

Practicing the Ways of Jesus

7 Sessions

1. Prayer
2. Scripture
3. Rest (Sabbath)
4. Solitude
5. Fasting
6. Simplicity
7. Community/Fellowship

Outline each week

1. Historical experience and perspective
 - a. What is my prior experience with this practice?
 - b. What are my expectations (or fears)
2. Things to practice
 - a. Simple steps and to do's
 - b. Supplemental resources
3. How did this practice impact me?
 - a. What did I learn about me and about God?
 - b. What might I want to carry forward and do on my own?

Supplemental resources

Much of this content was guided and inspired by <https://practicingtheway.org/practices> (John Mark Comer)

- The Life You've Always Wanted by John Ortberg
- The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry by John Mark Comer
- Spirit of the Disciplines by Dallas Willard
- Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster
- Disciplines of a Godly Man by Kent Hughes
- Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life by Donald Whitney

Session 1: Prayer

Historical experience and perspective

Expectations

- What do you think God is thinking about you praying to Him?
- What do you want from Him? What do you think He wants from you?

Things to practice

1. Put a prayer reminder on your calendar each morning
 - a. Can be just a few minutes, but try to do this before starting your day (or turning on your phone)
 - i. Make sure there are no distractions
 - b. Use simple and honest words - raw and authentic is much better than pretty and polished
 - c. Use the Lord's prayer as an outline:
 - i. *Our Father* - think about God as our Father, with good intentions and deep love toward us
 - ii. *In heaven* - consider His presence all around us, breathe in the Spirit
 - iii. *Hallowed be your name* - praise God with specific things we love about Him
 - iv. *Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven* - ask for God's will to be done in our community/life, be specific here
 - v. *Give us each day our daily bread* - pray for specific needs and wants in our life and those around us
 - vi. *Forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors* - ask for personal forgiveness and release others to forgiveness
 - vii. *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil* - pray against the bad things in your life or community
 - d. Other things to pray for:
 - i. Ask God to enter into your day
 - ii. Name things we are grateful for
 - iii. Share what makes your heart ache (and other requests)
 - iv. Ask questions and be straight with your doubts
 - v. Talk about your hopes and dreams
2. Put your specific prayer requests on paper and record what happens
3. Look for ways to add prayer throughout the day/week
 - a. Set a modest goal for adding either number of times or length of prayer times
 - b. Find triggers or times that would remind you to pray
 - i. Walking the dog
 - ii. Lunch break
 - iii. Drive time
4. Pray with at least one other person

How did this practice impact me?

Session questions

1. How do you normally pray? What creative ideas would you add to this practice from your own prayer life?
2. What models of prayer work best for you as you come near God?
3. What does it normally feel like when you spend time just "being" with God?
4. Why are we praying? For others? For ourselves? Out of guilt? Need?
5. In what ways can we incorporate prayer into our daily life?
6. Do you feel uncomfortable praying with others? How about praying with your spouse?

Supplemental resources

- Matthew 6: 5-13
- Jer. 33:3; Heb 4:5-16
- <https://practicingtheway.org/practices/prayer> - download prayer cards
- <https://www.24-7prayer.com/how-to-pray/help-me/>
- Dangerous Prayers by Craig Groeschel
- Prayer by Richard Foster
- Movie - The War Room

Session 2: Reading the Bible

Historical experience and perspective

Expectations

- What role did the Bible play in your earliest church experiences and how do you think that shaped you?
- What has been your experience of studying the Scriptures in the past? What value do you see in studying the Bible?
- Can we trust the Bible?
- Have people in my circle used scripture as a weapon or point of personal judgment? Or have I seen others just point to “the Bible tells me so” reasoning?

