



The Practicing the Way Course

Companion Guide

The Practicing the Way Course

Session 1 | Following Jesus

Who are you following? Everybody is following somebody. Put another way: We're all disciples. The question isn't, "Are you a disciple?" but, "Who or what are you a disciple of?" In this session, we explore what it means to be a disciple or apprentice of Jesus.

Video can be found here: https://youtu.be/Xv_FKBmmMkk?si=SkFWQ9UISDpvJgLM

Opening Questions:

- 01 What drew you to this Course?
- 02 What are you looking forward to?
- 03 Describe in brief your spiritual journey thus far.

Teaching

Scripture

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "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 1v16-18

Session summary

- Following Jesus is based on the first-century practice of rabbis and apprentices.
- Today, to follow Jesus means to apprentice under him.
- To apprentice under Jesus is to organize your life around three driving goals:
 - Be with Jesus
 - Become like Jesus
 - Do as he did
- Apprenticing under Jesus means practicing a way of life.
- 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.

Discussion questions

Here are some questions for discussion:

- 01** What are you hoping Jesus will do in you through this Course?

 - 02** As you look back on your life, who or what has had the greatest impact on your spiritual journey thus far?

 - 03** What do you think is the driving aim of your life? Your top goals and priorities?

 - 04** How can we as a community be praying for you?
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Closing prayer

God of love, who seeks and pursues us,
teach us how to seek and pursue you too,
that in our learning anew how to pray,
we may give you what you so deeply long for —
all of us enjoying all

OPTIONAL:

If you'd like to continue your conversation, here are some additional questions for reflection:

01 When you envision starting your day with silence, solitude, and prayer, what excites you? What challenges you?

02 Think about your week and come up with a plan. When and where will you engage in this practice?

Practice

Developing a daily prayer rhythm

We need more than information for transformation. The practices of Jesus (which we'll learn more about in Session 04) help to get the teachings of Jesus into the muscle memory of our bodies. They turn the idea of following Jesus into a reality in our daily life. And one of the best ways to begin to "be with Jesus" is by developing a daily prayer rhythm.

There's no "right" way to do this — you may choose to go on an early morning walk with your dog or curl up under a blanket with a cup of tea or sit cross-legged on the floor and breathe deeply. You may pray the Psalms or let a prayer app guide your meditation. You may do this before the sun rises or as it sets.

Whatever you decide, our exercise for Session 01 is to develop a daily time and place to commune with God through the practices of silence, solitude, and prayer.

Here are a few suggestions for your practice:

- 01** Find a quiet place that is distraction-free.
 - o This could be a corner in your home or a nearby park. Find somewhere that you can focus and be at peace.

- 02** Find a quiet time.
 - o For many people, first thing upon waking is the best possible time to do this; but for you, it may be before bed, or while your baby is napping mid-morning, or on a lunch break.
 - o The general rule is: Give God your best time of the day
- 03** Come to quiet.
 - o If at all possible (unless you're using an app such as Lectio 365 or Pray As You Go to guide your prayer time), put your phone away in another room. Start with a few deep breaths ... in and out of your nose, and let your mind and body calm down.
 - o This may take a few minutes. You're not in a hurry.
 - o And then...

- 04** Open your heart to God in prayer.
 - o Again, there's no "right" way to pray. But you don't have to start from scratch.
 - o For thousands of years, followers of Jesus have used the Psalms for daily prayer. The Psalms are a collection of poetic prayers found in the middle of the Bible, and they were designed to be prayed, not just read.
 - o You can pray one psalm or pray a few; it's up to you. You can start in Psalm 1 and keep going to pray a selection. If you want to pray one psalm, here are some we suggest you start with: Psalms 1, 23, 37, 40, 42-43, 63, 84, 86, 103, and 139.

This whole exercise can be done in five minutes, or it can easily take up to an hour — again, that's up to you. The key is: Start where you are, not where you feel you "should" be. If two or three minutes is all you can make happen, start there and take the next step.

If you didn't get a chance to take the Spiritual Health Reflection before Session 01, please remember to do so before you come back together. Visit practicingtheway.org and create an account, or follow the QR code, and answer the prompt questions slowly and prayerfully..



Practice reflection

Before your next time together, take five to ten minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions:

- 01 What was most challenging about practicing a rhythm of prayer?

- 02 What is something you enjoyed about it?

- 03 What are you hoping for as you continue this rhythm of prayer?

Extra Resources:

This sessions' reading

For this session, we're reading "Apprentice to Jesus," in *Practicing the Way* by John Mark Comer, pp.1-31.



If you're interested in learning more about what it means to be an apprentice of Jesus or growing in your practice of prayer, here are some more resources to consider.

Recommended reading

- *The Deeply Formed Life* by our guest, Rich Villodas
- *The Great Omission* by Dallas Willard
- *Walking in the Dust of Rabbi Jesus* by Lois Tverberg
- *Praying like Monks, Living like Fools* by Tyler Staton
- *Time for God* by Jacques Philippe

Recommended listening

- Rich Villodas' teaching series, *The Deeply Formed Life* from New Life Fellowship: link.practicingtheway.org/course-s1
- The *Practicing the Way* Vision Series from Bridgetown Church: bridgetown.church/series/practicing-the-way
- Episode 01 of the *Practicing the Way* podcast: link.practicingtheway.org/course-s1b

Additional resources

The Prayer Practice from *Practicing the Way*: practicingtheway.org/prayer

If you'd like to learn more about the practice of prayer, you can run the Prayer Practice, a four-session experience designed to integrate the practice of prayer into your regular life.

