, breathing slowly, in and out, through your nose.
- You might begin by praying a psalm, such as the 23rd Psalm, or reading another Scripture.
- Here are a few suggestions as you develop your practice of prayer:

1. First, find a quiet *place* that is distraction free.

- This could be a corner in your home or a nearby park.
- Find somewhere where you can focus and be at peace.

2. Second, identify a quiet *time*.

- For many people, the first thing upon waking is the best possible time to pray. But for you, it may be before bed, or while your baby is napping mid-morning, or on a lunch break.
- One helpful guideline is to *give God your best time of the day* — and then let the rest of your hours flow out of this time with God.

3. Third, come to quiet.

- If at all possible (unless you're using an app like Pray As You Go or Lectio 365 to guide your prayer time), put your phone away in another room.
- Start with a few deep breaths in and out of your nose. Give your mind and body time and space to calm down. This may take a few minutes. Remember, you're not in a hurry.

4. Fourth, open your heart to God in prayer.

- Though this may feel unfamiliar, and you might not know where to begin, you don't have to start from scratch.
- For thousands of years, followers of Jesus have used the psalms, a collection of poetic prayers found in the middle of the Bible, as a guide for daily prayer. The psalms were designed to be actively *prayed* or *recited*, not just read. When we're

struggling to pray, the psalms give us structure to pray and words to express our deepest emotions.

- You might start with Psalm 1. You could read a short psalm or portion of a longer psalm each day until you finish the entire book.
- As I said, this exercise can be done in five minutes, or it can easily take up to an hour ... Whatever it looks like, the goal this week is to set aside time daily to be with Jesus.
- The spiritual journey will involve our entire lifetime as we deepen and are transformed by our friendship with Jesus.
- God bless you as you experience God's presence in silence and solitude.

Session Summary:

- Let's review what we've covered in Session One.
 - Following Jesus is based on the first century practice of rabbis and apprentices.
 - For us today, to follow Jesus means to apprentice under him.
 - To apprentice under Jesus is to organize your life around three driving goals:
 1. To be with Jesus
 2. To become like Jesus and
 3. To do as he did
 - Apprenticing under Jesus means practicing a way of life.
 - And one of the best ways to begin is through a daily prayer rhythm, where you create a time and place for solitude, silence, and prayer.

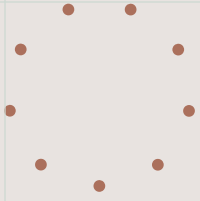
Outro:

- Jesus did not invite anyone to convert to a new religion called "Christianity," he invited them to apprentice under him what he called "the kingdom of God."
- Simon and Andrew left everything to say yes to this invitation.
- But there are other stories in the Gospels of people saying *no* to the same incredible invitation.
- In America, for all the talk about how the West is post-Christian, 63% of people still self-identify as "Christians."

- But a number of independent surveys put the number of people who are actually *following* Jesus at around 4%.
- Many people who identify as “Christians” are not yet *disciples* of Jesus.
- Dallas Willard once said this:
 - “The greatest issue facing the world today, with all its heart-breaking needs, is whether those who ... are identified as “Christians” will become disciples — students, apprentices, practitioners — of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from him how to live the life of the Kingdom of the Heavens into every corner of human existence.”⁵
- What about you?
- Are you ready to follow Jesus?
- To become his apprentice?
- To be with him and become like him and do as he did?
- Do you ache for life with God? To be formed into a person who is pervaded by the love and joy and peace of God?
- The good news, or the *gospel* of the kingdom is this: God has come to you and me in Jesus, and made a way for us to apprentice under him into what one early apprentice called “the life that is truly life.” (1 Timothy 6v19)
 - In Jesus, God has taken on our death, to give us his life.
 - He’s taken on our brokenness so that we can take on his healing.
 - He’s entered our mortality, so we can step into his immortality.
- All we have to do is say yes to Jesus’ invitation to become his disciple.
- And Jesus said, “*Whoever* wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16v24)
- Whoever! Meaning, you don’t have to be the best of the best of *the best* to become an apprentice of Jesus ...
- You can be a mess or deeply wounded or stuck in an cycle of addiction or still full of doubt and not even sure what you believe yet.
- In other words, you can be human.
- *All* of us are invited to apprentice under Jesus ...

Notes

1. *The Imitation of Christ* (1427)
2. *Faith Beyond Reason* (1989)
3. *The Practice of the Presence of God* (1800s)
4. *The Great Omission* (2006)
5. *The Great Omission* (2006)



The Practicing the Way Course

Teaching Notes

Session 02: Formation (Part 01)

Intro:

- Life is a miracle.
- To witness a mother give birth and a child grow up ...
- To watch the gift of life unfold over the years ...
- ... all those key moments imprint on your memory forever.
- And this process of growth and change is fascinating.
- It's why we show baby photos at weddings and wedding photos at funerals ...
- But the most fascinating changes aren't external, but internal; not to our body, as much as to our soul - to who we become.
- In the Christian Way, this process of change is called spiritual formation.

Set up:

- Last week, we covered the three goals of a disciple or apprentice of Jesus:
 1. To be with Jesus
 2. To become like him
 3. And to do as he did
- And we said: Spiritual formation is the *process* by which all this happens, by which our *spirit*, or our inner woman or man, is *formed* into a particular shape, or what we call "a character."
- Whether it be the character of Jesus, or the character of someone *else* ...
- The language of "spiritual formation" comes from the New Testament.
- For example, in Romans 12, Paul writes this to the followers of Jesus in the city of Rome:
 - "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." (Romans 12v2)
- Notice the two verbs: conform and transform.
 - Both verbs are from the same root word in Greek: *metamorphao*. Where we get the English word *metamorphosis* — the word for the process by which a caterpillar is "transformed" into a butterfly.
 - One Lexicon defines it as: to change the essential form or nature of something.

- This is the word picture for the depth of change that is possible in the human soul.
- Not just surface level behavior modification; but deep change.
- And in Greek, both verbs — conform and transform — are in the present passive tense.
- Meaning, they are something that is *already* happening to you.
- You are *already* being *conformed* to be more like “the pattern of this world” or *transformed* to be more like Jesus.
- *There is no option C.*
- *Conformed, or transformed.*

Formation isn't a Christian thing:

- The *first* thing we need to understand about spiritual formation is this: *Spiritual formation isn't a Christian thing; it's a human thing.*
- To be human is to change, we can't help it! Whether we are religious or not, we grow, evolve, go astray, come back to the path ...
- I occasionally hear people say they are “getting into spiritual formation,” by which they usually mean they are reading good books, and beginning to practice ancient spiritual disciplines like solitude and silence, or are in therapy.
- All very good.
- But just to clarify: You've been being spiritually formed since before you took your first breath.
- Spiritual formation begins in utero, and continues through all our days, whether we are “into” it or not!
- Mother Teresa was a product of spiritual formation, and so was Hitler. Queen Elizabeth was spiritually formed, as was Ghengis Khan.
- Their spirits were formed over a long period of time through a complex alchemy of genetic inheritance, family patterns, childhood wounds, education, habits, decisions, relationships, environments, and more.
- Same with you and me.
 - We've *been* formed.
 - We're *being* formed.

- And we *will be* formed in the days to come.
- Spiritual formation is *not* optional.
- The problem is, most of our formation is unintentional.
- No one sits down one day and decides to be “conformed to the pattern of this world.”
- *It just happens.*
- No one sets out to become bitter or angry or greedy or judgemental or fearful ...
- *It just happens.*
- Simply by living in Manhattan or LA or whenever you call home, and living a “normal” life.
- Because of that, I’ve found it *incredibly* helpful to name the forces at work in my life, that are forming, or *deforming* me ...
- In this session, we want to help you do the same.

Seam: To that end, here’s a paradigm we call Unintentional Spiritual Formation ...

Unintentional Spiritual Formation:

- *How* we become *who* we become is a sacred mystery of the human soul — taunting the brightest minds of both science and spirituality, but there is a surprising level of agreement across disciplines.
- We are formed by six primary forces:
 1. Our habits
 2. Our relationships
 3. The stories we believe
 4. Our environment
 5. Time
 6. And experience
- The first four forces are more active, more about what we do.
- The last two are more passive, more about what is done *to* us.
- Let’s take a deeper look at all six ...

- We are formed by our ...

1. Habits

- What we do on a regular basis we become.
 - Reading the news
 - Doom scrolling on social media
 - Going to the gym ...
- The things we do, do something *to* us, they get into the core of our being and shape who we become.
- The journalist Charles Duhigg called this “the power of habit.”¹
- It’s easy to think we’re just watching Netflix or checking email late at night or buying another pair of shoes — but actually, we’re turning a kind of invisible fulcrum in our heart in a particular direction; we’re becoming a type of person.
- Secondly we are formed by our ...

2. Relationships

- We become like the people we spend time with.
- Think about your family and friends. The odds are very high that you dress like them, think like them, talk like them, vote like them, spend money like them, and so on.
- Third we’re formed by ...

3. The stories we believe

- God wired the human brain to search for meaning, to take all the data points of reality and turn them into a story — a narrative to live *in* ... and live out.
- This is why we love movies and novels and telling stories around the campfire ...
- And every day we are exposed to stories — stories about what is the good life, what will make us happy, what the purpose and meaning of life even *is* ...
- These stories shape us far more than we realize.
- And whatever stories we come to believe are true, determine the kind of people we become.
 - For example, one of the reasons so many marriages end in heartache, is because no marriage can possibly live up to the story we are told by Hollywood and pop music ... which is very different from the story Jesus tells.

- The stories we believe give shape to the thousands of decisions we make every day, from whether we stay in a marriage to how we spend our money to how many hours we spend at work.
- Pick your stories carefully, because they will determine who you become.

Seam: And our stories and relationships and habits all come from an ...

4. Environment

- Whether you live in a small town or a global city; in a Western, secular culture, or a traditional religious culture ...
- ... we all become *like* the place we live.
- And in the digital age, we all live in two places at once, in our city or town or area and in the echo chambers of the algorithms that define our digital home ...
- This may be good, or it may be bad, but it *is*: you will become *like* your environment.

Seam: These forces work on us slowly ...

5. Over time

- They sneak up on us, little by little, and have a cumulative effect: we wake up one day and realize — we’ve changed.

Seam: And ...

6. Through experience

- We are deeply shaped not just by what we *do*, but by what is *done* to us ...
- Nowhere is this more true than in our family of origin and our childhood, but it’s also true of our whole lives — do we go to college? Or drop out of high school? Get our dream job? Or file for bankruptcy? Get married? Get divorced? Or stay single?
- Our experiences deeply shape who we become.

Summary: In summary: We are formed by our habits, relationships, the stories we believe, and our environment; this happens over time, and through experience.

- We call this paradigm “Unintentional Spiritual Formation” because it’s a synopsis of how we are formed with no *intentionality*; just by waking up in the morning and going about our day.
- The question isn’t: “Are you becoming someone?”

- It's: "Who or what are you becoming?"

Who are you becoming?

- When I reflect on this paradigm, I find it both sobering and hopeful.
- Let me guide you in a short reflection exercise ...
 - Close your eyes for just a moment
 - Take a few deep, slow breathes ...
 - Ask God to direct your mind ...
 - Now, imagine yourself at 70 or 80 or 90.
 - What kind of person do you see?
 - Ask yourself: Who am I becoming?
- I remember the first time I ever did that exercise: I was about thirty, and I had enough life under my belt to plot a hypothetical trajectory and imagine myself at 40 or 50 or 60 ... and the person I saw on the horizon was terrifying ...
- I was becoming more hurried and anxious and irritable ... not more loving and joyful and peaceful and patient ...
- In my case, it was a wake up call: I realized I had to make some major life changes.
- What about you?
- What changes do you need to make to alter the trajectory of your spiritual formation in the direction of Jesus?

Discussion groups:

- Thank you for listening.
- Now it's time to process this truth about spiritual formation together.
- You may be feeling a number of emotions as you realize you're *becoming* a person, and that all sorts of forces in your life — from your morning routine to your friend group to your social media feed — are *deforming* you, more than forming you ...
- Let's process this together.

- Circle up into groups of 3 to 5 people and talk through the following questions:
 1. What habits do you keep in your daily and weekly life? How might they be shaping you?
 - This might be as simple as what you do after you wake up, or what activities fill up your free time.
 2. Who are the most important people in your life? What do those relationships look like?
 3. As you reflect on your own journey, what stories have shaped the way you view the world and where did these stories originate?
 - These stories could be: what's your version of a good life, what should you spend money on, how should you interact with family?
 4. Did God reveal anything new to you in this session that you want to say more about?

Seam: Take a few minutes and discuss ...

Discussion break:

- Now it's time to take the next step.
- For those of you reading the *Practicing the Way* book alongside the Course, this week we're reading Part 2.
- And, as we said in the last session, each week we'll offer a spiritual exercise for you to move forward in your discipleship to Jesus.
- Everything we offer is invitational.
- We make recommendations, you make decisions.
- But open your Guide to Session 02, and let's explore this week's spiritual exercise ...

Tutorial:

Week 2: Life Audit

- Our exercise for this coming week is to conduct a "life audit."
- For me, going through this life audit has been a powerful and illuminating experience. Prayerfully going through an exercise like this can help us become more self-aware and set

the stage for our growth toward wholeness, for our becoming more like Jesus.