Things to practice

1. Spend 15 minutes a day reading the Bible (see 10-day reading plan)
 - a. First thing in the morning might be the best time, or maybe in the evening as you wind down the day
2. Ask God to speak to you personally - what jumps off the page and comes alive?
 - a. Approach the text as if God wrote this just for you and picture yourself in context to the narrative
3. Combine scripture reading with prayer
 - a. Maybe reflect or even meditate on a passage for a longer period of time
4. Take one thought or verse with you through the day
 - a. Allow this thought to become part of your memory
5. Consider any prompts of action - what are we feeling stirred to do or do differently based on what we read?

Suggested 10-day reading plan

John uses specific words, images, and ideas to develop themes and illustrate his point. During this reading plan, take notes on any repeated words, phrases, images, or ideas you notice across the book of John as well as his subsequent letters. Also consider paraphrasing these themes into your own words and conclusions each day.

1. Day 1 - John 1-3
2. Day 2 - John 4-6
3. Day 3 - John 7-9
4. Day 4 - John 10-12
5. Day 5 - John 13-15
6. Day 6 - John 16-18
7. Day 7 - John 19-21
8. Day 8 - 1 John 1-3
9. Day 9 - 1 John 4-5

10. Day 10 - 2 & 3 John

Supplemental resources

- YouVersion app - download for different translations and reading plans by topic
- Hebrews 4:12 - the word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword
- Read the Bible for a Change by Ray Lubeck
- [How to Read the Bible Overview](#) (1 minute)

How did this practice impact me?

Session questions

1. How did this entire movement begin and build 300 years before the Bible was even assembled? How might that impact my view of the Bible?
2. What does your practice of scripture reading look like right now? How did you get to that point?
3. What difficulties do you face when it comes to the Bible (fear, confusion, boredom, skepticism, etc.)?
4. Did reading the Bible impact your desire to spend more time with God?
5. When you approach scripture, do you do so with a heart posture of expecting to hear from God?
6. What passages spoke the most to you that you can carry with you and possibly memorize?

Session 3: Rest (Sabbath)

Historical experience and perspective

1. Is the Practice of Sabbath new to you? Was it part of your upbringing? Did you grow up with any kind of negative understanding about it?
2. How does the idea of practicing Sabbath make you feel? Nervous about Sabbath being too legalistic? Skeptical about working this into your schedule? Full of anticipation for rest? Something entirely different?

Things to practice

1. Reserve 24 hours to rest and unplug - Sabbath is translated literally as “to stop” but also “to delight”
 - a. Pick a day and time that works for you
 - Traditional Sabbath: from sundown Friday night to the same time Saturday late afternoon. (This works well for people who are especially busy on Sundays with church activities or other events.)
 - Lord’s Day Sabbath: from the Sunday morning gathering through bedtime on Sunday. (This works best for most people, as Sunday is the calmest day in the city, and we already set aside time to worship as a community.)
 - Midweek Sabbath: any day during the week. (This works best for people with odd or sporadic work schedules and have a midweek day off.)
 - b. Activities to consider - do something to make the day stand apart
 - Read
 - Nap
 - Walk/hike
 - Picnic
 - Bake/meal prep
 - Enjoy a slow/long meal with others
 - Spend time alone with God (prayer + scripture)
 - Spend time with family and friends (park, frisbee, etc)
 - c. Avoid

- Digital devices (from phone and social media to TV)
 - Chores
 - Errands
 - Calls or email
 - Work
 - Shopping
2. Practice gratitude and contentment
 - a. Journal things for which you are grateful
 - b. Vocalize gratitude at the dinner table, listing the things, people, and moments in recent memory that you recognize as gifts from God
 - c. As you rest and delight, pause and thank God in the beauty of small and ordinary things: laughter, a good meal, nature, good conversation, a work of art
 3. Schedule time to worship
 - a. Corporate worship (church service)
 - b. Gather a small group to sing together
 - c. Attend a relaxing concert
 - d. Listen to music by yourself

Supplemental resources

- The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the Modern World by John Mark Comer
- Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now by Walter Brueggemann
- Subversive Sabbath: The Surprising Power of Rest in a Nonstop World by A.J. Swoboda
- Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing Feasting by Marva Dawn

How did this practice impact me?