The Practicing the Way Course

Session 2 | Formation (Part 01)

Spiritual formation isn't a Christian thing or even a religious thing; it's a human thing. To be human is to grow, to mature, to adapt over time. Formation is simply the process by which our "spirit," or inner person, is formed into a particular shape or character. Over a lifetime, we are spiritually formed by a complex alchemy of genetic inheritance, family patterns, childhood wounds, education, habits, decisions, relationships, environments, and more. The problem is, most of our spiritual formation is unintentional. It just happens. And often, we are "conform[ed] to the pattern of this world," more than "transformed by the renewing of [our] mind."

Video can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqWv92rqbQQ>

Practice Reflection

- 01 What was most challenging about practicing a rhythm of prayer?
- 02 What is something you enjoyed about it?
- 03 What are you hoping for as you continue this rhythm of prayer?

Teaching

Scripture

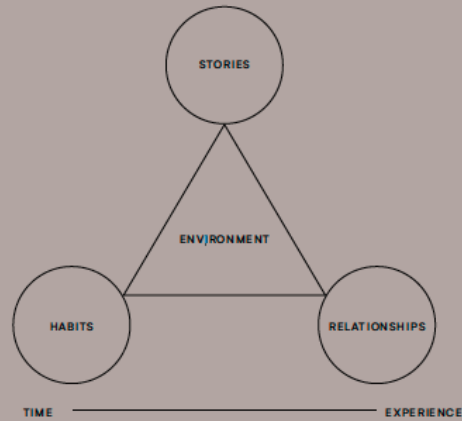
Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

—Romans 12v2

Session summary

- Spiritual formation isn't a Christian thing; it's a human thing.
- We are formed by a complex web of forces, but especially by:
 - Habits
 - Relationships
 - The stories we believe
 - Environment
 - Time
 - Experience
- Most of our formation is unintentional.
- Some of the most important questions to reflect on are:
 - Who am I becoming?
 - Am I being intentional about who I am becoming?
- One of the best ways to do this is through a Formation Audit.

Unintentional Spiritual Formation



Discussion Questions:

01 What habits do you keep in your daily and weekly life? How might they be shaping you?

02 Who are the most important people in your life? What do those relationships look like?

03 As you reflect on your own journey, what stories have shaped the way you view the world? Where did these stories originate?

04 Did God reveal anything new to you in this session that you want to say more about?

Closing prayer

Good Creator, who made our inmost parts,
you see more of us than we do,
you know us better than we ever will,
and yet you call us “beloved”;
give us courage to see ourselves in the light,
to be honest with who we are, and what we’re not,
that in our being fully seen by you,
we may be transformed ever more greatly,
by your love, into your holy image.
Amen.

OPTIONAL

If you’d like to continue your conversation, here are some additional questions for reflection:

01 When you consider the list of forces that can unintentionally form us, does anything surprise you or stand out to you?

02 When do you plan to set aside time for your Formation Audit? Is there anything coming up for you as you think about doing the audit?

Practice

Formation Audit

Practice helps the information we take in become a part of who we are and transform our lives.

Our exercise for this session is to take an inventory of all the forces that are currently forming you.

01 This is one of the longest exercises in this Course, and we recommend you carve out a quiet time and place to spend ample time in thoughtful reflection and prayer.

02 Invite the Spirit of Jesus to come and illuminate your mind, silence the voice of the evil one, and to “give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better,” and that “the eyes of your heart may be enlightened” (Eph.1:17-18).

03 Remember to answer honestly and non-judgmentally. You will likely feel your heart drift toward shame and denial, both of which will sabotage the effectiveness of this exercise.

04 Above all, do this exercise with God. Slowly and prayerfully, and with your heart at peace.

Habits — What habits make up your everyday life?

Write out your habits.

Morning routine:

Activities of a typical workday:

Evening routine:

Activities of a typical weekend:

Reflection: How do you think your habits are shaping you as a person?

(See the two lists on page 11 for a list of possible effects)

Relationships

What relationships make up most of your life?

Family:

Friends:

Work:

Community:

Other:

Reflection: How are these people shaping you as a person?

The key questions to ask are: What kind of person do I become when I'm around this person? What do they draw out in me or suppress in me?

Stories you believe

What are the "stories" you have come to believe?

What stories do you believe about God?

(What is he like/not like? How does he feel toward you?)

What stories do you believe about yourself?

(How does God see you? How do others see you? What kind of person are you? What do you see for your future?)

What stories do you believe about happiness?

(What do you think will make you most happy and peaceful? Is it God? Money? Marriage? Success? Vacation?)

What stories do you believe about the meaning of life?

(What do you think matters most? Perhaps your career? Family? Health? Something else?)

Reflection: What are the core stories of my life? Are they forming me as a person?

Environment

What are the cultural distinctives of my environment?

Town: *What is my town like? What is it known for?*

Nation: *What is my nation like? What are its highest cultural values?*

Generation: *What are my generation's values?*

Digital algorithm: *What are the algorithms feeding me news, information, and social connection like?*

Ethnic and/or socio-economic group: *What are the values and cultural norms and expectations of my cultural heritage and socio-economic class?*

Reflection: How am I being formed or deformed by the cultural forces that are “normal” in my city/nation/generation/social media feed, but possibly far from the vision of Jesus?

Experience

What life experiences have most shaped me into who I am today?

Family of origin: *What is my family like? What are its highest values? Deepest dysfunctions? Greatest legacy?*

Traumatic events: *Have I experienced a traumatic event? What story has my body wordlessly learned from that trauma?*

Key experiences: *What are the key moments on the timeline of my life that have altered the trajectory of my story?*

Spiritual autobiography: What are the key moments of my spiritual journey thus far?