- In this exercise, we take an inventory of all the forces that are currently forming us.
- To help you with your audit, we have created a template for you to work through, which you can find in your Guide in the On Your Own section for session 02.
- In this audit, we will work through each of the six forces that form us: the stories we believe, our habits, our relationships, our environment, and our time and experiences.
 - The first step is to write out your morning routine, your workday, your evening habits, and your eating and sleeping patterns.
 - You then write about your various relationships and your family history.
 - The next step, which requires more reflection, is to identify how these patterns and relationships are forming you. You might want to process this step with a wise, trusted friend, counselor, pastor, or spiritual director.
- As you work through your life audit, try not to be judgemental. Don't beat yourself up. Just write down everything that has shaped you, past and present.
- For example, you might look at your morning routine and notice that you start your day by reading the news. You might ask — What is this habit doing to me? What kind of person am I becoming by letting the news — much of which is alarming — be the first thing in my consciousness every day? As you reflect on your routine, you may consider how you might develop a new morning routine, like the one we started last week — beginning your day with quiet prayer and reading Scripture.
- Similarly, as you reflect on your day at school or work, you might think about your interactions with people. Do they leave you feeling stressed and anxious or energized and grateful?
 - Finally, you might consider what you typically do at night. Do you tend to be on your phone, watching Netflix, or playing video games? Or perhaps you have a ritual that helps you recollect the day and give thanks? How do these habits and rituals shape you?
- Remember, try not to be judgmental, don't beat yourself up.
- Just write out all the forces in your life, past and present.
- This exercise can take more than an hour. We encourage you to take an evening this week or a quiet morning to do this. Although it's a longer exercise, it can open the door to profound transformation as you grow in self-awareness and are inspired to establish habits that help you grow into the person you long to become.

- As you reflect on these forces, ask yourself, “How are they forming me?” Are they leading me to a sense of life, and peace, and closeness to God. Or are they causing me to feel restless, anxious, and distant from God?
- As you continue the daily prayer rhythm you practiced last week, use some of that time to offer whatever feelings, desires, insights, or intentions you have to God and pray that the Holy Spirit will lead you onto the path to life.
- As you conduct your life audit, as David prays at the end of Psalm 139
 - May God search you and know your heart;
 - test you and know your anxious thoughts.
 - See if there is any offensive way in you,
 - and lead you in the way everlasting.

Summary:

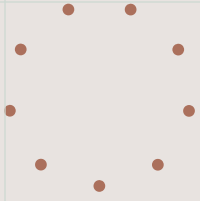
- Now let’s review what we covered in Session 02.
 - Spiritual formation isn’t a Christian thing; it’s a human thing.
 - We are formed by a complex web of forces, but especially by:
 - Our habits
 - Our relationships
 - The stories we believe
 - And our environment
 - This happens over time.
 - And through experience.
 - Most of our formation is unintentional.
 - One of the most important questions to reflect on is: Who am I becoming?
 - And: Am I being intentional about who I am becoming?
 - And one of the best ways to do this is through this coming week’s practice: a Formation Audit.

Outro:

- The philosopher Dallas Willard used to say, “The main thing God gets out of our life is the person we become.”²
- It’s hard for me to imagine right now, but one day, I am going to wake up and — God willing — I’ll be 70, or 80, or 90 years old.
- And what will matter on that day is not how much money I made or how “successful” I was by the standards of the world, or whether or not I saw that new TV series ...
- What will matter is the person I *became*.
- This is why Saint Benedict in the 6th century said, “Day by day remind yourself that you are going to die.”³
- He urged people to meditate daily on their coming death — not to provoke fear or dread, but to remind us: *don’t waste your life*.
- Live for what matters.
- So that when we come to the end of our lives, we can die at peace ...
- But this will require us to reflect on our life today ... and connect the dots between how we are living — and *who we are becoming*.
- So as you apprentice under Jesus, and you conduct your Formation Audit and start to make decisions about your life, may you live for what matters; may you treat each day as a precious gift to be stewarded with gratitude and joy.
- And may every day find you more and more at peace in God.

Notes

1. *The Power of Habit* (2012)
2. “*Streams in the Desert and Wells of Living Water*,” 2004 speech at Baylor University
3. *The Rule of Saint Benedict* (530)



The Practicing the Way Course

Teaching Notes

Session 03: Formation (Part 02)

Intro:

- Growing up, I would spend my summers at my grandparents' cabin up in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California.
- There was a river close by where we would go swimming.
- And I remember the first time I tried to swim across the river; I was a strong swimmer, but the *moment* I hit the current in the center of the river, I was immediately swept downstream. I made it across, but had to hike way back up the opposite bank.
- I will never forget that horrible feeling, of swimming with all my energy, and yet being swept downstream by forces far more powerful than me.
- A lot of us feel like that in our spiritual formation.
- ... like no matter how hard we try to become more like Jesus, we are being swept downstream ... by the forces of culture ... all around us ... and by forces inside our own heart.
- It can feel like we're just trying to keep our head above water ...

Seam: If you feel this way, you are not alone.

Stuck:

- I felt this way for many years.
- I grew up in the church. And all through my teenage and young adult years, I felt like — in the words of Paul in the New Testament — I was making “progress” in the spiritual life — like I was becoming more like Jesus year over year.
- Take Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5: I felt like I was becoming more loving and joyful and peaceful and patient and kind.
- But then, it's like I hit a plateau.
- Once my apprenticeship to Jesus began to touch on the *deeper* issues in my shadow side:
 - My anger
 - My perfectionism and critical spirit
 - My anxiety and attachments ...
 - All the deeply ingrained habits of sin in my body that go back *generations* in my family line.

- At that point in my spiritual journey, the formula for Christian Life that I grew up with — go to church on Sunday, read your Bible every morning, and tithe ... all good things, but ... it just wasn't working on the deeper layers.
- Instead of making progress, I felt like I was walking in circles.
- And *then*, as the pressures of adult life began to fall on my shoulders — work, family, responsibility, etc. — I began to feel like I was *regressing*, not progressing!
- Instead of becoming more like Jesus, more loving and joyful and peaceful, I was becoming *less* like Jesus! More irritable and impatient and exhausted ...
- The problem was *not* that I did not *want* to become like Jesus (I did, believe me), or that I wasn't *trying* to become like Jesus (I was, if anything, too hard); the problem was, I did not know *how* to become like Jesus.
- You may be new to following Jesus, and right now you're growing like a weed — that's *great*.
- But after serving as a pastor for over twenty years, I've come to realize: *many* people reach a point in their spiritual journey where they get stuck:
- Stuck in ...
 - Self-defeating habits of sin and shame.
 - Dysfunctional patterns that go back generations.
 - Hurt and wounding.
 - And more
- And — same as me — the problem isn't that people don't *want* to become like Jesus or that people aren't *trying* to become like Jesus. It's that we don't know *how* to become like Jesus.

The training program:

- In Luke 6, Jesus said:
 - “The apprentice is not above the rabbi, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their rabbi.” (Luke 6v40, paraphrase)
- Notice: not only is Jesus' desire for his apprentices to become like him, but he has a training program we can follow *to* become like him.

Seam: But to *enroll* in Jesus' training program will require us to live with a whole new level of *intentionality* in our apprenticeship to him.

Intentional Spiritual Formation:

- Spiritual formation isn't a Christian thing; it's a *human* thing.
- Every minute of every day, we are *being formed* by a complex interplay of forces.
- We're formed by:
 - Our habits
 - Our relationships
 - The stories we believe, and
 - Our environment
- All this happens over time and ...
- Through experience.
- The first four forces are more active, more about what we *do*.
- The last two are more passive, more about what is done *to* us.
- But most of our formation is *unintentional*.
- It just *happens*.
- We wake up in the morning, go about our normal life, years go by, and one day we wake up and realize: we've been *formed* into a particular shape.
- Which means, for those of us who desire to be formed to be like *Jesus*, we don't start with a blank slate!
- We've already been deformed.
- Not into the beauty of Jesus but into the ugliness of sin and shame.
- Therefore, to some degree, all formation in the Way of Jesus is *counter-formation*.
- To be formed to be like Jesus will require an *intentional*, thoughtful, conscious way of life to counteract the many forces that malform our soul.
 1. To counter our habits, we need the practices of Jesus (or the spiritual disciplines), that turn the fulcrum of our heart in a new direction and open our inner world to the presence and power of the Spirit of God to change.
 2. To counter our relationships, we need community — where we travel the Way side by side with other apprentices of Jesus, and we are loved into people of love.

3. To counter the stories we believe, we need the teaching of Jesus — to fill our minds with truth.
 4. And to counter our environment, we need to live aware of and connected to the Holy Spirit, who is the animating center of our life and the ultimate source of all transformation.
- These counter practices form our souls slowly, over time.
 - And especially through times of suffering, where we are not only formed, but *forged* into the love, peace, and joy of Jesus.
 - This is *intentional* spiritual formation — a life architecture of discipleship to Jesus that is deliberately designed to be more robust than the cultural forces all around us and the internal forces of our own heart.
 - The key idea is this: We are going to be formed.
 - Jesus' desire is to form us to be like *him*.
 - But this will require us to organize our days around intentionally following Jesus and finding deep joy in our everyday lives with him.

Paradigm teaching:

- Let's explore this paradigm in more depth ...

Seam: First, if our habits are forming us ... if scrolling on social media and reading the news multiple times a day and shopping for things we don't need ... is doing something to us; it's making us more lustful or anxious or greedy ... Then one of the first steps we must take as followers of Jesus is to become more intentional about our habits through ...

1. The practices

- Also known as the spiritual disciplines.
- The practices are activities — or “habits” — that are based on the lifestyle of Jesus himself that slow our busy lives down to connect with Jesus and each other, and make room for God to come in and transform our lives from the inside out.
- Practices like ...
 - Sabbath
 - Prayer

- Fasting
- Solitude
- And more ... [Generosity, Service, Witness]
- Through these practices, we set our whole life before God, and open deeper layers of ourselves to his loving presence and power.
- As we do what we can do — offer our mind and body to God — he does what we *cannot* do — form us into people of love and joy and peace.

Seam: Secondly, if we're being formed by our relationships ... if our view of the world, and value system, and daily behaviors are shaped more by our peer group or family of origin or office culture than by Jesus ... then it's essential that we harness our relational wiring to become more like Jesus through ...

2. Community

- Community is the incubator for all spiritual growth; it's where our rough edges are chipped away, and where our deepest wounds are healed.
- It's our school of love; where we are loved into loving, and when we err, are forgiven, but also where we learn to forgive.
- Living in community is not easy, but it's where all the deepest transformation happens.

Seam: Third, if the stories we believe are forming us ... if we're being formed by cultural narratives that come to us from Hollywood and social media and the education system, more than by Jesus, how do we become more intentional about the stories we believe?

- We fill our mind with ...

3. Teaching

- Or another word for this is truth.
- Jesus was a rabbi, a teacher, a truth-teller; he came to fill our minds and imaginations with his vision of reality, so that we can live in tune with the Creator's wisdom and good intention for his creation.
- We fill our minds with the truth of Jesus in all sorts of ways, through:
 - Scripture

- Teaching
 - Preaching
 - Theology
 - Reading
 - Meditation
 - Contemplation
 - And more ...
- As we think God's thoughts after him, we begin to experience what the Apostle Paul called "the renewal of the mind."
 - If you think about it, this miracle we call *consciousness* is the flow of thoughts and feelings and images that pass through our mind all day long.
 - But if we do not curate our consciousness — or what we give our attention to — someone or something else will.
 - And our mind is the portal to our whole life. What we give our attention to is the person we become.
 - As we empty our minds of lies and fill it with truth, we partner with God to make our mind a beautiful place to live.

Seam: And the animating center of this entire process is ...

4. The Holy Spirit

- ... who is God's empowering presence *inside* us ...
- Through the practices and life in community and teaching, we are opening up deeper and deeper layers of our inner being to God, to heal and free and transform.
- We are drawing on what the New Testament writers call "grace," the freely given, totally undeserved *action* of God on our behalf, his capacity to be who we were meant to be and do what we were meant to do.
- The more intentional we become about practicing the presence of God, and living in step with the Spirit, the more God himself becomes our primary environment, our home.

Seam: This all happens over ...

5. Time

- As the professor James Houston once said, “Spiritual growth is the slowest of all human movements.”
- Spiritual growth is a lot like physical growth, there’s a dramatic beginning and occasional growth spurts early on, but most growth takes place a little bit at a time, as we grow up in the family of God.
- Nobody becomes like Jesus overnight. That’s why Jesus’ metaphors for spiritual growth are all slow — trees, vines, crops that grow over seasons and years.
- Change is a long, slow process.
- Eugene Peterson called it “a long obedience in the same direction.”¹
- We have to be patient, and stay with Jesus, and never lose hope for transformation.

Seam: Finally, this happens through ...

6. Suffering

- Or what Jesus and the New Testament writers call “trials and tribulations.”
- We all *hate* this, but the very experiences that most of us fear and fight tooth and nail to avoid ... the pain and suffering that are *inescapable* in this life — can be our crucible: they can form and *forge* us into people of love and joy and peace.
- As Paul writes in Romans:
- “We know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.” (Romans 5v3-4)
- But it must be said: the exact same experience of suffering can form *or deform* us; can make us soft and gentle, or hard and cruel; can open us to God, or close us off.
- But when we intentionally open our pain and suffering to God, God will not only meet us in it, but use it to form us to be more like him.

Recap:

- The invitation of Jesus is to enroll in his training program: to intentionally organize our lives around his practices, community, truth, and ultimately around God himself ...
- To do this, you don’t need to become a monk or a nun, you just need to slow down and live

intentionally in the beauty of ordinary life ...