Session questions

1. In what ways do you see our culture pushing back against a life of rest?
2. What activities do you find most restful? Connect you to God?
3. Have you ever been forced to rest (discipline) that was more painful than finding rest on your own (delight)?
4. What do you think has to change in your life for Sabbath to become a part of your practice?
5. What are the positive benefits of going a full day of the week without phone, social media, or email? Is this something you would like to try?
6. Is it possible to slow down and really enjoy the sabbath if we don't slow down the other 6 days of the week?
7. What do you find typically increases or decreases your sense of contentment?

Session 4: Solitude

Historical experience and perspective

1. Is silence and solitude a regular part of your routine? Is it an important discipline to connect with God? If yes, what does that look like in your life rhythm? If no, why not?
2. How does the idea of silence and solitude make you feel? Excited? Scared? Too busy?

Things to practice

1. Start with carving out 15-30 minutes of absolute quiet time by yourself

- a. Clear your schedule and mark out 30 minutes of "do not disturb" or "important" on your calendar
 - b. Early mornings are the best for most people, but it can also be lunch or right before you go to bed
 - c. Make sure the environment is comfortable and quiet/removed (at home or in a park)
 - d. Remove all distractions (digital but also music or any other noise)
 - e. Don't multi-task
 - f. Goal is to be still and listen, which might include prayer, closing your eyes, and breathing slowly
 - g. Let yourself "feel" - name your emotions, big or small
 - i. Identify joy, gratitude, sadness, anger, emptiness, fatigue, worry, guilt and shame, conviction, or any number of positive or negative emotions
 - ii. In God's presence, face these emotions head on, open yourself up to Him in new ways, and give them to Him
2. Begin to create space to carve out 2 hours in a work day (ideally during working hours and even better if half a day) to just think and plan
- a. Fridays are typically best to peel away, ideally once a month (if 2 hours) or once a quarter (if half day)
 - b. This is best outdoors in a quiet park or a cabin or retreat center
 - c. If you don't want to sit still for that long, maybe go for a hike
 - d. Think forward about the full year and maybe next few years
 - e. Reflect on the trajectory, whether you feel that you are on the right path or not
 - f. Pray for guidance
 - g. What might need to change in the months ahead, either personally, professionally, or spiritually after further reflection
 - h. Who do I want to become in this next season of life not what do I want to get done in the next 30 days?
 - i. If you're sitting in unanswered questions about your life or future, hold that tension before God. Tell him how it feels not to have an answer. Don't force clarity where there is none. Just be patient before God with all that is unsolved in your heart
 - j. Journal all of the above
3. Plan a 1-day or extended retreat
- a. Once a year, make time for a 1-day getaway (or at least 8 hours) where you won't be interrupted
 - b. If you are able, consider extending this for an entire weekend or maybe even up to a week
 - i. The goal isn't just a relaxed vacation but intentional time alone to process, pray, and plan
 - ii. If you have a lot of action in your life combined with a lot of unresolved feelings/emotions, this might be the most productive practice you could schedule leading to greater clarity and conviction
4. Build a path to a 1-month, 3-month, or 12-month sabbatical
- a. This is the most difficult practice, but a bigger reset might be needed for fuller restoration

Supplemental resources

- Isaiah 30:21
- One Minute Pause app from John Eldridge (based on the book Get Your Life Back)
- <https://practictheway.org/teaching/jesus-and-the-lonely-place> (50 minute teaching on silence and solitude)
- <https://www.whitespaceatwork.com/videos> (Power of Thinking video is 2 minutes)
- Invitation to Solitude and Silence by Ruth Haley Barton
- Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster
 - "Loneliness is inner emptiness. Solitude is inner fulfillment."
- Leading on Empty by Wayne Cordeiro

- "There is a difference between isolation and solitude. They may contain similar characteristics, but in reality they are worlds apart. Solitude is a chosen separation for refining your soul. Isolation is what you crave when you neglect the first."