Reflection: How have my experiences formed and deformed me over the years? Where do I still need healing? What do I need to never forget and hold on to? What am I still missing?

Possible effects of following “the pattern of this world”:

- Stress
- Hurry
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Insecurity
- Hypervigilance
- Jealousy
- Anger
- Irritation
- Impatience
- Resentment
- Outrage
- Pride
- Distraction
- Numbness
- Overwhelm
- Exhaustion
- Discouragement
- Loneliness
- Isolation
- Shame
- Division
- Disconnection
- Lying
- Dirty speech
- Sarcasm
- Putdowns
- Dishonour of authority
- Contempt
- Careerism
- Overwork
- Materialism
- Discontent
- Debt
- Laziness
- Alcoholism
- Addiction
- Substance Abuse
- Impulsiveness
- Lust
- Pornography
- Racism
- Bigotry

Possible Parkers of following the Way of God’s Kingdom:

- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Patience
- Kindness
- Gentleness
- Faithfulness
- Self-control
- Faith
- Hope
- Unhurried living
- Simplicity of life
- Calm
- Generosity
- Contentment
- Freedom
- Warmth and affection
- Relational connection
- Community
- Sense of belonging
- Equity
- Diversity
- Trust
- Acceptance
- Authenticity
- Honesty
- Integrity
- Harmony
- Vulnerability
- Compassion
- Restfulness
- Diligence
- A sense of meaning and purpose
- A clear sense of direction
- Creativity
- Growth

Extra Resources:

This Session’s reading:

For this session, we’re reading “Goal #1: Be with Jesus,” in *Practicing the Way* by John Mark Comer, pp. 32-63.



The Practicing the Way Course

Session 3 | Formation (Part 02)

In the last session, we explored the reality that we're already being formed by our habits, relationships, environments, and more. Therefore, all formation in the Way of Jesus is counter-formation. As apprentices of Jesus, our goal is to intentionally slow our lives down to find deep joy in walking with Jesus.

Video can be found here: <https://youtu.be/q3gKLqPPLmo?si=qsHNEMf4YoGN-QEt>

Practice reflection

- 01 What did you find helpful about taking the Formation Audit?
- 02 When you consider the ways you are being unintentionally formed, what felt most challenging?
- 03 Did anything surprise you?

Teaching

Scripture

The apprentice is not above the rabbi, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their rabbi.

—Luke 6v40*

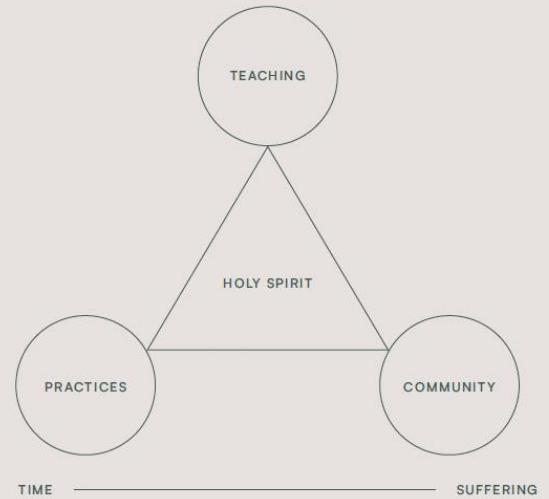
* Key words adapted

Session summary

- We may desire to become more like Jesus, but feel stuck.
- The problem is 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, where we are formed by:
 - The Practices
 - Community
 - Teaching
 - The Holy Spirit
- Formation 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.

Intentional Spiritual Formation*

*Adapted from Dr. James Bryan Smith's 'Triangle of Transformation' in *The Good and Beautiful God*.



Discussion questions

- 01** 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?

- 02** With the paradigm of Intentional Spiritual Formation in mind, how have you participated in your own formation over the years?

- 03** How have you understood the Holy Spirit’s role in spiritual formation?

- 04** Have you had an experience of intentionally opening your pain and suffering to God? What did God produce in your formation through that experience?

Closing prayer

Thank you, Father, for your word,
for your Son who speaks it to us,
and for your Spirit who illumines it within.
Teach us how to read it with you,
that we may learn to love its wisdom,
goodness, and truth, growing in your Way.
Amen.

OPTIONAL

- 01** How do you currently engage with Scripture?

- 02** What comes up for you when you think about starting your day with a rhythm of reading Scripture? What would you like to share with your group?

- 03** As a group, talk about your plan for this week. Will you use a reading plan or a particular book of the Bible? What time and setting is best for you?

Practice

Daily reading of Scripture

Information alone doesn't produce transformation. To grow, let's put what we've learned into practice. Last session, you conducted a Formation Audit. You made a list of all your habits and relationships, and then you attempted to connect the dots between them and your formation or deformation.

Did you identify any habits or relationships or stories that seem to be having a negative effect on you?

This session's practice is to take the next step and replace an old habit with a new practice. And if it's not already a part of your daily life with God, we invite you to begin the practice of reading Scripture. The best way to do this is likely to add it to the daily prayer rhythm you began two sessions ago. Hopefully by now you're learning to carve out a quiet place and time, and come to quiet before God. A next step could be to integrate the reading of Scripture into your daily rhythm in a prayerful, peaceful way.

Here are a few reminders from the Prayer Practice:

01 Identify a quiet place that is distraction-free.

- This could be a corner in your home or a nearby park. Find somewhere that you can focus and be at peace.
- If at all possible (unless you're using an app to read or follow a reading plan), put your phone away in another room.

02 Identify a quiet time.

- For many people, first thing upon waking is the best possible time to do this; but for you, it may be before bed, or while your baby is napping mid-morning, or on a lunch break.
- The general rule is: Give God your best time of the day.