Set up for group conversation:

- That's a lot to process, so let's process it *together*.
- Circle up in groups of 3 to 5 people, and talk through the following questions ...
 1. Have you ever had a moment in your discipleship where you felt "stuck" — whether in habits, unhealthy emotional patterns, or in your relationship to God?
 2. With the paradigm of Intentional Spiritual Formation in mind, how have you participated in your own formation over the years?
 3. How have you understood the Holy Spirit's role in spiritual formation?
 4. Have you had an experience of intentionally opening your pain and suffering to God? What did God produce in your formation through that experience?
- Take the next few minutes for conversation ...

Set up:

- Now we're ready to turn to the week ahead.
- For those of you following along in the *Practicing the Way* book, this coming week we're reading Part 3.
- Go ahead and open your Guide to Session 3 as we explore our next practice ...

Tutorial:

Week 3: Reading Scripture

- A recent study estimated that 87 percent of people sleep with their smartphone next to their bed, and most of them check it first thing upon waking.
- Perhaps we wake up to a text from someone at work ... or see a news alert of another tragedy across the world ... or get sucked into social media ... and just as we're beginning our day, we're feeling anxious or angry, jealous or sad ...
- Do you know the feeling?
- What if there is another way to begin our day? What if there is a practice we can adopt from

the life of Jesus to help us begin each day with the peace of God?

- Last week, you conducted a formation audit.
- You made a list of all your habits and relationships and then attempted to connect the dots between these forces and your formation — or *deformation*.
- Did you identify any habits, relationships, or stories that seem to be having a negative effect on you?
- For many of us, the next step would be to replace an old habit with a new practice.
- To that end, this week's practice is to read Scripture daily.
- Maybe you noticed last week that the very first thing you do in the morning is read the news or go on social media. Or just before bed, you surf the Internet or play video games to relax. Though these things might have given you an initial burst of energy, you might have started to realize that they ended up making you feel restless or anxious. The practice for this week encourages us to replace these habits with the practice of relaxing into God's presence with Scripture.
- When we read Scripture, we turn our attention to God, who is good, beautiful, and true. And as we focus on God, we grow more like God. As Daniel Siegel, a professor of psychiatry points out, "Where attention goes, neural firing flows, and neural connection grows."² In other words, we become like what we pay attention to. When we meet God through Scripture, we are spiritually and neurologically formed.
- You may already be reading Scripture daily. If so, this week's practice is to continue what you are already doing. But if this is not the case for you, the daily reading of Scripture can serve as an important foundation for your spiritual journey.
- In your Guide, we have recommendations for reading plans for Scripture and resources from our friends at BibleProject. You might also explore a Bible reading practice like *Lectio Divina* — where you meditate on Scripture with an open heart — so that God's word can speak to you in a deeply personal and powerful way. Remember, the goal of reading Scripture is not to consume information, but to experience God deeply and intimately.
- To help you process your experiences with these practices we have included a practice reflection in your guide.
- Before you come back next week, take ten minutes to reflect on your week with God and be ready to share what God is teaching you.
- God bless and form you as you immerse your mind and heart in Scripture this week.

Summary:

- Let's review all that we covered in this episode:
 - Many of us desire to change and become more like Jesus, but we feel stuck in our spiritual formation.
 - The problem isn't that we don't want to become like Jesus or that we aren't trying to become like Jesus, but that we don't know how to become like Jesus.
 - We need a training program; a reliable pathway to transformation.
 - We find this in the Way of Jesus.
 - By following his Way, we are formed by:
 - The practices
 - Community
 - Truth
 - And the Holy Spirit
 - All this happens over time and through suffering.
 - And one of the best ways to begin to change is to replace an unhealthy habit with the practice of reading Scripture daily.

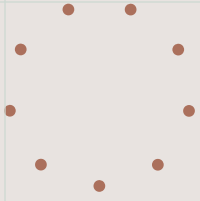
Outro:

- It's sad but true: many modern Christians have no idea of the level of transformation that is possible in this life — if we will only apprentice under Jesus.
- Let the vision of Jesus raise your horizon of possibility! You can change. You can heal. You can grow. You can become like Jesus ... by the power of Jesus.
- Transformation *is* possible.
- But — it's not inevitable.
- Nobody becomes like Jesus by accident!
- Nobody wakes up one day at fifty and thinks, "Weird, I became the next Mother Teresa?"
- "I just woke up one day and found that I was no longer anxious about anything, and I was full of love for my enemies ... weird!"

- No ... there are no accidental saints.
- We can't transform ourselves; deep change is God's work, not ours.
- But we *can* follow the practices of Jesus, like beginning each day in quiet prayer and reading Scripture.
- We *can* live in community.
- We *can* fill our mind with truth.
- And in doing so, we can open deeper and deeper layers of our soul to the transforming grace of the Holy Spirit.
- In Scripture, the *Spirit* is also likened to a rushing river.
- In that same river I grew up swimming in in the Sierra Nevadas, there was a small waterfall that was safe to go over ... my siblings and I used to swim out into the middle, lean back, and let the current carry our bodies over the side.
- That's a good metaphor for spiritual formation; get yourself into the current of God's Spirit, and let him carry you places you could never possibly imagine.

Notes

1. *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* (1980)
1. *Mind: A Journey to the Heart of Being Human* (2016)



The Practicing the Way Course

Teaching Notes

Session 04: The Practices

Intro:

- Every Friday night, my family and I sit down to our table with our community ... As the sun goes down, we power off all our devices, take a few deep breaths, light two candles, and pray to enter the Sabbath.
- The Sabbath is a day like no other.
- It's an entire twenty-four hours set aside to stop, rest, delight, and worship.
- We don't work, or do chores, or run errands, or shop.
- We just relax and feast and laugh and talk and sleep and *just be* ...
- The sabbath is — for our family and community — the *best* day of the week, and an essential anchor for our life with God and each other.
- And the Sabbath is one of the practices of Jesus — ancient spiritual disciplines from the life of Jesus himself that are utterly key to apprenticeship to Jesus ...

Seam: But what exactly are the practices?

Jesus' practices:

- If you were to follow Jesus around for a while, you would notice a set of repeating practices.
- You would see him preach the gospel and heal the sick and cast out demons; and you would also see him keep Sabbath, read scripture, and spend time in solitude and prayer ...
- You would see Jesus live by a set of practices that were the foundation for his life as a whole.

Seam: And the practices of Jesus are the key to unlock our spiritual formation.

- In Mark 1 we read:
 - “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” (Mark 1v35)
- Why is this story in Mark's gospel? It isn't a story of a miracle; it's just a small detail about Jesus' morning prayer rhythm.
- The four biographies of Jesus in the New Testament are *full* of small details like this:
- Jesus getting up early to pray in the quiet, keeping Sabbath, fasting, eating meals with his community — his way of life.

- These small details that we see repeat all through the life of Jesus are the practices.
- Also known as “the spiritual disciplines.”
- But what are the practices, exactly?
 - The practices are disciplines based on the lifestyle of Jesus that create time and space for us to access the presence and power of the Spirit, and in doing so, be transformed from the inside out.
 - “The practices are disciplines” — or habits ...
 - “Based on the lifestyle of Jesus” — all of them come straight out of the pattern laid down by Jesus himself.
 - “That create time and space” — they slow our life down and open our life up ...
 - “To access the presence and power of the Spirit” — they are how we draw on God’s energy to change ...
 - “And in doing so, be transformed from the inside out ...”
- In other words, they are *how* we apprentice under Jesus.
- The practices come in all kinds of shapes and sizes ...
- But you can group them into nine basic disciplines:
 - Sabbath — an entire day set aside to stop, rest, delight, and worship.
 - Prayer — intentional time to communicate and commune with God.
 - Fasting — going without food in order to give yourself more fully to Jesus, purge your body of sin, hear and be heard by God in prayer, and stand in solidarity with the poor.
 - Solitude — intentional time in the quiet to be alone with yourself and God.
 - Scripture — immersing your mind and imagination in the library of the Bible.
 - Community — doing life with other followers of Jesus around a table, in deep, loving friendship.
 - Generosity — the giving of our money and resources.
 - Service — following Jesus’ example in meeting the practical needs of others, especially the most vulnerable.
 - Witness — practicing hospitality and preaching the gospel of Jesus.

- Think of the nine practices as *categories* that all contain sub-practices.
- For example, Sabbath includes worship on Sunday, gratitude, and celebration.
- Community includes the confession of sin and the Lord's Supper.
- Scholars call practices like these nine the “classical disciplines,” because they are for *all* people for *all* time.
- No matter what your personality is ... And no matter what stage of life you're in ... some version of these nine ancient disciplines should find their way into the lifestyle of every apprentice of Jesus.
- The practices of Jesus are utterly key to being transformed into people who are *like* Jesus as we slow our busy lives down to live deeply connected to God.
- This course was designed to be an on-ramp into a life of practices, and we have an entire library of additional resources available from Practicing the Way that are designed to integrate these nine ancient disciplines into your everyday life, because we believe they are essential to spiritual formation.
- But it must be said that *almost anything* can become a spiritual discipline *if* we offer it up to God as a channel of grace.
- Including activities we love and enjoy — like hiking, or reading poetry, or listening to music ...
- And the mundane activities that consume most of our time — driving to work, folding laundry, going for a run.
- And even including the responsibilities and relationships that we find difficult or even painful — caring for an infant that won't sleep through the night, or caring for your aging parents; quietly suffering a chronic illness; staying faithful to a difficult marriage — any of these can become a channel of grace if we offer them up to God.

Seam: This course will focus on “the classical disciplines,” but whenever you talk about the practices, three very important things need to be said:

- First,

1. The practices are not a measure of spiritual maturity

- Yes, a disciple of Jesus is a “disciplined one,” and yes, a more mature disciple of Jesus is more likely to live by a regimen of practices and a less mature one is likely to be more free-spirited and undisciplined

- But. Love is the metric of spiritual maturity, not discipline
- The question is not: How often do you read your Bible? or How long do you pray? or How often do you go to church?
- It's: How loving are you?
- Love as modeled by Jesus himself is how we chart our progress.
- Secondly ...

2. They are not a form of spiritual merit

- I'm sure the Father is overjoyed by any overtures we make in his direction, but when we practice Sabbath or fast and pray, we're not earning credit in some kind of cosmic ledger.
- The disciplines are motivated by love, not fear or shame; but by our desire to be with Jesus, and be transformed into people of love, like him.
- This is especially important to say for those of you who grew up in the suffocating air of legalism or under the heavy weight of a performance oriented family or culture; you may be wary of any talk of discipline or practice; but the practices don't earn grace, they open us up to receive the free gift of grace in the deepest part of our being.
 - Willard used to say, "Grace isn't opposed to effort, it's opposed to earning,"¹
- The practices do require effort, though over time they make our life much *easier*, not harder. But they are not earning a thing.
- Finally ... and most importantly ...

3. They are a *means to an end*

- The goal isn't to practice spiritual disciplines, it's to be with Jesus and become like him ...
- In their book *The Relational Soul*, the psychologists Richard Plass and James Cofield write:
 - "Spiritual disciplines are not an end in themselves. They are means to an end. ... Disciplines set the soul on the path where it can come to know God and live present to others in love."²
- Another way to say this is: We practice the disciplines so *that* we can obey the commands of Jesus.
- Think about some of the commands of Jesus in the New Testament:
 - "Do not worry about tomorrow." (Matthew 6v34)

- “Be anxious for nothing.” (Philippians 4v6)
- “Rejoice in the Lord.” (Philippians 4v4)
- “Bear one another’s burdens.” (Galatians 6v2)
- “Be patient” (Ephesians 4v2)
- “Be completely humble and gentle” (Ephesians 4v2)
- “Forgive one another.” (Colossians 3v13)
- “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22v39)
- “Love your enemies.” (Matthew 5v44)
- And of course the greatest commandment of all: “Love the Lord your God with *all* your heart, soul, mind and strength.” (Mark 12v30)
- Most of us can’t go out and consistently obey these commands — not yet.
- The practices are how we do what we *can* do — practice Sabbath, begin our day in the quiet, read Scripture, eat a meal with community, etc. — in order to be formed into people who can eventually do what we currently *cannot* do: live and love like Jesus
- For example, from a young age, I’ve had a running struggle with anxiety.
- I read Jesus’ command in the Sermon on the Mount — “Do not worry about your life” — and I genuinely *want* to obey it.
- But then I get one text message with bad news and my body is shot through with a jolt of fear! Or I go through a stressful situation and I can’t fall asleep at night.
- Why?
- I *desire* to obey Jesus’ teachings. And I have the Spirit of Jesus in me. But I have yet to be formed into the kind of person who can live worry free.
- I can’t obey Jesus’ command and never worry again.
- But you know what I *can* do?
- I can practice Sabbath ... I can set aside an entire day to practice trusting in God, I can let him run the world without me for at least twenty-four hours ...
- I can begin my day in the quiet ... rather than waking up to my phone and news alerts and noise ... I can breathe in the peace of God; I can read Scripture and turn my attention to the truth of God ...