How did this practice impact me?

Session questions

1. Do you find silence and stillness unnerving, or comforting? Why?
2. What challenges do you face in carving out time for silence and solitude? (Ex. Overall busyness, work schedule, little kids, apartment living, extroverted personality, etc.)
3. Would you say you are "in touch with your feelings" in a healthy way? Or is that hard and difficult for you? If so, why?
4. Was emotional awareness a part of your upbringing? How did your family of origin deal with emotional pain? How has that shaped your life today?
5. We all face emotional pain in life. In those times, what happens when we use coping mechanisms other than prayer? And what is your coping mechanism of choice? (escapism, alcohol, denial, overwork, busyness, church activity, etc.)
6. In what ways can you use silence and solitude to strengthen your own faith and draw you closer to God?
7. In seasons of busyness, how might we schedule more time in the quiet rather than less?

Session 5: Fasting

Historical experience and perspective

1. Have you ever fasted before? If not, why not? If yes, was it a good or forced experience?
2. What do people who fast look like? What kinds of people come to your mind?
3. How does even the anticipation of fasting make you feel?

Things to practice

1. Determine a reason why to consider fasting in the first place
 - a. Learn to draw closer to God through self-denial vs. responding primarily to our fleshly desire
 - b. Recognize how we use food pleasure to soften meaningless work, purposeless pursuits, or lack of rest/exercise
 - c. Fasting can help break a bad habit (whether food or drink or another coping mechanism)
 - d. Without a purpose to fast, the practice can be a miserable and difficult experience
2. Set aside a day and time to begin and end the fast
 - a. Can be sunup to sundown, which would mean skip breakfast and lunch with a late dinner
 - Don't skip water
 - Maybe even consider drinking juice
 - b. Can shorten by just skipping one meal or lengthen to full 24 hours
 - c. Another alternative is to eat only vegetables and water for even longer (this Daniel fast is 3 weeks)
 - d. Might there be fasts from things other than food to practice with a spiritual intention? Such as media, tech, hobbies, or even people?
3. When prompted by hunger, turn to these practices:
 - a. Prayer - engage in different conversations with God
 - Cry out in crisis
 - Express grief

- Repent
 - Plead with God
 - Determine God's will and guidance
 - Seek deliverance or protection
 - Humble yourself before God
 - Express concern for the work of God
- a. Journal
 - b. Walk and Reflect
 - c. Read Scripture
 - d. Minister to the needs of others

Supplemental resources

- Fasting with a Purpose reading plan in YouVersion Bible app
- God's Chosen Fast by Arthur Wallis
- <https://practicingtheway.org/fast/part-two>

How did this practice impact me?

Session questions

1. Do you fast on a regular basis? Do you have any encouraging stories of fasting and the role it's played in your faith?
2. Did you fast at all this past week? What keeps us from wanting to do this? And do/did we have the right motivation to consider engaging in this practice?
3. What's an area of your life you would love to get more freedom in?
4. Is fasting a practice that needs more practice and habitual experience to be effective?
5. What is an area of your life in which you would love to discern God's will?
6. Is it easy for you to hear God's voice?
7. In what ways do the dangers of a spiritual discipline like fasting often keep us from the good that God has for us?

Session 6: Simplicity

Historical experience and perspective

1. Compare the simplicity of your childhood to today and consider any material differences in material possessions.
2. Has the idea that "more is better" been part of your life or upbringing? How has that idea impacted you, if at all?
3. How often do you purge and clean out your stuff, either by throwing away, giving away, or doing a garage sale?