03 Come to quiet

- Start with a few deep breaths ... in and out of your nose, and let your mind and body calm down.
- This may take a few minutes. You're not in a hurry.
- And then ...

04 Open your heart to God in prayer

- Again, there's no "right" way to pray. But you don't have to start from scratch.

05 Read Scripture

- Choose a section of Scripture or follow a Bible reading plan suggested in the section below.
- As you read, you might want to notice what resonates with you, what emotionally lifts off the page and into your heart.
- Your goal is to listen for Jesus' voice coming to you.
- This whole exercise can be done in five minutes, or it can easily take up to an hour—again, that's up to you. The key is: Start where you are, not where you feel you "should" be.

Extra Resources

This session's reading

For this session, we're reading "Goal #2: Become like him," in *Practicing the Way* by John Mark Comer, pp. 64-117.



BibleProject

We highly recommend the amazing videos and resources from our friends at BibleProject, who are all about helping people engage with Scripture as a unified story that leads to Jesus. On the topic of Scripture, we recommend the following:

- For a taste, the Genesis 1 video: link.practicingtheway.org/course-s3a
- On reading Scripture, the How to Read the Bible video series: link.practicingtheway.org/course-s3b
- To go deeper, the Paradigm podcast: bibleproject.com/podcast/series/paradigm
- BibleProject reading plans, bibleproject.com/reading-plans, and some suggestions:
 - The Character of God 6 days
 - Introduction to Faith 8 days
 - What Gives You Hope? 7 days
 - Trusting God Through Suffering 6 days
 - One Story That Leads to Jesus 1 year

Recommended reading

- *The Renovation of the Heart* by Dallas Willard
- *Liturgy of the Ordinary* by Tish Harrison Warren
- *Shaped by the Word* by M. Robert Mulholland

Recommended listening

- The Scripture Practice teaching series by Bridgetown Church: bridgetown.church/series/scripture
- *The Year of Biblical Literacy* by Reality San Francisco: realitiesf.com/bible
- Episode 03 of the Practicing the Way podcast: link.practicingtheway.org/course-s3

Additional Resources

The Scripture Practice from *Practicing the Way*: practicingtheway.org/scripture. If you'd like to learn more about the practice of reading Scripture, you can run the Scripture Practice, a four-session experience designed to integrate the practice of reading Scripture into your life.

Practice Reflection

01 How did your practice of reading Scripture go following the last session?

02 Where did you experience resistance in this practice?

03 In what ways did you encounter God in it? Did anything surprise you?

The Practicing the Way Course

Session 4 | The Practice

The practices of Jesus are essential to our spiritual formation. They are how we do what we can do — sabbath, pray, read Scripture — to make space for God to transform us into the kind of people who can do what we currently cannot do — live and love like Jesus. And they slow our busy lives down to the pace and presence of “the God of peace.”

Video can be found here: <https://youtu.be/TO3PcWWgncE?si=NpQwdSzPsrloYyrg>

Practice reflection

- 01 How did your practice of reading Scripture go following the last session?
- 02 Where did you experience resistance in this practice?
- 03 In what ways did you encounter God in it?

Teaching

Scripture

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

Session summary

- 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: 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.
- They are essential for those who desire to be transformed to become more like Jesus.
- One of the most important practices for our age of exhaustion is Sabbath — a full day set aside to stop, rest, delight, and worship.

The Practices

Sabbath
Prayer
Fasting

Solitude
Generosity
Scripture

Community
Service
Witness

Discussion questions

01 What's your experience with the spiritual disciplines? What practices have you engaged with in your spiritual journey?

02 If the practices are the means, what do you understand the end of the spiritual life to be?

03 Who has most reflected God's love to you? Where did you see the life of Jesus at work in them?

04 Do you practice any kind of Sabbath or day of rest? Or is this a new discipline for you?

Closing prayer

With the stillness of this night, we offer the stillness of our beings—our minds, our hands, our souls; that in the quiet of your love we may again hear you whisper, “You are my beloved.”

OPTIONAL

If you'd like to continue your conversation, here are some additional questions for reflection:

01 What comes to mind for you when you think about ceasing some things and embracing what gives life?

02 Talk about your plan with your group. When and where will you practice Sabbath

Practice

Sabbath

To grow, we need more than content; we need real, embodied practice.

In our age of exhaustion, Sabbath is one of the most neglected and most crucial of all the practices of Jesus. But it can be daunting to begin, as it's an entire 24 hours, and you're swimming against the current of our entire culture. Powerful forces keep us tethered to our devices, distractions, and the endless queue of work and responsibilities.

So, start small. If a full Sabbath day is too much for you, start with a Sabbath morning or afternoon. Set aside a few hours after church or early on a Saturday to embrace the four movements of Sabbath: stop, rest, delight, and worship.

Four things to keep in mind as you begin:

01 Begin by connecting with God. The Hebrew people called this “sanctifying the day,” setting it aside from the other six days. You could light two candles, or pray a Psalm or share a meal or begin with Sunday worship at your church. But have a clear ritual or moment with God that begins and ends your Sabbath time.

02 If you can, spend part of the day with your family or friends who follow Jesus. You could throw a Sabbath meal or just spend unhurried time in conversation.

03 Do whatever makes you come alive in God. Nap, read poetry, play basketball with your kids. Pursue whatever activities make you feel joyful, rested, and alive to God; whatever it is you do that makes heart spontaneously burst into gratitude and worship.

04 Keep at it. Integrating Sabbath keeping into your life usually takes months or years, not weeks. Just start small and aim at joy.

Here's a short guide to planning out your next Sabbath.