- I can live in community, and share my anxieties with my brothers and sisters, and bear them together.
- And through the practices, I can offer my anxieties and attachments up to God for him to heal me and set me free.
- Here's a dynamic I've learned about spiritual formation: We can approach small changes directly.
- Small changes — like beginning our day by reading a Psalm rather than looking at our phone or going to church rather than sleeping in or cussing less often — are usually within the range of our willpower.
- We can *stop* doing them or *start* doing them.
- But most of the deeper changes in our spiritual formation are far beyond the range of our willpower.
 - For me, it's things like living without anxiety ...
 - Or being kind to my family when I'm tired or stressed ...
 - Or forgiving people when they hurt me deeply.
- I desire to do these things! But I can't. Not yet.
- I can't approach them directly, but I *can* come at them *indirectly*, through the practices.
- I can't not worry, but I can keep sabbath.
- I can't not lust, but I can change what I watch on TV.
- I can't be completely free of greed, but I can practice generosity.
- And over a long period of time, as I follow Jesus' apprenticeship program, he *will* slowly but surely transform me into a person of love.

Set up for group conversation:

- I love to hear the heart behind the practices. It's so easy to lose sight of the big picture in the humdrum and rhythms of our lives.
- In just a minute, Ken is going to walk us through this coming week's practice of Sabbath.
- We chose to introduce this practice to you early on because, in our day and in this age, most people are simply too tired, busy, and worn down to have any meaningful spiritual life at all. For many in our world, the spiritual journey *begins* with rest.

- For many of you, this may be your first excursion into this ancient discipline, and it likely draws up all sorts of thoughts and feelings.
- Let's process it together for a few minutes before we move on ...
- Here's a few questions for your time ...
 1. What's your experience with the spiritual disciplines? What practices have you engaged with in your spiritual journey?
 2. If the practices are the means, what do you understand the end of the spiritual life to be?
 3. Who has most reflected God's love to you? Where did you see the life of Jesus at work in them?
 4. Do you practice any kind of sabbath or day of rest? Or is this a new discipline for you?
- Enjoy your conversation ...

Set Up:

- Welcome back.
- Go ahead and open to Session 04 in your Guide for our tutorial, as well as more resources for you to explore if you so desire.
- Also, this coming week we are reading *Practicing the Way*, part 4.
- Now we're ready to hear more about how to actually practice the Sabbath.

Tutorial:

Week 4: Sabbath

- Years ago, when I was working in the corporate world, I was making a very good salary. Far more than I needed to live on.
- But this was also the unhappiest time of my life.
- I felt like I was a slave to work.
- I knew something needed to change. During this time, I began to practice Sabbath. It was life-changing.

- I began to feel more connected to God, my soul, and the most important people in my life — and I felt more joy ...
- Now, years later the Sabbath continues to serve as a vital part of my life.
- While the Sabbath will look different for each person (and the Sabbath isn't just a day of religious to-do's), here's part of how the day often looks for me.
 - On my Sabbath, I go off my devices for the day (unless I am specifically wanting to connect with someone). In the morning, I'll take a long walk with our golden retriever, Sasha, on the beach or through a forest trail, and I will give thanks to God for the gifts of my life thus far.
 - At noon, I'll have lunch with my wife, Sakiko, and we enjoy unhurried time together. Later in the afternoon, I might go on a run or a bike ride with our teenage son, Joey, in a nearby park or connect with a friend.
 - On my Sabbath, I will also make dinner (which doesn't feel like work to me because it's so different from my everyday work, and I usually cook only once a week). This also gives my wife, who cooks the rest of the week, a Sabbath, and we enjoy dinner as a family.
- The Sabbath, to use Abraham Joshua Heschel's phrase, is a "palace in time" where we delight in God, life itself, and the people who are most important to us. Ann Voskamp says, "It's a gift we cannot afford to refuse."
- Our practice for this week is to set aside space for a Sabbath.
- Actually *experiencing* the Sabbath day requires some preparation. To support you through this, we have prepared a practical tool in the course guide to help you plan for this day.
- Twenty-four hours is a major commitment, and it takes some work to give up work.
- So our recommendation is to start small. If a full twenty-four hour Sabbath is too much for this coming week, just carve out a few hours — perhaps on Sunday afternoon after church, or on Saturday, or whenever there is a good slot in your weekly schedule.
- We also recommend the following:
 1. First, begin your Sabbath celebration by connecting with God. You might start with a ritual that helps remind you that God is present as you anticipate the day you will be enjoying together. You might begin by lighting a candle or with a prayer of thanksgiving, by reading a passage of Scripture or participating in a worship service at church.
 2. Second, when possible, share at least part of the Sabbath with your friends and family

— the most important people in your life. You might share a meal, or enjoy an activity or an outing, or set aside space to walk or have tea and conversation together.

3. Third, engage in things that make you come alive in God, who faithfully provides for us even as we take time away from work. My friend Mark Buchanan says, “The golden rule of Sabbath is to cease from what is necessary and to embrace what gives life.” For some of us, this might involve walking through a forest trail or hiking up a mountain. Others find life while listening to music, playing in a jam session, or viewing a beautiful work of art. Some feel joy when they get lost in a captivating novel or movie. Others love eating delicious food. Many feel deep joy when they spend time with someone they love.

- Pursue whatever activities make you feel joyful, rested, and alive to God.
- You can find more suggestions in your companion Guide.
- You can also find additional resources from Practicing the Way if you’re interested in pursuing the Sabbath further.
- May you deeply enjoy your life with God as you practice the Sabbath.

Summary:

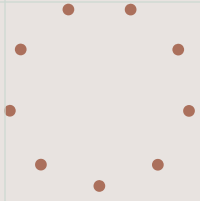
- To review this episode:
 - The practices are disciplines based on the lifestyle of Jesus that create time and space for us to access the presence and power of the Spirit, and in doing so, be transformed from the inside out.
 - Practices are a means to an end; the end is to live and love like Jesus.
 - We approach deeper changes in our life indirectly, not directly, by practicing ancient disciplines that open us up to God to change us at the deepest level.
 - Practices are *not* the whole of the spiritual life, they are just one part of it.
 - But they are essential for all those who deeply desire to be transformed to become more like Jesus.
 - And one of the most important practices for our age of exhaustion is Sabbath. A full day set aside to stop, rest, delight, and worship.

Outro:

- Let me offer you one final word about all of this ...
- The number one problem you will face in your spiritual formation is time.
- Most of us are just too busy, tired, and digitally distracted to have any meaningful spiritual life at all.
- Dallas Willard once called hurry “the great enemy of spiritual life in our day,” and gave this key piece of advice: “You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.”
- One way to think about discipleship to Jesus in the modern era is as a disciplined effort to slow your life down and simplify it around what is most essential.
- This is key: apprenticeship to Jesus doesn’t work like a hobby, that you add on to your already overbusy, hurried life.
- “Less is more” in the way of Jesus.
- It isn’t about addition, but subtraction.
- As we integrate the practices of Jesus into our busy lives, we have to ask, What can I cut *out* of my life, not just add in? What can I *not* do, in order to *do* life with Jesus?
- Because it’s not about increasing complexity, but pursuing simplicity.
- It’s about living at the pace of Jesus ...
- What the Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama called “the speed of love.”³
- 1 Corinthians 13 says “love is patient.” Another way to translate that is “love is unhurried.”
- So, as you begin to organize your life around the practices of Jesus, may you feel the grace of God upon you to unhurry, to breathe, to say no ... in order to say yes to Jesus.

Notes

1. *The Great Omission* (2006)
2. *The Relational Soul* (2014)
3. *Three Mile an Hour God* (1980)



The Practicing the Way Course

Teaching Notes

Session 05: Meeting God in Pain and Suffering

Intro:

- Jesus once said, “In this world, you will face trouble.” (John 16v33)
- Suffering comes to find *all* of us — the loss of a loved one, a cancer diagnosis, the breakdown of a relationship ...
- And over time, emotional pain accumulates in our soul; we carry our history in our body and live our past in our present; and all too often, our unhealed emotional pain sabotages our spiritual formation into people of love.

Seam: When pain and suffering come knocking on our door, what do we do?

Set up:

- We left off last week with the practices of Jesus — ancient spiritual disciplines by which we open our life to God.
- Now, I love the practices, but let’s shoot straight for a minute ...
- Maybe your experience with the practices over the last few weeks was pure bliss; you felt close to Jesus, and drawn into the Trinity’s inner life of love ...
- But maybe *not*.
- When I first started on this inner journey, there were times in prayer where I would experience something that was, for me, counter-intuitive, but I realized later, very common: I went into it expecting to feel happy and peaceful, but instead, I would often feel all sorts of emotional pain.
- I would find myself feeling anger at someone who hurt me in my past, or feeling anxiety over my future ...
 - I would find myself suffering from what psychologists call “afflictive thoughts.”
 - If that was your experience, you are *not* alone.
- Often what happens in the practices is ... when we slow down and come to quiet before God ... all our undigested emotional pain — that we’ve pushed down in the busyness of life — comes *up* ... from the shadow to the surface of our heart ...
- The Cisterian monk Thomas Keating said that the first thing that comes up in quiet prayer is what he called, “the unloading of the unconscious.”
- He writes:

- “When we commit ourselves to the spiritual journey, the first thing the Spirit does is start removing the emotional junk of a lifetime that is inside of us.”¹
- When this happens, it does *not* mean you’re “bad” at the practices — this is all part of the process of spiritual formation.
- The practices are *not* a religious formula to habit stack our way to Christlike character!
- Rather, the practices create time and space for the unprocessed emotional pain of a lifetime — from our childhood wounds from twenty years ago to a passing slight from a co-worker the day before — to come out of the shadows and into the light, where they can be healed.

Seam: In the therapy world, they call emotional pain a “trailhead.”

Emotional pain:

- Pain is an invitation from your soul to explore a path in your story, to follow it down to its origin point in search of healing.
- Think about the role of pain in the *body* — when you get hurt, pain is your body’s way of forcing you to give attention to a part of you in need of attention, healing, and love.
- The pain is a signal to your mind, something is wrong in your body and in need of healing.
- *Emotional* pain is very similar — it’s often a signal from our soul that some aspect of our person is in need of attention, healing, and love.

Seam: The problem is, the modern world does not know how to deal with pain ...

Three ways to deal with emotional pain:

- There are three common cultural responses to emotional pain:
- The first is to ...

1. Deny

- You just deny that you *have* pain.
- This is the most popular response in a lot of Christian circles, because it’s so easy for us to spiritualize our denial as faith in God.
- The psychologist John Welwood called this “spiritual bypassing,” which he defined as

a “tendency to use spiritual ideas and practices to sidestep or avoid facing unresolved emotional issues, psychological wounds, and unfinished developmental tasks.”²

- It’s a (futile) attempt to co-opt the Christian theology of hope to skip over our pain and chase the Western life script up and to the right.
- The thing about denial is: it works incredibly well!
- It is the most effective of all coping strategies.
- The problem is, it’s a short term strategy, and it’s incredibly dangerous.
- Think of physical pain: if you get hurt and it’s not dangerous, your body will likely self-heal, just give it a few days or weeks; but if you have a pain your body that won’t go away, it’s highly likely that something is seriously wrong, and if you deny it or ignore it or pretend it’s not real, it could grow and damage you or even kill you long term.
- Sigmund Freud was wrong about almost everything, but he was right that whatever we refuse to face in our inner lives has the most power over us.
- Denying any part of our inner life, especially those parts that are in need of a healing touch, always has destructive consequences — on us, *and* on others.
- The second option is ... You ...

2. Detach

- You emotionally disconnect from your feelings.
- Certain personality types seem to have the ability to cut off their emotional pain.
- But if we cut off our emotional pain, we inadvertently cut ourselves off to *the whole spectrum of emotion* — *lows and highs*; we don’t feel sadness, but neither do we feel joy or wonder or gratitude.
- Of course the most popular way people deal with their pain is to drug it ...

3. Drug

- Many people *literally* drug their pain ... with alcohol or cannabis or pain meds ...
- But most of us drug our pain more figuratively — with our cultural narcotic of choice.
 - It could be work or our career
 - Or sex

- Or romance
- Or social media ...
- Or entertainment — TV and film and video games ...
- It could be *anything* that is used as a distraction from our pain and our God, rather than a pathway through our pain *to* God ...
- When we turn to drugs, either literally or figuratively, we feel a momentary relief from our pain, but ultimately, we make our anxiety or sadness *worse*, not better.
- But none of these ways of dealing with emotional pain are the Jesus way.
- The Jesus way is to meet God *in* our pain.

The Jesus Way:

- What does the Jesus way look like?
- Let's read from Matthew 26, which is, arguably, the most painful moment in Jesus' life.
- It's the night before the cross, when he's feeling the weight of what's coming: Judas' betrayal, his best friend's denial, his disciples' abandonment, his coming rejection, humiliation, torture, and brutal death ...
- What does he do?
 - Does he *deny* it?
 - "It's okay, God has a plan. Other people have it way worse."
 - No.
 - Does he *detach*?
 - "It is what it is..."
 - No.
 - Does he *drug*?
 - "Hey guys, let's go out for one last night on the town."
 - No.
- He goes to a quiet place, a garden called Gethsemane, with his closest friends, and we read this:

- “Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.” Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” (Matthew 26:36-39)
- Notice the line, “he began to be sorrowful ...”
- He intentionally makes space for all his feelings of sadness to come up — and he meets God in his pain by offering his feelings up to God in prayer.
- This practice — what has come to be called “lament” - is a key feature of what pastor Pete Scazzero calls “emotionally healthy spirituality.”
- Scazzero’s thesis is that “it is impossible to be spiritually mature, while remaining emotionally immature.”³
- But emotional health doesn’t mean you’re happy all the time!
- Jesus was the most emotionally healthy person to ever live and in Luke’s version of the story we just read, Jesus begins to sweat blood, a medical condition called “hematohidrosis,” which is brought on by extreme duress.
- Emotional health means:
 1. You’re aware of your feelings
 - You have the capacity to notice and name your inner life.
 - In a spirit of welcome and gentleness ...
 2. But you’re not run by your feelings
 - You have the capacity to sit with your feelings and let your body process them before God in prayer ... without them causing you to behave in unloving ways.
 - Psychologists call this “emotional regulation.” And the New Testament calls it “self-control.”
 - But to become emotionally healthy means we have to go on “the inner journey,” as some call it, to meet God in our pain ... we have to learn how to pray our pain to God, and share our pain with each other.
 - This is why so many find therapy to be a key part of the inner journey.
 - Processing our pain with an older, wiser, loving soul can be deeply healing.