Things to practice

1. Review your annual spending allocation and follow the money trail, then do the same for your calendar. Are there any areas that look too high or too low versus what you expected or what you'd like them to be? Try to particularly name any unnecessary areas of excess (money or time).
2. Take an inventory of your possessions (aka "stuff") and label any item that makes you feel anxious because you have it or possibly makes you feel uneasy if you didn't have it. Do we have an unhealthy attachment to any kinds of possessions?
3. Simplify a room, your wardrobe, or possibly even the whole house by sorting items into 4 categories:

- a. Giveaway - Goodwill, neighbors, family
- b. Sell - FB marketplace, consignment shop
- c. Throwaway or recycle - particularly if something is not useful or beyond repair
- d. Keep - focus on what is useful, beautiful, or has a purpose in your life

Supplemental resources

- <https://practictheway.org/teaching/simplicity-of-stuff>
- <https://www.becomingminimalist.com/inspiring-simplicity-0422b/>
- Simplify by Bill Hybels
- Freedom of Simplicity by Richard Foster
- Get Your Life Back by John Eldredge

How did this practice impact me?

Session questions

1. Have you ever experienced a greater-than-expected weight and burden when accumulating "more" - either assets or just material possessions (like a boat)?
2. Does our pursuit of *more* ever feel like a distraction, and can it actually drain us of energy, time, or passion?
3. We often get rid of things we don't want that don't matter to us, but have we ever let something go that we actually wanted?
4. Does the idea of parting with something you think you want to keep make you uncomfortable? Why?
5. Is there any one area you most look forward to simplifying or most want to simplify? Such as your schedule, your home, etc?
5. Do you have more clothes than you regularly wear? Why is that?
6. Have you noticed any correlation in your own life between how much you own and how content you are? How did one impact the other?
7. Are there excesses in my life that need simplifying? What are they?

Session 7: Community / Fellowship

Historical experience and perspective

1. Outside of this group, have you regularly or intentionally participated in relational activities or small groups with others in the past? Have you felt welcomed, known, and accepted - or possibly uncomfortable and not that engaged?
2. Have you been able to be authentic and honest within your community, or do you often feel like you have to pretend around others?
3. Has someone in your life intentionally pursued a relationship with you and purposefully cultivated a friendship or mentorship over an extended period of time? How did that make you feel?

Things to practice

1. Share a meal/feast or just coffee with at least 4 other people
 - a. Can be 1x or ongoing with a planned cadence (weekly, monthly, quarterly)
 - b. Consider hosting in a home for greater intimacy and fellowship
 - c. Think about engaging with friends who might not be in an intentional community
 - d. Be courageous to initiate and engage in conversation that goes deeper
2. Join a church and/or sign up for a small group through the church
 - a. Celebrate together
 - b. Share together - particularly deeper emotions and frustrations and concerns
 - i. What are you angry about?

- ii. What are you sad about?
 - iii. What are you anxious about?
 - iv. What are you glad about?
 - c. Read and discuss scripture together
 - d. Serve together
 - e. Pray together
3. Participate in regular corporate worship, either at church or a concert series
 - a. Ask someone to come sit with you and maybe go to brunch afterward

Supplemental resources

- Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 | Romans 12:15-19 | Acts 2:42
- I'd Like You More if You Were More Like Me by John Ortberg
- Life Together by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- The Relational Soul by Richard Plass and James Cofield

How did this practice impact me?

Session questions

1. How would you describe your current inner circle and community? How did this initially develop, and how intentional are you (or others) in cultivating these friendships?
2. When thinking of your best and most lasting relationships over the course of your life, what stands out as a consistent or common theme that makes these stand above the rest?
3. Is fellowship and intimacy with others easy or difficult for you? Why?
4. Give an example of how others have blessed you or spoken into your life
5. When we think of how others have impacted us, does this prompt a stirring to either reciprocate or do the same for others? Why is that, and what holds us back from taking greater proactive steps in pouring into others?
6. What is it about breaking bread with others that is so meaningful and memorable? How might we consider doing this more often?