- When will you sabbath? (Include your start and end time)
- How will you mark the beginning and end of your sabbath time? (A ritual or liturgy or prayerful moment)
- What will you do with your devices?
- What do you need to do to prepare? (Grocery shopping, emails, errands, work tasks, phone calls, etc.)
- How will you include friends and family?
- What will you do to fill your heart with joy and peace?
- How can you create sabbath for those who have none?

Extra Resources

This session's reading

For this session, we're reading "Goal #3: Do as he did," in *Practicing the Way* by John Mark Comer, pp. 118-155.



If you're interested in learning more about the keystone practice of Sabbath, here are some more resources to consider.

Recommended reading

- *The Sabbath* by Dan Allender
- *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* by Marva J. Dawn
- *The Sabbath* by Abraham Joshua Heschel
- *Subversive Sabbath* by A.J. Swoboda

Recommended listening

- Sabbath Rhythms sermon by Rich Villodas: link.practicingtheway.org/course-s4a
- Subversive Sabbath sermon by A.J. Swoboda: link.practicingtheway.org/course-s4b
- Rest Must Be Stronger Than Exhaustion sermon by Jon Tyson: link.practicingtheway.org/course-s4c
- The Sabbath series from The Rule of Life

Podcast: link.practicingtheway.org/course-s4d

- The Sabbath series from Bridgetown Church: bridgetown.church/series/sabbath
- Episode 04 of the Practicing the Way podcast: link.practicingtheway.org/course-s4e

Additional Resources

- The Sabbath Practice from Practicing the Way: practicingtheway.org/sabbath. If you'd like to learn more about the practice of Sabbath, you can run the Sabbath Practice, a four-session experience designed to integrate the practice of Sabbath into your regular life.

Practice Reflection

Reflection is a key component in our spiritual formation. Like practice, it allows what we learn to become a part of who we are.

Before your next time together, take five to ten minutes to journal out your answers to the following four questions.

01 What was challenging about your Sabbath practice?

02 Where did you feel delight in your practice?

03 Where did you most experience God's nearness?

04 Is there anything different you would like to try related to the practice of Sabbath?

The Practicing the Way Course

Session 05 | Meeting God in Pain and Suffering

Jesus once said, “In this world you will have trouble.” Pain and suffering are inevitable in this life. Often, when we begin to practice the disciplines, the unhealed wounds of a lifetime rise to the surface of our hearts. Everything in us wants to run in the opposite direction —to deny, detach, or drug our pain. But the invitation of Jesus is to meet him in our pain, and let it become the crucible of our formation. Video can be found here: https://youtu.be/Lr9FzQ9GM1c?si=xvbZW41I_NZlSw8m

Practice reflection

- 01 What was challenging about your Sabbath practice?
- 02 Where did you feel delight in your practice?
- 03 Where did you most experience God’s nearness?
- 04 Is there anything different you would like to try related to the practice of Sabbath?

Teaching

Scripture

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

Session summary

- 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

Drug

- 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.

Spiritual bypassing: A tendency to use spiritual ideas and practices to sidestep or avoid facing unresolved emotional issues, psychological wounds, and unfinished development tasks.

Emotional maturity: You’re aware of your feelings, but you’re not run by your feelings

Spiritual maturity: The ability and willingness to know and do the will of God

Discussion questions

01 Can you tell one story of a painful experience you've been through that has been used for good in your formation?

02 How have you experienced God in times of pain and suffering?

03 Which of the three responses to emotional pain are you most inclined toward: deny, detach, or drug? What has that looked like in your life?

04 What could it look like for you to reorient yourself to the pain in your life as an opportunity to be formed by God?

Closing prayer

End your time together by praying this liturgy: God of Gethsemane, who experiences and knows the pain of our condition, help us turn to you in the ache of our emotions when the day has turned to darkness, that we may know the liberation of your transforming love, not only by the calm waters' edge, but when we're traveling on the waters of the storms that life brings. Amen.

OPTIONAL

If you'd like to continue your conversation, here are some additional questions for reflection:

01 How familiar are you with noticing and naming your feelings?

02 As you consider the spiritual exercise of noticing and naming your feelings in prayer, what comes up for you?

03 Come up with a plan for your practice this week. When will you try the exercise

Practice

Noticing and naming your emotions

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 helps to process quiet that emotion. This is why psychiatrist Dan Siegel encourages us to "name it to tame it."

This session's spiritual exercise is a simple template for prayer designed to notice and name your feelings and offer them to God in prayer.

- Find a quiet, distraction-free place and time.
- Put away your phone or any devices, and settle into a comfortable but alert position.
- Take a few minutes to breathe and center your awareness in God's presence. And then do the following:

01 Notice: Now that you are centered in your body and in God, begin to let yourself feel. Let whatever is in you come up. Just notice it. Don't fight it or run away from it or feel guilty about it or judge it — just notice it. Let the feeling be.

02 Name: Then name the emotion and be as specific as possible. You may want to use the following list of emotions. Just pick out one to three words from the Feelings list on the following page that put language to what you're experiencing in your body.

03 Feel: Just sit in those feelings. Sink into them. Normally, we turn away from them and run in the opposite direction. Instead, turn and face them, like you would an ocean wave, and let it wash over you and then pass you by.

04 Offer it to God: Remember and follow Jesus' Gethsemane Prayer.

- Give God your feelings — Tell him what you are feeling, with no filter.
- Give God your desires — Tell him what you really want, good or bad.
- Give God your trust — Surrender your heart again to him. Stop grasping for control and yield yourself to God and his will for your life. You

may want to pray Jesus’ own prayer, “Not my will, but yours be done.”