- But through practices like silence and solitude and prayer and therapy and friendship ... we create time and space to process our pain and suffering with God and in community.

Seam: This is often a slow, painful process, but it is the crucible of our formation!

Pain the crucible:

- Pain and suffering are inevitable in life.
- Again, Jesus: “In this world, you *will* face trouble.” (John 16v33)
- Not “may,” but “*will*.”
- There is no version of life where you do not feel emotional pain.
- The Jesus we follow was betrayed, abandoned, falsely accused, unjustly treated, and killed.
- The prophet Isaiah called him “a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.” (Isaiah 53v3)
- The writer of Hebrews said, “We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are.” (Hebrews 4v15)
- And while few of us have ever experienced the level of trauma that Jesus did, we have all been hurt, wounded, and thrown into trials and tribulations.
- Left *unhealed*, the unresolved emotional pain of a lifetime will sabotage our spiritual formation into people of love.
- If we allow hurt and anger and bitterness and fear to fester in our soul ... it will undermine our best intentions to become like Jesus.
- “Hurt people hurt people,” as the saying goes.
- Psychologists give us categories like trauma, attachment, emotional triggers, and more to name the unhealthy patterns that arise from pain and suffering and in turn, ruin relationships and block our transformation.
- *But*.
- Jesus *went on to say*, “Be of good cheer! I have overcome the world!” (John 16v33)
- Because of Jesus’ incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension — no pain and suffering is meaningless, as it is in a secular worldview, because death and all his friends have been “overcome” by Jesus ...

- Which means the very pain and suffering that can sabotage our spiritual formation can become the secret *to* our spiritual formation!
- Our *breakdowns* can become our *breakthroughs*.
- The risen Christ has the power to take any evil — no matter how heinous — and use it for good.
- *Nothing* is wasted!
- Paul writes in Romans:
 - “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8v28)
- James says it this way:
 - Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1v2-4)
- Peter adds this:
 - “For a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” (1 Peter 1v6-7)
- Do you see it?
- The very pain that we all want to deny or detach from or drug is the pathway to our transformation.
- *If* we, like Jesus, will only meet God in our pain ...

Set up for group conversation:

- Touching on our emotional pain can bring up quite a lot.
- You may be feeling things right now that you’ve pushed down for many years, or are painful to hold.
- So we want to give you a chance to share openly and let others hold your pain with you ...
- You may not be ready for that, that’s okay. Just be as open and transparent as you can ...

- Here's a few questions to guide your conversation:
 1. Can you tell one story of a painful experience you've been through that has been used for good in your formation?
 2. How have you experienced God in times of pain and suffering?
 3. Which of the three responses to emotional pain are you most inclined towards: deny, detach, or drug? What has that looked like in your life?
 4. What could it look like for you to reorient yourself to the pain in your life as an opportunity to be formed by God?
- Now let's have a conversation ...

Set up:

- This coming week we are reading part 5 of the *Practicing the Way* book.
- In your Companion Guide, you'll find extra resources to go further, but go ahead and open to Session 05, as we prepare for this week's spiritual exercise ...

Tutorial:

Week 5: Noticing and Naming Your Emotions

- When I've entered into a time of silence with God, there have been times when I have experienced a sense of God's peace, love, and joy.
- But there have also been times in the silence, like John Mark's experience, when anxiety has risen up in my heart, or a feeling of anger, resentment, or envy towards someone.
- I name these emotions and then lift them up to God in prayer.
- The journey into emotional health involves learning to notice and name our emotions in the presence of God.
- When we notice and name our feelings they have less power over us. If you were to name a painful emotion like fear, anger, disappointment, or jealousy, a brain scan would show that your very act of naming it quiets that emotion. This is why psychiatrist Dan Siegel encourages us to "name it to tame it."
- This week for our practice, we are inviting you, during your rhythm of daily prayer, to set aside time on a particular day for a specific prayer exercise that we have prepared in your

guide called noticing and naming your emotions. The purpose of this prayer is to bring your emotions to God and experience his love and presence.

- Begin by finding a quiet place that's distraction free (without devices) to pray.
- Take a few deep breaths, relax, and center.
- There are four steps to this prayer exercise:
 1. First, *notice* your emotions. Let your emotions rise up within you.
 2. Second, *name* your emotions. Be as specific as possible.
 3. Third: *feel* the emotions. Don't fight the emotion, fret over it, or run from it. When we fight an emotion, it gets bigger — not smaller. Let the emotion rise like a wave, peak, and then pass you by. After ninety seconds, an unimpeded emotion will typically transform on its own.
 4. Fourth and finally, *offer* your feeling to God. Express your emotion to God and entrust your life to him. You may want to set aside space to name an emotion you are carrying once this week — or a few times.
- As you do this, some of you might have a profound experience, but others may wonder, “am I doing it “right”? Like most practices, the deepest impact happens over time as the practice becomes a part of our life. So don't feel any pressure this week — give it a try, reflect on it and then process it with your group in the next session.
- You can engage this powerful exercise for the rest of your life as you walk with God and seek to open your inner world to him.
- May God give you courage and peace as you name your emotions this week.

Summary:

- In this episode we covered these key points:
 - The practices are *not* a religious formula to habit-stack our way into spiritual formation.
 - When we slow down and come to quiet before God, often the first thing that comes up is emotional pain, as our soul begins to process and discharge all the pain and suffering of our life.
 - There are three primary ways people deal with pain:
 - Deny

- Detach or
- Drug
- But the Jesus way is to meet God *in* our pain.
- Left unhealed, emotional pain can sabotage our transformation. But if we open it to God, it can become the secret *to* our transformation.

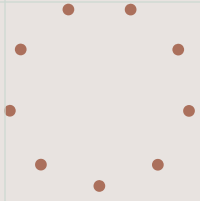
Outro:

- In closing, some of you are in pain right now ...
- The essential question in difficult times is: How do we let our pain and suffering become a portal to God and his transformation?
- How do we let it form us, and not *deform* us?
- The answer is: We accept Jesus' invitations.
- There's a metaphor I find helpful from the Christian psychologist Larry Crabb:⁴
- Imagine your emotional life like an iceberg ...
 - Above the surface is what Dr. Crabb calls "the managed life," where our focus is on living by a set of principles to be successful. Our driving question is: How do I look and feel good?
 - But inevitably, we get hurt, betrayed, rejected, let down, and we slip down to what he calls "the wounded life," where our driving question is: What can I do to get back to looking and feeling good?
 - Most of our life is here, below the surface.
 - And the invitation of Jesus is *not* to go up and out of our pain, but down and into it ... to meet God *in* our pain, in what Dr. Crabb calls "the formed life," where our question becomes: What is God doing through this and in me?
 - *That*, that is the question of an apprentice of Jesus.
- This means we do not need to fear suffering! As Jesus' said, "Do not let your heart be troubled." (John 14v27) You don't need to be afraid.
- We don't need to seek it out; it will come and find us.
- But when it does, if we meet God in it ... he can turn all of it for good, if we only surrender to him ... day by day.

- And we can say with Julian of Norwich: “All will be well, all will be well, and all manner of thing will be well.”⁵

Notes

1. *Open Mind, Open Heart* (1994)
2. “*Principles of Inner Work: Psychological and Spiritual*,” *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* (1984)
3. *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (2006)
4. *Inside Out* (1988)
5. *Revelations of Divine Love* (1670)



The Practicing the Way Course

Teaching Notes

Session 06: Healing From Sin

Intro:

- The world is beautiful.
- It's quiet, and calm, and full of goodness.
- But when I drive the streets of LA, it is glaringly obvious that something is wrong with the world.
 - I see beauty — the arts, architecture, culture, people doing life together ...
 - And I see poverty, inequality, addiction, loneliness, and the breakdown of relationships ...
- What if the city is a kind of parable for the soul? What if all of us are both beautiful, and deeply broken at the same time?
- Seam: What if we need to be saved?

Sin:

- The word used by Jesus to name what's wrong with the world is "sin."
- Now, "sin" is an emotionally loaded word for a lot of people.
- You may hear it and instantly feel a kind of inner allergic reaction.
- But sin is just the word Jesus used to name a reality that *all* the brightest minds agree on — ancient, modern, spiritual, scientific, Western, Eastern — pretty much everyone agrees that something is *off* in the human heart.
- It's not just that we do bad things — we gossip or lie or cheat on our taxes or have an affair.
- It's that we often *want* to do bad things.
- And — even worse — when we *don't* want to do bad things, we often *still* end up doing them! Like an addict, caught in a self-destructive loop.
- Calling human beings "sinful" is no more judgmental than a doctor telling someone they have a heart condition.
- It's just true.
- But there's *good news*: one of the *opening* lines about Jesus in Matthew's Gospel is the angel's word to Joseph in a dream about his soon to be born son:
 - "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."
(Matthew 1v21)

- In Greek, the name Jesus is Yeshua, or Joshua, which means “God saves.”
- And what does God save us from in Jesus? Our sins.
- And yet: I’ve been following Jesus for my entire life, and honestly, I thought that by now, I’d be pretty much done with this sin thing! Or at least on the tail end.
- And while I’m not the man I was twenty years ago, I still have a *long* way to go ...
- One of the reasons this confused me at first was because I did not realize that sin is far more multifaceted than I was led to believe ...

Three dimensions of sin:

- In biblical theology, there are three dimensions to sin. The first is ...

1. Sin done *by* us

- This is the category we are most familiar with.
- We mess up; we are unkind, we shame our children, we tell white lies, we dishonor our parents.
- We add our toxicity to the collective pile of humanity...
- The theologian Cornelius Plantinga called this dimension of sin “the culpable disturbance of *shalom*.” The ripping apart of God’s desired harmony and human flourishing.¹
- But that’s only the first dimension; there’s also ...

2. Sin done *to* us

- We’ve all been *sinned* against — hurt, wounded, betrayed, slandered.
- We are both victim and perpetrator.
- And *our woundedness is the cause of much of our wickedness*.
- “Hurt people hurt people,” as the saying goes, and it’s true.
- Starting in our earliest days, we accumulate a coterie of painful memories that we carry implicitly in our bodies, and tragically, against all our best intentions, we often pass them on to those closest to us.
- Cue the heart-wrenching stats on the number of abusers who were abused, cheaters who were cheated on, perfectionists who were raised by perfectionists, and so on.

- A key part of our spiritual journeys to wholeness is the healing of memories.
- Finally, there is ...

3. Sin done around us

- Due to the radical individualism of the West, we often miss this last dimension, but Jesus and Scripture are adamant: Our environment has a warping effect on our soul.
- All sin — even if it's not done *by* or *to* us, but just *around* us — has a deformative effect.
- It's like breathing secondhand smoke — no one would hold you guilty in a court of law, but that doesn't make it any less deadly.
- The orthodox bishop Kallistos Ware said, "We are born into an environment where it's easy to do evil and hard to do good; easy to hurt others, and hard to heal their wounds."²
- The cultural currents we swim in often push and pull us away from the Way of Jesus.
- But the good news is: through apprenticeship to Jesus, we can be healed of sin in all three dimensions, and made whole at every level of our being.

Thesis:

- You've made it over halfway through a course on apprenticeship to Jesus — well done!
- But following Jesus is a *lifelong* journey.
- And trying to go on the spiritual journey without healing from sin is like trying to run a marathon with a broken leg.
- You're not going to get very far.
- So, a *key* aspect of our spiritual formation is healing from sin done by us, to us, and around us.

Seam: And I'm using the language of "healing" on purpose.

Healing:

- In Mark chapter 2v17, Jesus said:
 - "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."
- Jesus' point here isn't that some people are healthy and other people are sick; but that *all* of

us are sick, and some of us know it.

- But notice: for Jesus, sin is like a disease, and he is the doctor.
- Based on this story, ancient Christians called Jesus “the doctor of the soul.”

Hinge: And like any good doctor, he doesn’t just want to just deal with the symptoms, but the disease itself.

- It’s so clear in the teachings of Jesus that he is interested in so much more than behavior modification; he’s interested in our heart ...
- The hard truth is, sin goes far deeper than most of us realize ...

Seam: This clicked for me when I came across a paradigm from Dr. Robert Mullholland on the four layers of sin ...³

Four layers of sin:

- The first layer is what ancient Christians called...

1. Gross sins

- Not “gross” as in yucky, but as in *major* sins.
- Like the saying, “I made a *gross* mistake.”
- Listen to the Apostle Paul’s list of gross sins in Galatians 5(v19-21):
 - “Sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”
- These are the sins that mark so many of our lives before we come to Jesus.
- Gross sins are the first to go in our spiritual journey (sometimes they disappear the *day* we are baptized!); but then comes layer two ...