You can do this exercise one time before the next session, or every day. It’s also an exercise you can practice for the rest of your life, to open deeper and deeper parts of your inner world to God

Feelings List

Happy

Admired
Alive
Appreciated
Assured
Cheerful
Confident
Content
Delighted
Determined
Ecstatic
Elated
Encouraged
Energized
Enthusiastic
Excited
Exuberant
Flattered
Fortunate
Fulfilled

Sad

Alienated
Ashamed
Burdened
Condemned
Crushed
Defeated
Dejected
Demoralized
Depressed
Deserted
Despised
Devastated
Disappointed
Discarded
Discouraged
Disgraced
Disheartened
Disillusioned
Dismal

Angry

Abused
Aggravated
Agitated
Anguished
Annoyed
Betrayed
Cheated
Coerced
Controlled
Deceived
Disgusted
Dismayed
Displeased
Dominated
Enraged
Exasperated
Exploited
Frustrated
Fuming

Scared

Afraid
Alarmed
Anxious
Appalled
Apprehensive
Awed
Concerned
Defensive
Desperate
Doubtful
Fearful
Frantic
Full of Dread
Guarded
Horried
Impatient
Insecure
Intimidated
Nervous

Confused

Ambivalent
Awkward
Baffled
Bewildered
Bothered
Constricted
Directionless
Disorganized
Distracted
Doubtful
Flustered
Foggy
Hesitant
Immobilized
Misunderstood
Perplexed
Puzzled
Stagnant
Surprise

Extra Resources

For this session, we’re reading “How? A Rule of Life,” in *Practicing the Way* by John Mark Comer, pp. 156-205.

Recommended reading

- *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* by Pete Scazzero
- *Untangle Your Emotions* by Jennie Allen
- *The Human Condition* by Thomas Keating

Recommended listening

- The Emotionally Healthy Discipleship Course: link.practicingtheway.org/course-s5
- In This World You Will Have Trouble teaching series from Bridgetown Church: bridgetown.church/series/in-this-world



Practice Reflection

01 What was your experience of noticing and naming your feelings before God like?

02 What were the most common feelings that came up for you? Was anything a surprise to you?

03 Where did you most experience God’s nearness in this practice?

The Practicing the Way Course

Session 6 | Healing From Sin

Jesus once said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” He likened sin to a disease and himself to a healer. Based on this text, ancient Christians called Jesus “the doctor of the soul.”

And trying to go on the spiritual journey of discipleship without healing from sin is like trying to run a marathon with a broken leg — you’re not going to get very far, and it’s not going to be very fun. A key step in our apprenticeship to Jesus is healing from sin.

Video can be found here: https://youtu.be/gCnOR_I1LMU?si=cS0NrxAJAJLi-63c

Practice Reflection

01 What was your experience of noticing and naming your feelings before God like?

Where did you feel delight in your practice?

02 What were the most common feelings that came up for you? Was anything a surprise to you?

03 Where did you most experience God’s nearness in this practice?

Teaching

Scripture

It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

—Mark 2v17

Session summary

- A key aspect of the spiritual journey is healing from sin.
- Three dimensions to sin:
 - **Sin done by us**
 - **Sin done to us**
 - **Sin done around us**
- Four layers of sin we move through in our healing:¹
 - **Gross sin**
 - **Conscious sin**
 - **Unconscious sin**
 - **Attachments**
- Our part in the healing of sin is the practice of confession.

¹ M. Robert Mulholland, Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation (Downers Grove: IVP, 2016).

In-Session Reflection Exercise

Pause the video and take a few minutes in the quiet to journal through the following questions:

- 01 What do you believe about how God sees you and your sin?

- 02 What came up for you as we talked about sin?

- 03 Is there anyone you need to forgive or ask for forgiveness from, including God?

Discussion Questions

- 01 Growing up, what was your understanding of sin and God's response to it?

- 02 When you sin, what do you normally do?

- 03 As you think about your sin patterns, what attachments or idols are you clinging to in your pursuit of happiness?

- 04 In light of this teaching, what steps may God be inviting you to take toward healing?

Closing prayer

Loving God, we open ourselves to you and confess all that we have and have not done, both consciously and unconsciously, in opposition to your goodness. Help us to live more openly with you, that in our being seen in all, we may also too be healed in all, growing in your love. Amen.

OPTIONAL

If you'd like to continue your conversation, here are some additional questions for reflection:

- 01 What comes up for you as you consider this session's exercise in confession?
- 02 Is there someone who comes to mind when you consider practicing confession? Or would you be open to partnering with someone in your group?
- 03 What steps do you need to take to set yourself up to practice confession this week?

Practice

Confession

We heal from sin by coming out of hiding. This is why this session, almost more than any other, must be put into practice. The practice of naming your sin to another person is what the writers of the Bible call “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 5v16 we read, “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” When we name our sin or shame or secret with a trusted person, we can experience healing.

The practice is simple:

- 01** Find someone you trust who will both love and accept you, and call you up to holiness. This could be a spiritual friend, community member, pastor, spiritual director, or therapist.
- 02** Find a place to meet that is private enough for you to feel safe and at peace.
- 03** Name your sin or shame or secret. Tell them the sin done by you, to you, or around you.
- 04** Let them love you, be faithful to you, and speak Jesus’ forgiveness over you.

For those of you hearing a confession, your role is very important. Don’t shame or lecture or scold, just welcome in love. Continue this practice on a regular basis, and keep the conversation going.

Extra Resources

This session’s reading

For this session, we’re reading “Take up your cross,” the final section of *Practicing the Way* by John Mark Comer, pp. 206-221.



If you’re interested in growing even more in your practice of confession, here are some more resources to consider.