2. Conscious sins

- These are sins that are socially acceptable in our culture (or even celebrated in our culture), yet are *not* the way of Jesus.

- Sins like:
 - Materialism
 - Bragging
 - Watching dirty TV
 - Gossip
 - Cussing
 - Course humor
 - White lies
 - Negativity
 - Rudeness
- These are called “conscious” sins because even when we know they are contrary to Jesus’ teaching, we still *choose* to do them.
- The problem (at this layer in our apprenticeship) is an aspect of our *will* that has yet to be surrendered to Jesus ...
- Over time, the Spirit gently convicts us of these sins, and calls us to leave them behind ...
- Then we face our ...

3. Unconscious sins

- These are sins of *omission*, not *commission*.
 - Meaning, things we *don’t* do, rather than things we *do*.
 - We *don’t* call our friends when they are suffering, we don’t speak up when we need to, we ignore the poor ...
- Or they are sins of *motivation*, where we do the right thing — serve the poor, speak up for truth, practice the spiritual disciplines — but for the wrong reasons.
- Or it’s dysfunctional relational patterns — how people emotionally experience us — as defensive or moody or negative or judgmental or overly talkative ...
- In layer three, we pass a kind of invisible line in our soul, from the conscious to the unconscious, into what the psychologist Carl Jung called “the shadow.”
- Our shadow is murky and unclear and it’s much harder to distinguish between vice and virtue.

- As our shadow is exposed — by suffering, by our most intimate relationships, and by prayer — it can feel humbling, *humiliating* even ... but it's a key step in the process of healing.
- But we're still not at rock bottom. The final layer is ...

4. Our attachments

- Or in more Christian language, our “idols.”
- Dr. Robert Mulholland called them our “trust structures.”
- Father Thomas Keating called them our “emotional programs for happiness.”⁴
- They are the things we believe we *need* to be happy and at peace.
- These usually aren't bad things at all!
- They are good things that we want in a bad way; just meaning, we *need* them to be okay.
- Things like, our:
 - Health
 - Marriage
 - Children
 - Job or career
 - Success
 - Wealth
 - Beauty
 - Youth
 - Retirement
 - Reputation
 - Plans
 - Friends
 - Food, drink
 - Pleasure
- It's hard to believe, but all these good things — which are gifts from God — can become

the source not of happiness, but *unhappiness*.

- The problem is not the gifts themselves; it's our attachment *to* the gifts.
- As the Indian Jesuit Anthony de Mello put it:
 - "If you look carefully you will see that there is one thing that causes unhappiness. The name of that thing is attachment. What is an attachment? An emotional state of clinging caused by the belief that without some particular thing or some person you cannot be happy.⁵
- And it's in this last layer of sin that we are *most* in bondage, and most in need of the salvation of Jesus.
- And it's here that Jesus' teachings are at their most radical.
- The great paradox of Jesus' message is: *As long as you need your life to go a certain way to be happy and at peace, you will never be happy and at peace.*
- Ignatius of Loyola — the founder of the Jesuit Order — went as far as to define sin as "unwillingness to trust that what God wants for me is only my deepest happiness."
- But to believe that, God must *become* our deepest happiness.
- It's in this stage in our formation where we begin to see all the areas in our heart where we do not look to our Creator for our wellbeing, but to created things.
 - *All* sin, and all idolatry, at its root, is our soul's search for happiness, and love; but by looking to the creation rather than to the Creator.
- Which is why the end goal of spiritual formation is detachment from the things of this world ... and attachment to God ...

Seam: So, four levels.

- Let's take the sin of anger as a case study ...
- The "gross" layer of anger is murder, violence, domestic abuse, road rage, etc.
- The "conscious" layer would be things like name calling, yelling at our spouse, mouthing profanities ...
- The "unconscious" layer would be coming to a place in our formation where we would never hit someone or even yell at them, yet we're passive aggressive, and we still feel the lace of contempt in our heart.
- And the final layer, our attachments, would be, say, for example, when my teenage son does

poorly in school, and I mature to a place that I don't snap at him or shame him, but inside, I'm angry, or stressed out ... because I emotionally *need* him to do well in school, to live up to my plans for his life ...

- I need this to be happy; I'm yet to be completely happy in God.
- As you can see, the spiritual journey traverses the ground from the worst kind of outward behavior to the most intimate internal desires of the heart ...

Seam: Where are you in your spiritual journey of healing? Jesus is the doctor of the soul and his desire is to heal you, free you, and save you at every level of your being.

Set up for reflection:

- This was possibly one of the most tender of all the sessions.
- And we want to give you a few minutes, right now, right where you're at, to plot yourself on this continuum ...
- Please open your Guide to Session 06, where you'll find a page for a short reflection.
- Take a few minutes in the quiet, we ask you not to talk, to journal through the following reflection questions ...
 1. What do you honestly believe about how God sees you and your sin? (Don't journal the "right" answer, but what you actually think and feel ...)
 2. What came up for you as we talked about sin? (e.g., a sin you were convicted of, a habitual sin you struggle to break free from? A wound from your past? Fear of confession and vulnerability?)
 3. Is there anyone you need to forgive or ask for forgiveness from, including God?

Set up for group conversation:

- Now let's take a few minutes to process this together. You may feel comfortable sharing with those around you or you may not, that's okay. Just share as much as you're able and willing.
- Here are a few questions ...
 1. Growing up, what was your understanding of sin and God's response to it?
 2. When you sin, what do you normally do? How do you normally deal with any lingering sense of guilt, shame, or ongoing temptation?

3. As you think about your sin patterns, what attachments or idols are you clinging to in your pursuit of happiness?
4. In light of this teaching, what steps may God be inviting you to take towards healing?

Set up:

- As a reminder, this week we are finishing reading *Practicing the Way*.
- Now let's turn to this coming week's practice ...

Confession:

- If sin is a kind of disease, how do we begin to heal?
- Well, there's a saying in AA: "We are only as sick as the secrets we keep."
- The beginning of healing is to tell our secrets, through what the writers of the Bible call "confession."
- Contrary to what a lot of people think, confession is not about beating yourself up or telling all your sins to a priest to get off the hook ...
- It's about courageously naming your wickedness and your woundedness — the sin done *by* you, *to* you, and *around* you — in the presence of loving community who are walking with you on the long journey to wholeness.
- It's not just about the confession of sin; but the confession of God's love for us and others *in* our sin.
- It's about coming out of hiding and leaving behind not only sin, but *shame*.
- And confession is *our* part in the healing of sin.
- You have to go to the doctor and tell them what's wrong for them to heal you.
- And when it comes to the deeper sins, especially layers three and four, that's often all we can do — set our sin before Jesus ... only he can heal and save us.
- *His* job is to deal with our sin; *our* job is to confess our secrets.
- Sadly, the way many modern Christians practice confession is by saying sorry to God in their mind at church or in prayer.
- And that's not bad, but *true* confession is more like sitting down at an AA meeting and

saying, “Hi, my name is ... whatever ... and I’m an alcoholic. Last week I lost it ...”

- It’s *naming* your sin to loving *community*.
- The writer James says this in the NT:
 - “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” (James 5v16)
- Notice his word choice: not just forgiven, but *healed*!
- And while this may sound terrifying at first, it is a crucial practice for all those who want to make genuine progress in the spiritual life.
- As they say in AA: “*I get drunk, but we stay sober.*”
- We need each other on the spiritual journey of healing.

Tutorial:

Week 6: Confession

- For those of you reading the *Practicing the Way* Book alongside this course, this week we are in the final section.
- The practice we are inviting you into this week is confession.
- When we feel guilt and shame because of something we’ve *done or not done*, confession is likely the *last* thing we feel like doing.
- But the path to being free from shame involves being open and transparent with someone we trust. In James 5:16 we read, “Confess your sins to one another and pray for each other that you may be healed.” When we name our sin or shame or secret with a trusted person, we can experience healing.
- I meet weekly over Zoom with a trusted friend, and we mutually confess our temptations, struggles, and sins and then pray for each other. This may sound heavy, but in practice, it feels truly uplifting.
- I first began to see the value of confession years ago. I had done something to violate my code and conscience. A lot of people would say it was no big deal. But, I knew I had violated an important value and had sinned, and I was feeling guilt and shame.
- Not long after this, I confessed what I had done to a close friend and mentor. He was disappointed, but he also expressed his love for me, and I felt his deep care. After confessing

and being received with love, I felt an enormous burden lifting from my shoulders.

- When we are able to confess something to someone we trust (whether it's a friend, pastor, spiritual director, or counselor) and they don't judge us, but reflect God's grace to us, and say, "I'm not going anywhere," or "Welcome to being human," or "God has forgiven you," we experience healing and freedom. Another person can make the presence and forgiveness of Christ real to us.
 - Our practice for the coming week is confession.
 - This practice is difficult, but powerful:
 - To begin, identify someone you trust and ask them if they would be willing to listen to you as you practice confession.
 - Make a plan to connect somewhere private, where you feel at peace.
 - Tell this trusted person what is on your heart, name your sin (As you begin, you don't need to share every secret of your life, perhaps begin with one. And as you build trust with the person over time, you can become more transparent and vulnerable in your confession.
 - Finally, invite them to respond and ask them to pray over you.
 - Receive their love for you and fully accept the truth they speak and pray over you.
- Now, if someone asks you to hear a confession, it's important for you to affirm God's love and forgiveness over them.
 - Jesus, the doctor of the soul, will bring healing to you as you open new layers of your life to him.
 - God bless and keep you as you practice confession this week.

Summary:

- To review this episode ...
 - A key aspect of the spiritual journey is healing from sin.
 - There are three dimensions to sin.
 - Sin done *by* us
 - Sin done *to* us

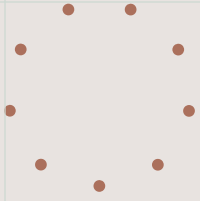
- And sin done *around* us
- And there are four layers of sin we move through in our healing.
 1. Gross sins
 2. Conscious sins
 3. Unconscious sins
 4. Attachments
- Our part in the healing of sin is the practice of confession.

Outro:

- Just a few days ago, I went hiking with a close friend ... I was burdened by something I'd done recently ... I was embarrassed and scared to confess my sin ... but he was so loving ... and after our conversation, I felt a thousand pounds lighter.
- This process of healing from sin through the practice of confession may sound *terrifying*.
- It can be, at first.
- But once you experience the love of God — through loving community, who hold your sin and shame up to his healing light — confession becomes a lifeline.
- Confession becomes something you want to do ... because you want healing, you want *health* and life.
- The paradox of discipleship is: It is only when we are honest and true with God, others, and ourselves about all the ways we fall short of love that we enter into the transformational process of becoming more loving.
- The more we hide, the less we heal!
- But as we come out of hiding ... we realize, we thought our secrets were protecting us from shame; but they were actually keeping us imprisoned *in* shame.
- And as we come out into the light ... we find we are more deeply loved than we could ever imagine ...

Notes

1. *Engaging God's World* (2002)
2. *The Orthodox Way* (1979)
3. *Invitation to a Journey* (1993)
4. *The Human Condition* (1999)
5. *The Way to Love* (2011)



The Practicing the Way Course

Teaching Notes

Session 07: Crafting a Rule of Life

Intro:

- I love driving through wine country ... and seeing row after row of green ... each vine rooting itself in the earth and reaching up to the sun to grow ...
- I'm struck by how essential the trellis is to the vine; you *never* see a vine growing wild on the ground; it *always* has a support structure underneath it.
- And I can't help but think of Jesus teaching:
 - "I am the vine, you are the branches, if you abide in me, *you* will bear much fruit."
(John 15v5)
- The soul is like a branch in a vine; and we too need a trellis in order to grow ...
- In the Christian tradition, this is called a Rule of Life ...

Set up:

- Over the last six sessions, we've set before you a vision of apprenticeship to Jesus.
- Now we're ready to shift gears and make a plan to turn that vision into a reality.
- Transformation *is* possible.
- But it's not inevitable.
- It won't just "happen."
- We need a plan.
- Pete Scazzero, of Emotionally Healthy Discipleship, has said:
 - "Nurturing a growing spirituality with depth in our present-day culture will require a thoughtful, conscious, intentional plan for our spiritual lives."¹
- We all have a plan for the things we *most value*.
- Most of us have a plan for our money, or what we call a budget; we have a plan for our time, or a schedule; many of us have a plan for our career or summer vacation or our diet or exercise routine.
- But not for our apprenticeship to Jesus.
- I've been around soccer moms with more of a plan for their kid's pathway to professional sports than for their spiritual formation.

- The question is: How do we make a “plan” to be spiritually formed?

Seam: Let me introduce you to the answer the first followers of Jesus came up with. They called it “A Rule of Life” ...

Rule of Life:

- A Rule of Life is a schedule and a set of practices and relational rhythms that create space for us to be with Jesus, become like him, and do as he did.
- It’s an intentional plan to slow down and simplify our life around being spiritually formed by Jesus.
- “Rule of Life” is ancient language, so it can sound strange or even off-putting to our modern ears.
- But notice; it’s *rule* of life (singular), not *rules* for life (plural).
- The original Latin word used by our spiritual ancestors was *regula*, where we get English words like *regular* and *regulation*, as well as *rule* and *ruler*, because it literally means a “straight piece of wood.”
- Some scholars believe it was the word used in the ancient Mediterranean for a trellis in a vineyard.
- In John 15, Jesus gave his most famous teaching on spiritual formation:
 - “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” (John 15v5-8)
- Early Christian teachers picked up on Jesus’ metaphor and followed it to its logical conclusion.
- For a vine to “bear much fruit,” what does it need? A trellis. A support structure, to lift it up off the ground, guide it in the desired direction, and guard it from damage, disease, and dangerous predators.
- In the same way, to “abide in the vine” and “bear much fruit,” apprentices of Jesus need a trellis, a support structure to guard and guide their lives into transformation.

- A Rule of Life is exactly that: a trellis. It's a way to schedule into our daily life practices and relational rhythms that align our time and habits to our deepest desires — to be with Jesus, and become like him.
- The motivation behind a Rule isn't duty; it's *desire*.
- Think of the way an athlete disciplines themselves with daily drills or a musician with daily practice ... it's all in service of a deeper desire ...
- They know, we have to connect our desires to daily disciplines if we want to see them become a reality.
- For apprentices of Jesus, a Rule of Life is made up of:
 - *Daily* practices: like beginning your day in prayer and the reading of Scripture.
 - *Weekly* practices: like keeping Sabbath and gathering with community.
 - And *monthly* practices: like serving the poor and preaching the gospel.
- It's all the practices we intentionally, repeatedly do, to offer our lives up to God for transformation.
- Put another way: A Rule of Life is an intentional plan for our spiritual formation.
- And in the chaos of modern life — with all its hurry and digital distraction and cross-pressures ... we need a Rule more than ever before.
- It is an ancient idea, whose time has come again.

You already have a Rule:

- You may love this concept of a Rule of Life, or you may hate it!
- Especially if you're a more spontaneous and fun-loving personality, *or* if you come out of a legalistic background and are leery of any talk of discipline.
- But here's the thing: *you already have a Rule of Life*.
- Whether it's:
 - Written or unwritten.
 - Conscious or subconscious.
 - Wise or foolish.
 - Based on long-term vision or short-term instant gratification.

- Moving you toward your desired destination or sabotaging your best intentions.
- Even if you've never heard the phrase Rule of Life until three minutes ago! You *have* one.
- We all do.
- We have a way in which we live: a morning routine, a typical day, a network of relationships, a budget, things we spend our time on, and so on.
- The question is not: Do you have a Rule of Life?
- It's: Do you know what your Rule of Life *is*?
- *And*: Is it giving you the life you most deeply desire?
- Is it working *for* you? Or against you?
- Many of us feel far from God so much of the time, always in a hurry, stuck in our spiritual formation, still living in wounding from our past or dysfunctional patterns in our present.
- The problem isn't that our Rule of Life isn't working; it's that it *is*!
- You and I are being *formed* — for better or for worse! — by the choice architecture of our lives — by *all* the habits and relationships and environments and decisions that fill our days.
- By our Rule of Life.

Seven tips:

- And now we're finally ready to craft a Rule of Life.
- Everything we do is invitational.
- We make recommendations, you make the decisions.
- But if you're ready to take the next step in your apprenticeship to Jesus and make an intentional plan for your spiritual formation, let me offer you a few tips ...

1. Start small

- It's easy to get over-excited and overreach, but this is a strategy doomed to fail.
- When it comes to the spiritual life, as a general rule: *start where you are, not where you "should" be.*
- We must find God inside the contours of ordinary life — not the life we used to have, or plan to have, or wish we had, but the life we *actually* have.

- So, start wherever you are.
- For most of us, that means start small.
- With what psychologists call “tiny habits” — small, easy, joyful practices for life with God.
- Yes, a full hour every morning for prayer before you touch your phone is ideal; but if that’s too big of a leap, start with 15 minutes. Or ten minutes. Or *two* minutes.
- Start there.

2. Think subtraction, not addition

- Take out more than you put in!
- Less *is* more.
- It’s tempting to write your Rule as a list of things to *do*.
- And that’s not all bad, but for most of us, it’s just as important if not *more* so to make a list of what we’re *not* going to do!
- A Rule of Life is not about doing *more*, but doing *less*!
- It’s about ruthlessly eliminating hurry from your life.

3. Take a balanced approach

- You can plot the practices of Jesus along four axis points:
 - Disciplines you do alone, and those you do in community. And ...
 - Disciplines of *doing*, like worship or feasting or service, and of *not* doing, like solitude, silence, or fasting.
- Naturally, you’re going to be drawn to some practices and shy away from others, that’s totally normal.
- Just make sure you design a Rule that covers the whole range of your formation, not *just* your personality preferences.
- That said ...

4. Take into account your personality and season of life

- Work *with* your personality, not against it.

- If you're more introverted and intellectual, carve out plenty of time to read and reflect; if you're more extroverted and action-oriented, prioritize *doing* meaningful things with other people.
- Yes, we need a balanced approach, but some of us need way more of certain practices than others.
- Design a Rule that is congruent with your personality *and* your season of life.
- Just as our budget and our schedule change through the various seasons of our lives, our Rule must as well.

5. There is no formation without repetition

- Formation is slow and at times monotonous work.
- In the moment, it often doesn't *feel* like it's doing anything to us at all.
- It is. It's just slow.
- But over time, the practices have a cumulative effect upon our spiritual formation.
- It's like Mr. Miyagi and the Karate Kid. In the moment, we just feel like we're waxing Mr. Miyagi's car or pounding nails into the dojo addition, but actually, we're becoming a karate master.
- In the moment, we just feel like we're beginning our day in prayer or practicing Sabbath or going to church, but actually, we're becoming like our Master, Jesus.
- We just have to stay with the process, and find *joy* in our ordinary life with God.
- Finally ...

6. Do this in community

- It's easy to think of crafting a Rule of Life as something I do: "*I write my Rule.*"
- And that's not bad! To repeat, "you already *have* a Rule," so anything that brings more intentionality to your apprenticeship to Jesus is powerful.
- But historically, a Rule of Life was for a *community*.
- It was designed to hold a community together around shared rhythms of spiritual formation.
- And following a Rule in community can change everything.
 - There's something about starting the Sabbath not just by yourself, but with a meal in community, that makes the entire practice far more joyful.

- There's something about fasting on Fridays, and knowing you're doing it with your community and all pooling the money you would have spent on food together to give to a local food bank.
- It's just *better* in community.
- So, as you make a rough draft of your Rule this coming week — *if at all possible* — do it in community.
- You could do it with one friend, or your small group or table community or women's Bible study. Or even with your entire church.
- This will be a lot messier and take a lot longer to figure out; that's okay; it will be worth it.

Conclusion:

- In your Guide is an example Rule of Life from Practicing the Way, that I live by with our community, along with a few other samples from different people in different stages of life.
- But this does not need to feel overwhelming ...
- Again, start *small*: your Rule may start as two or three simple practices: beginning your day by reading a Psalm, getting coffee with a close friend once a week, and spending a few hours each Sunday in Sabbath rest ... That's a beautiful start.
- You can always add practices over time.
- Just take the next step.

Set up for group conversation:

- Speaking of doing this all in community, let's take a few minutes to process this concept of a Rule of Life, and dream together about what this could look like.
- Circle up in your groups, and have a conversation around the following questions:
 1. What makes up your current Rule of Life?
 - As John Mark said, we already have a Rule of Life. What practices and relationships are currently the most central to your regular routine.
 2. As you think about designing a Rule of Life, how would you describe the spiritual needs of your personality and stage of life?
 3. What practices do you want to include in your Rule of Life?

4. Who would be important to incorporate in the process of building your Rule of Life?

Tutorial:

Week 7: Rule of Life

- We now come to the exercise this entire course has been building to: crafting a Rule of Life.
- When I was in my 20s, I was working in the corporate world in Japan as what they call a "7-11" man — which meant that my work day went from 7 in the morning until 11 at night. My life felt crazy back then. When I first became a pastor in Vancouver, Canada, I found myself working almost the same hours. I felt like I was constantly treading water.
- Establishing a rule of life — having a life rhythm that supports my relationship with Jesus — has felt like a literal life-line: it's been the most life-giving and transformative practice of my life.
- Ideally, your rule of life will feel like a gift, not an obligation — a "get to," not a "have to."
- If after crafting your rule, your life feels heavier, you likely have a self-constructed routine — not a Holy Spirit-inspired rhythm. If your rule is Spirit inspired, your life will feel supported, lighter, and freer. (Remember, as is true of the Sabbath: the rule is made for you, not you for the rule.)
- In your Guide, please turn to session 7 and consider the template:
- Now, there's no "right" way to do this! There's no one size fits all approach to spiritual formation. Feel free to be creative. Make sure your rule fits the unique person you are ...
- But, you may find it helpful to think about practices and relational rhythms in three categories: Daily, Weekly and Monthly or seasonally.
 1. First, let's look at Daily. What do you want to do — and not do — on a daily basis? For example, you might want to begin your day in silent prayer and by reading Scripture. And you might *not* want to begin your day by looking at news feeds or social media posts on your phone.
 2. Second, Weekly. What do you want to do on a weekly basis? For example, you might want to honor the Sabbath, worship at church, and share a meal with your community.
 3. Third, Monthly or seasonally. What rhythms do you want to work into your life regularly? For instance, you might want to incorporate the practice of a retreat, or a day in solitude, or serving those living in poverty, or sharing hospitality with your neighbors.

- In your Guide, you will find nine practices that we offer training for through Practicing the Way.
- We've introduced a number of them in this course:
- Some of these include:
 - Beginning your day with God: as you practice *solitude*, *prayer*, and *Scripture*.
 - A weekly *Sabbath*: a gift, in our era, we cannot afford to refuse.
 - And next week, we'll end by calling you to a regular touch point with *community*.
- These practices — that you're already doing — are the beginning of a Rule of Life.
- Our hope is that you build on this foundation and continue to refine it over time.
- If you're unable to incorporate all of these practices, seek to live your rule as you can — not as you can't.
- As you write your Rule of Life, tap into your deepest desires — what you most want in your life with God and the kind of person you long to become. Let your God-given desires fuel your actions. Let your vision of life to be with Jesus and to become like Jesus inspire you to practice the Way.
- To support you in this exercise, we have included several sample "rules of life" in the course guide, from different people in different stages of life.
- May God give you wisdom, creativity, joy, and peace as you craft your Rule of Life.

Summary:

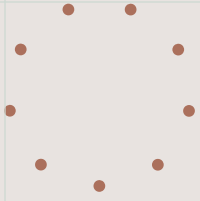
- Here's what we covered in this session:
 - Transformation is possible, but it's not inevitable.
 - We need an intentional *plan* for our spiritual formation — what the early Christians called a "Rule of Life."
 - A Rule of Life is a schedule and a set of practices and relational rhythms that create space for us to be with Jesus, become like him, and do as he did.
 - When crafting a Rule for the first time, it's important to start small, and begin with subtraction, not addition.
 - This coming week, our exercise is to design a Rule of Life.

Outro:

- The novelist Annie Dillard famously said:
 - “How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives. What we do with this hour, and that one, is what we are doing. A schedule defends from chaos and whim ... It is a peace and a haven set into the wreck of time; it is a lifeboat on which you find yourself, decades later, still living.”²
- A Rule of Life is a way to live with greater intentionality; to line up our *schedule* with the deepest desires of our heart — to be with and become like Jesus.
- But it must be said: following Jesus isn’t a formula, it’s a friendship.
- A Rule of Life is not a regimen of spiritual disciplines by which we habit stack our way to spiritual maturity.
- A Rule is just a way to put friendship with Jesus at the *center* of our lives, not off to the side.
- And through the practices that make up our Rule, we offer up our *whole* life — the good, the bad, and the ugly — *all* that we are — up to God in love.
- Transformation is God’s work, not ours; we’re not in control of any of it. God does it *his* way, at *his* pace.
- Living by a Rule is just a way to say, daily: “God, here I am. Heal me. Free me. Transform me. I love you; love me into a person of love.”

Notes

1. *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (2006)
2. *The Writing Life* (1989)



The Practicing the Way Course

Teaching Notes

Session 08: Life Together

Intro:

- There's an ancient proverb that says, "If you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go together."
- From time immemorial, teachers of the Way of Jesus have likened apprenticeship to a kind of spiritual journey.
- A long, winding journey of becoming a person of love in God.
- And like the proverb says, it is a journey that we were designed to go on *together*. In community.

Recap:

- Over the last seven sessions, we laid out a foundation for a life of apprenticeship to Jesus.
1. We began with the three driving goals of an apprentice:
 - Be with Jesus
 - Become like him
 - And do as he did.
 2. Then we covered spiritual formation, and said we've already been formed, or *deformed*.
 3. Therefore, all formation in the Way of Jesus is counter formation.
 4. This brought us to the practices of Jesus. The practices are how we do what we can do so that Jesus *can* do what we currently *cannot* do — transform us to live and love like him.
 5. But the practices only take us so far; we then have to meet God in our pain and suffering and go on the inner journey.
 6. What the Bible calls "sin" is a major obstacle on that journey. So we covered the layers of sin and how we heal through the practice of confession.
 7. This all built up to a climax: crafting a Rule of Life. A schedule and a set of practices and relational rhythms to organize our lives around spiritual formation.
 - And along the way, we intentionally put these ideas into practice ... by integrating spiritual

disciplines like quiet, prayer, scripture reading, and Sabbath into our busy lives to slow down and simplify our life around God.

- Today we come to our final session.
- But to say it again, this course is just a *primer*.
- You have a lifelong journey of following Jesus ahead of you.
- But before you go, we need to key in on one final idea that is of the *utmost* importance: *You are not meant to go on this journey alone*.
- You are meant to follow Jesus in community.