Recommended reading

- *The Relational Soul* by Richard Plass and James Cofield
- *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be* by Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.

Recommended listening

- The Sin Series by Jon Tyson at Church of the City New York:

link.practicingtheway.org/course-s6a

- The Bad Words video series by BibleProject: link.practicingtheway.org/course-s6b

Practice Reflection

01 Where did you experience resistance in your practice of confession?

02 Where did you feel delight?

03 How does confession impact or change your view of God or yourself?

The Practicing the Way Course

Session 07 | Crafting 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. It's an intentional plan to slow down and simplify our life around being spiritually formed by Jesus. To turn the vision of spiritual formation into a reality. It is an ancient idea, whose time has come again.

Video can be found here: https://youtu.be/0N4Moh2edUo?si=z_-l_NPraazU8ZZf

Practice Reflection

- 01 Where did you experience resistance in your practice of confession?
- 02 Where did you feel delight?
- 03 How does confession impact or change your view of God or yourself?

Teaching

Scripture

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

Session summary

- 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.

Six tips

- 01 Start small
- 02 Think subtraction, not addition
- 03 Take a balanced approach
- 04 Take into account your personality and season of life
- 05 There is no formation without repetition
- 06 Do this in community

Discussion questions

01 What makes up your current Rule of Life?

02 As you think about designing a Rule of Life, how would you describe the spiritual needs of your personality and stage of life?

03 What practices do you want to include in your Rule of Life?

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

Closing Prayer

Help us shape our lives, Father,
in the way of your Son —
the way of prayer and justice,
of generosity and purity,
of self-offering and compassion,
self-mastery and faith —
that the rhythms of our living
may be conduits of your grace,
welcoming your Kingdom in this world.
Amen.

OPTIONAL

01 As you contemplate crafting a Rule of Life, what are some deep desires that come up for you? What changes could bring more flourishing to your life?

02 Imagine some practices you might tend to do individually. What would it look like to experience these in community? What does it feel like in your body to envision that?

Practice

Crafting a Rule of Life

Now we're ready to take all the ideas we've been learning and "put it into practice" by writing our own Rule of Life.

There's no "right way" to craft a Rule of Life, and there's no one-size-fits-all approach to spiritual formation. The goal is to write a Rule that is customized for your unique personality, situation, and community.

To that end, we've created a digital tool called the [Rule of Life Builder](#).

RULE OF LIFE BUILDER



- 01** Go to practictheway.org and log in.
- 02** Click on the Rule of Life Builder and follow its prompts. It will guide you through daily, weekly, monthly, and seasonal practices in a number of categories.
- 03** You can utilize the suggestions, write yours completely from scratch, or do a mix of both.
 - Remember: start small. Your Rule can begin with just a few small practices and rhythms.
 - In this Course, we've covered three basic rhythms:
 - A daily prayer rhythm that includes the reading of Scripture in the quiet of solitude.
 - A weekly Sabbath.

- And next session, we'll invite you to a weekly touchpoint in community.
- Continue these practices and add, subtract, and edit as you sense the Spirit's direction.
- A Rule of Life isn't static, but dynamic. It changes with the seasons of our lives and stages of our discipleship. This digital template is easy to return to and modify. As time goes on, revisit your Rule and take the next step in your spiritual journey.
- You can do this exercise one time before the next session, or every day. It's also an exercise you can practice for the rest of your life, to open deeper and deeper parts of your inner world to God.

Extra Resources

Recommended reading

- *God in My Everything*

by Ken Shigematsu

- *At Home in the World* by Margaret Guenther

- *The Life We're Looking For*

by Andy Crouch

Recommended listening

- Unhurrying with a Rule of Life series from

Bridgetown Church:

link.practicingtheway.org/course-s7a

- Unforced Rhythms of Grace teaching series from Bridgetown Church:

bridgetown.church/series/unforced-rhythms

- John Mark's in-depth interview with Andy Crouch on a Rule of Life for the modern age:

link.practicingtheway.org/course-s7b

- Episode 05 of the Practicing the Way podcast:

link.practicingtheway.org/course-7c

Practice Reflection

01 Share about your process of creating a Rule of Life. What worked for you?

02 What feelings came up for you as you worked through this exercise?

03 What do you anticipate will be the most life-giving and transformative practice you came up with?

Rule of life Resources

01 A community of rest in a culture of hurry and exhaustion, through the practice of Sabbath.

02 A community of peace and quiet in a culture of anxiety and noise, through the practice of solitude.

03 A community of communion with God in a culture of distraction and escapism, through the practice of prayer.

04 A community of love and depth in a culture of individualism and superficiality, through the practice of community.

05 A community of courageous fidelity to orthodoxy in a culture of ideological

compromise, through the practice of Scripture.

06 A community of holiness in a culture of indulgence and immorality, through the practice of fasting.

07 A community of contentment in a culture of consumerism, through the practice of generosity.

08 A community of justice, mercy, and reconciliation in a culture of injustice and division, through the practice of service.