Seam: We started this course with Jesus' invitation in Mark 1:

- "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him. (Mark 1v17-18)
- Notice: Jesus did not have an *apprentice* (singular); he had *apprentices* (plural).
- Meaning: Jesus' invitation was to come and do life together.

Seam: Just a few pages later, we read this ...

- Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach ... (Mark 3v13-14)
- Why 12?
- Why not 21 or 100?
- Because this is a highly symbolic act; Jesus is intentionally naming 12 disciples to evoke the 12 tribes of Israel.
- It's Jesus' way of saying he is forming a new family ...
- What we call the Church is not a building, or an event; it is a new family, *not* based on blood, but on apprenticeship to Jesus ...

Seam: Just a few *sentences* later, we read this ...

- A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my

brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."
(Mark 3v32-35)

- The word Jesus used for brother and sister is *adelphoi* in Greek, it literally means sibling.
- It comes as no surprise that in the writings of the New Testament, the word *adelphoi* is the only other moniker used just as frequently as apprentice.
- The Apostle Paul uses *adelphoi* over 130 times in his letters.
- One of the main ways Paul and the New Testament writers explain Jesus' work is through the metaphor of adoption.
- Through Jesus, we have been adopted into the family of God; God has become our father, Jesus our older brother, and our fellow apprentices have become our siblings.
 - When my wife and I adopted our daughter Sunday, she became both our daughter, and Jude and Moses' sister ... she became part of a new family.
- In the same way, to become an apprentice of Jesus is to become a part of a new family.
- One that transcends all the lines that divide us — race, class, gender, politics, all of it ...
- Meaning (and please listen!): Jesus' desire is not just to form *you* into a *person* of love; but to form a *community* of love.

Seam: Now, this has all sorts of implications for our apprenticeship to Jesus.

- You can't follow Jesus alone.
- Not you shouldn't; you can't.
- The *whole point* of the spiritual journey is to become a person of love.
- Jesus called love the "greatest commandment."
- Dr. Todd Hall of Rosemead School of Psychology calls the Christian faith a "relational spirituality," by which we are loved into people of love.¹
- This means that spiritual formation is a *relational* process.
- You simply won't get very far in your spiritual journey if you try to go it alone.
- Dr. Joseph Hellerman put it this way:
 - "Spiritual formation occurs primarily in the context of community. Persons who remain contented with their brothers and sisters in the local church almost invariably grow in self-understanding. And they mature in their ability to relate in healthy

ways to God and to their fellow human beings. This is especially the case for those courageous Christians who stick it out through the often messy process of interpersonal discord and conflict resolution. Long-term interpersonal relationships are the crucible of genuine progress in the Christian life. People who stay grow. People who leave do not grow.”²

- This is why church is so essential.
- And by “church,” I don’t just mean church “attendance.”

Seam: Sunday worship is an essential part of our formation, but while God works through *all* shapes and sizes and styles of churches, it’s usually in the smaller, more relational spaces where we experience the most profound change.

Four circles of community:

- There is a growing body of research from the social sciences that groups relationships into different categories based on *group size* and the *depth of vulnerability*.
- One of the most widely accepted paradigms is from Dr. Robin Dunbar of Oxford.
- It’s called “Dunbar’s Number”:³
 1. He calls our inner circle our “intimates” — this is 1 to 5 people (max), who deeply know us as we are; our shadow, and our light; and who, ideally, love us as we are.
 - Of course, many in the West have *no* intimates.
 - The fallout of Western individualism and the breakdown of the family.
 - But hopefully you have a few people you can bare your soul to — a spouse or best friend or mentor.
 - The next circle is ...
 2. Our friends — which goes up to 15 people.
 - This is the people we do life with: We practice the “one another’s” of the New Testament
 - we help each other move, we go on vacation together, we share meals, we drop off groceries when people are sick
 - This is our *community*.
 3. The next threshold is around the 150 person mark.

- Sociologists call this “The Law of 150,” as 150 is about the maximum number of people we can be in relationship with; and it’s the optimal group size for human organization.
- While there are some very large churches, this is also about the size of most local churches.
- And we draw on this wider social network for all sorts of things. This is our village, per se.

4. The final circle is our “tribe” — the larger group we identify with and belong to.

- We don’t know all these people personally, but this group is where we get a vision of life and a call to live with meaning and purpose.
- For many in the secular world, this could be a company or a political party or a sports team.
- For us as followers of Jesus, this is the *Church* of Jesus ...

- And when it comes to our spiritual formation ...

1. We need relationships across all four circles.

- Jesus had relationships at every layer:
 - He had three intimates — Peter, James, and John.
 - He had the 12 and a few close friends like Mary and Martha.
 - Then he had the group of 120 in Jerusalem.
 - Then the larger church he left behind ...
 - Healthy people have relationships in all four circles.
 - But ...

2. Our deepest formation, growth, healing, and change all happens in the smaller circles.

- We all need what Celtic Christians called an *anam cara*, or a “soul friend.” To bear our most vulnerable burdens with.
- C.S. Lewis once said the essence of friendship can be summed up in the phrase “You too?!”⁴
- Meaning, friends come together around a shared joy, like backpacking or surfing or reading fiction ...

- In a spiritual friendship, the shared joy is *Jesus*.
- *And* we need a community to do life with.
- We were created to live deeply relational lives, and it's in the first two circles of our *closest* community that we experience deep, lasting transformation.

Three core components:

- And yet, we all have mixed feelings about these deep relationships.
- Part of us aches for connection ... to God and to others ... we desire to know and be known ... to give and receive love.
- But part of us is terrified of connection, especially if in our childhood we did not receive safe, steady love from our parents or caregivers, or if we've been deeply wounded along the way.
- The therapist Susie Hausch once said, "Our deepest wounds come from relationships, but so does our deepest healing."
- These deeper relationships are *essential* to our healing and growth.
- And yet, in our modern world of radical individualism, digital distraction, and transience, these types of relationships will not just fall on our head!
- They will require us to make an intentional effort.
- So, before we go, let me name what these relationships look like:

Seam: Spiritual friendships are marked by three core characteristics:

- The first is ...

1. Depth

- These are *not* superficial relationships where we chat about the weather or our work projects or what show we're watching on TV.
- We talk about what's *below* the surface.
- We talk about our life with *God*, our pain, our suffering, our sin — where the growth edge is in our formation.
- But it's not just depth, it's also ...

2. Vulnerability

- We come together around our weakness, not just our strength!
- We are raw, honest, and transparent with each other about what Jesus called our “spiritual poverty.”
- There are two parts to this:
 - One is telling the truth — or the practice of confession.
 - Naming our sin and shame to one another.
 - We can’t live without sin, but we *can* live without secrets.
 - The other is listening ...
 - Listening *deeply* to each other’s stories and struggles.
 - Neurobiologists tell us that when people “feel felt,” when they feel listened to in a compassionate way, it’s *indistinguishable* from feeling loved.
 - As we listen deeply to each other tell our stories, and help each other make sense of our stories in God, we experience real healing from both sin and shame.
- Finally is a ...

3. Commitment to transformation

- When monks join a monastery, they take vows, one of which is called *conversatio morum*, or “conversion of life,” which is essentially a vow to lifelong spiritual formation, to never stop growing in love ...
- Many people reach a certain level of spiritual maturity, and then plateau ... “I’m good.”
- But as apprentices of Jesus, we come together not just to be a safe place to process emotional pain; but ultimately, to give ourselves more deeply to Jesus.
- This means part of our relational dynamic is telling the truth *to each other*.
- I *need* people to both *comfort* me and *confront* me at times! To point out my potential, and also any pitfalls
- And while I rarely need a full on rebuke, I *regularly* need people to speak hard truths into my life.
- Spiritual friendships do not work if one member is not fully committed to the transformational journey.

Recap: Depth, vulnerability, and a commitment to transformation.

Seam: Here's the thing: It's possible to go to church every Sunday and even be in a small group, but never have these types of relationships.

- *I* was in the church for years and never had any relationships like this. I never let anyone get that close.
- When I first woke up to Jesus' call to community, I started small.
 - Our family began to share a weekly meal with a few other people.
 - Then a few of them moved into our neighborhood and we started doing life together — watching each other's kids, going running together, throwing block parties, going on vacations ...
 - Then we started to confess our sins to each other ...
 - Eventually we started living by a Rule of Life together ...
- We kept going to church on Sunday, but most of our life together wasn't around a stage; it was around a table.
- And as romantic as that may sound, we had to learn the hard way about what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "the wish dream" of community.
- In his book *Life Together*, he writes:
 - "Those who love their dream of a Christian community more than they love the Christian community itself become destroyers of that Christian community even though their personal intentions may be ever so honest, earnest, and sacrificial."
- No *actual* church or friendship can possibly live up to the wish dream of the *ideal* church or friendship.
- Honestly, I can tell you after many years of living in community, it is *not* easy, and when it goes wrong, it's incredibly painful.
- But when it goes *right*? It's a glimpse of eternity in time.
- Living in community has *changed my life*.
- I will *never* go back to just going to church on Sunday and living like an American individualist the other six days of the week.
- If you want to go far in your spiritual journey, cultivate a community of depth, vulnerability, and commitment to transformation, and follow Jesus together.

Set up for group conversation:

- Now we've come to our final conversation together.
- Hopefully, by now, you've really come to know and love the people to your right and left.
- Let's process this call to community together.
- Here are a few questions to give shape to your discussion:
 1. Of the three relational characteristics named (depth, vulnerability, and a commitment to transformation), which is the hardest for you? How could you practice leaning into it going forward?
 2. As you reflect on your life and relationships, who has been or could be a "soul friend" to you on this spiritual formation journey? How could you be more intentional in that relationship?
 3. What has Jesus done in your life over the last eight weeks during our time together?
 4. What's your next step in your spiritual journey, your "next right thing"? What do you need to do and who do you need to help you to keep going forward?
- It's been such a joy to journey with you for this course.
- Now enjoy your final conversation together ...

Tutorial:

Week 8: Community

- Please open your guide to session 08 for this week's practice.
 - In our final week, we come to one of the most important practices of all: community. Almost all our formation occurs within the context of relationship.
- When you read the Gospels, you see that Jesus was in the synagogue every Sabbath, gathering with a group of worshipers for the reading of Scripture, teaching, prayer, and singing.
- As we noted earlier, Jesus also did life with his 12 disciples and some close friends.
- And he had an inner circle of *three* — Peter, James, and John — who were his closest companions on the Way.
- Altogether, Jesus had about a thousand days for his mission. He invested the vast majority of that time with a relatively small group of people: the 12 and the three.

- There is much we can learn from this. Though it's important to worship in church and be part of a larger community, it's just as important to know and name your "twelve" and your "three."
- This means that it is vital you have a few others you are engaged with in an *intentional* relationship.
- Relationships require time and energy, and they can lead to heartache. But it is in relationships where we experience life's greatest joys and almost all our transformation. The novelist Frederick Buechner has said, "You can survive on your own; you can grow strong on your own; you can prevail on your own; but you cannot become human on your own."⁵
- Our final practice is to identify our intentional community and begin to meet together, ideally weekly (or bi-weekly or monthly).
- This intentional community might be with one or two others, five or six, or around a dozen or even more. It's a circle of friends where you can grow to trust each other enough to be open and vulnerable.
- If you don't have something like this in place, could you initiate a group like this to foster spiritual friendships?
- There's no one "right" model to follow.
- We encourage you to follow the pathway of your church — whether in a small group, a table community, a house church, or a Bible study.
- What's most important is for you to identify your community. Who are your Peter, James, and John? Who are your 12? and then begin to meet regularly and intentionally as you seek to travel the Way together.
- You might follow up this course with one of the nine Practices from Practicing the Way, or you might read a book together, or take a class from BibleProject, or simply share a weekly meal and pray for one another.
- There's no formula to follow, but we have Jesus, and we follow him together.
- God bless you as you do life in community.

Outro:

- And now we come to the end of our time together.
- The heart of this course is an invitation to become an apprentice of Jesus.
- To organize your life around three driving goals:

- Be with Jesus.
- Become like Jesus.
- Do as he did.
- And to follow Jesus in community — to live a deeply relational life with your fellow apprentices.
- But let me say it one final time: This is a *lifelong* journey.
- And *all* of us will stumble and fall along the way.
- The Finnish Orthodox writer Tito Colliander tells this story about a monk who was once asked, “What do you do there in the monastery?”
- And the monk said, “We fall and get up, fall and get up, fall and get up again.”⁶
- This *is* the spiritual journey: falling and getting back up, again and again over the course of a life.
- That’s why we need each other ... To never lose hope. But to keep following Jesus, and living in the hope of his soon return.

Benediction:

- To end, let me send you off with a blessing ...
- May you apprentice under Jesus.
- And be formed into a person of love like Jesus.
- May you follow him in community ... in relationships of depth, vulnerability, and a commitment to spiritual formation.
- And when you stumble, may you get back up and begin again. With your eye set over the horizon to the hope of eternity.
- And may God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit draw you into their inner life of love and transform you into a person of love ... one day at a time ... as you are with Jesus, become like Jesus, and do as Jesus did.

Notes

1. *Relational Spirituality* (2021)
2. *When the Church Was a Family* (2009)
3. "Coevolution of neocortical size, group size and language in humans". *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* (1993)
4. *The Four Loves* (1960)
5. *The Sacred Journey* (1982)
6. *Way of the Ascetics* (1985)