09 A community of hospitality in a culture of hostility, through the practice of witness.

Sample Rule of Life 01

	Sabbath	Prayer	Fasting	Solitude	Generosity	Scripture	Community	Service	Witness
Daily		Prayer Rhythm		A time in silence to begin and end the day		Reading scripture			
Weekly	Sabbath day to stop, rest, delight, and worship		Fast until sundown				A meal together and worship on Sunday		
Monthly/ Seasonally					Giving 10 percent of your income, with special attention to the church and to the poor			An act of service to the poor with the aim of kinship	An act of hospitality and regularly praying for one person in your life who does not know Jesus

Sample Rule of Life 02 – Jennie (Married with young son, works as a teacher)

	Sabbath	Prayer	Fasting	Solitude	Generosity	Scripture	Community	Service	Witness
Daily	As I can, pray throughout the day – in the car, on a walk, before meal-times					Read scripture at night before I got to bed; as I can, pray through these Scriptures the following day			
Weekly	Rest and Sunday worship, typically on a Saturday or Sunday (depending on what is going on)						Small group with families with young children (currently working through a Bible study book on parenting)		
Monthly/ Seasonally	Travel once a year in the summertime				Tithe every month Support missionaries and other charitable organisations every month				Invite friends to church and through our Christmas and Easter Outreach

Rule of Life – Jot down some notes here

Sabbath			
Prayer			
Fasting			
Solitude			
Generosity			
Scripture			
Community			
Service			
Witness			
	Daily	Weekly	Monthly/ Seasonally

The Practicing the Way Course

Session 08 | Life Together

“If you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go together.” We are not designed to travel the spiritual journey by ourselves. We need community to practice the Way. And Jesus’ call to community goes far beyond church attendance to relationships of depth, vulnerability, and a commitment to transformation.

Video can be found here: <https://youtu.be/uMUnlq08BWw?si=HLD6ZuXOwUnTnex0>

Practice Reflection

- 01 Share about your process of creating a Rule of Life. What worked for you?
- 02 What feelings came up for you as you worked through this exercise?
- 03 What do you anticipate will be the most life-giving and transformative practice you came up with?

Teaching

Scripture

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

Session summary

- Jesus’ invitation was to come and do life together.
- Through Jesus, we have been adopted into the family of God.
- Jesus’ desire is not just to form you into a person of love, but to form a community of love.
- You can’t follow Jesus alone; spiritual formation is a relational process.
- Four layers of community:²
 - Intimates: 1-5 people who deeply know and love us.
 - Friends: 15 people with whom we do life.
 - Village: 150 people, the maximum we can be in relationship with.
 - Tribe: The larger group we identify with and belong to.
- Spiritual friendships are marked by three core characteristics:
 - Depth
 - Vulnerability
- Commitment to transformation
- Our final practice is to cultivate a community of spiritual friendship and begin meeting regularly.

² Robin Dunbar, “Coevolution of neocortical size, group size and language in humans,” Behavioral and Brain Sciences 16, no. 4 (1993).

Discussion questions

01 Of the three relational characteristics named (depth, vulnerability, and a commitment to transformation), which is the hardest for you?

02 As you reflect on your life and relationships, who has been or could be a “soul friend” to you on this spiritual formation journey?

03 What has Jesus done in your life over the last eight weeks, during our time together?

04 What’s your next step in your spiritual journey, your “next right thing”?

Closing prayer

Lord Jesus,
There is no greater prayer than yours —
make us one as you are one,
in devotion, in living, in love.
Amen.

OPTIONAL

01 What comes up when you consider meeting in an intentional community?

02 What natural pathways exist in your life for this, whether within your church or other spaces?

03 As you examine your own desires, what do you envision for your time? Engaging in a Practice? Reading a book? Taking a BibleProject class? Meeting for a meal or prayer? Or something else?

Practice

Do life in community

Jesus’ call to community isn’t a theory or an idea, it’s a practice — a relational way of doing life together. Jesus would preach to crowds of thousands, but he spent most of his time with a small circle of disciples, in homes and around tables. It’s important to worship in church on Sunday and be part of a larger community, but it’s just as important to know and name your “twelve” and your “three.” To cultivate spiritual friendships that last for years.

So our final practice is to identify our intentional community and begin to meet with them regularly.

01 Identify a community to meet with regularly.

02 This community could be with just one or two others, or a dozen or even more.

03 We recommend you meet weekly, but it could be bi-weekly or monthly.

04 We also recommend you share a meal when you meet. The act of “breaking bread” is central to the Christian way. Something powerful happens when we eat together.

But remember, there's no one "right" model for you to follow. You may choose a house church with 20 kids running around a backyard on a Sunday afternoon or a small triad for group spiritual direction early in the morning.

We encourage you to follow the pathway of your church — whether in a small group, table community, or house church, or a women's or men's Bible study.

You could follow this Course with any of the nine Practices available from Practicing the Way, share a weekly meal and pray for one another, or work through more free resources from BibleProject, like the following:

- Reflections mini-cast with discussion questions: bibleproject.com/podcasts/reflections
- Reading plans: bibleproject.com/reading-plans
- Heavier classes: bibleproject.com/classroom

Extra Resources

Recommended reading

- *When the Church was a Family* by Joseph Hellerman
- *The Connected Life* by Todd Hall
- *Made to Belong* by David Kim

Recommended listening

- The Community Practice teaching series from Bridgetown Church:
link.practicingtheway.org/course-s8

Additional Resources

The Community Practice from Practicing the Way: practicingtheway.org/community (coming soon). If you'd like to learn more about the practice of community, you can run the Community Practice, a four-session experience designed to integrate the practice of community into your regular life

Practice reflection

01 As you think back over this Course, what is sticking with you most?

02 Take a moment to remember how you felt when you first started this Course. What has changed in how you feel or think? How do you see yourself or God differently? Do you notice any change or growth?

Continuing the Journey...

Information alone isn't enough to produce transformation.

By adopting not just the teaching but the practices from Jesus' own life, we open up our entire being to God and allow him to transform us into people of love. Our nine core Practices work together to form a Rule of Life for the modern era. Find more resources on each practice at practicingtheway.org

The Practices

Sabbath
Prayer
Fasting

Solitude
Generosity
Scripture

Community
Service
Witness