

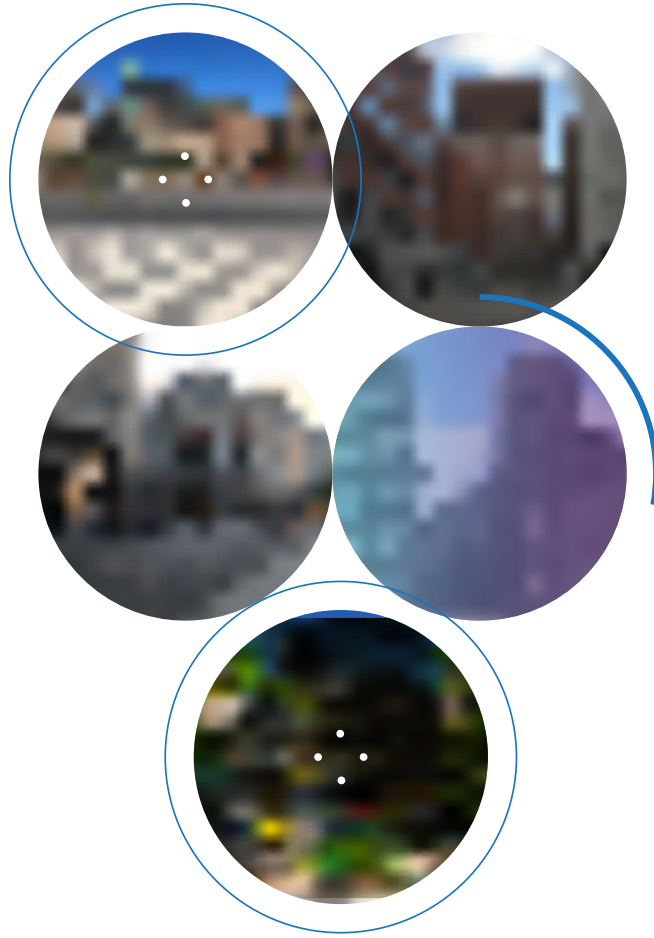


ALL SOULS
FELLOWSHIP

A COMMUNITY MARKS
GROUP STUDY



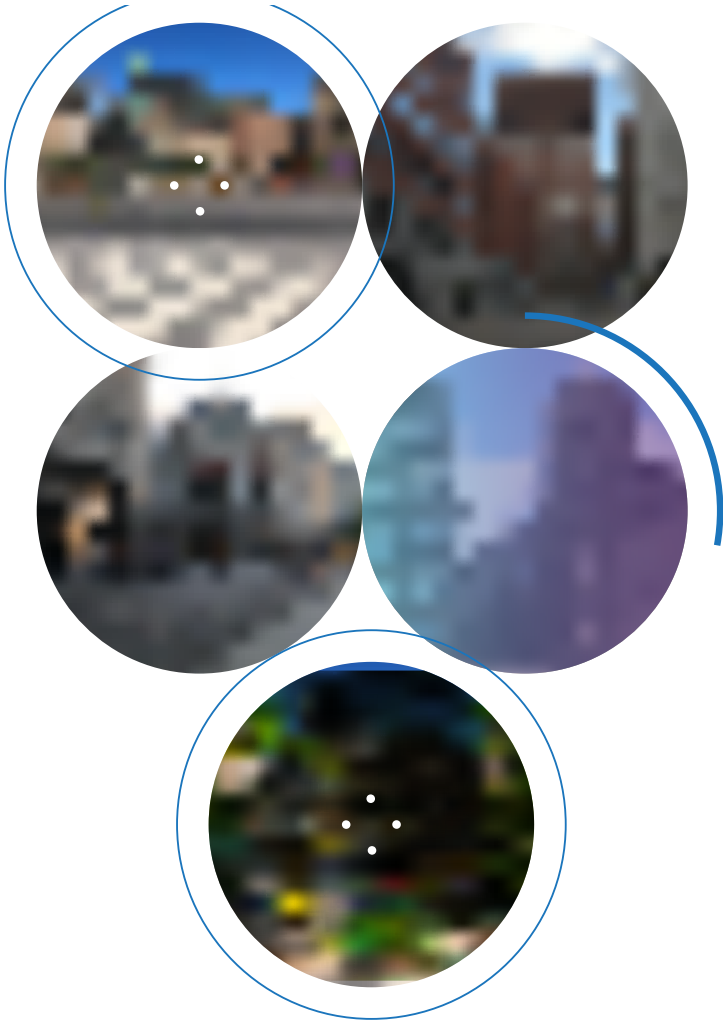
**FUTURE:
PRESENT**



FUTURE:PRESENT

A COMMUNITY MARKS GROUP STUDY

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“Story is the most natural way of enlarging and deepening our sense of reality, and then enlisting us as participants in it. Stories open doors to areas or aspects of life that we didn’t know were there, or had quit noticing out of over-familiarity, or supposed were out-of-bounds to us. They then welcome us in. Stories are verbal acts of hospitality.”

EUGENE PETERSON,

CHRIST PLAYS IN TEN THOUSAND PLACES

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FUTURE:PRESENT

P R E F A C E

Our view of the future shapes how we act in the present.

Where you think the story of your life is headed is going to have massive implications for the kind of decisions you make in the here and now. Jesus describes the future reality we will experience as the *renewal of all things*. If that's the future toward which our lives are directed, then the transformation of the world is linked to all the ways the Spirit is at work transforming the human heart in the present.

We describe our mission at All Souls as **practicing the way of Jesus for the renewal of all things**. We chose the word “practicing” because it carries a double meaning. In one sense practicing means we haven't arrived. Faith involves a journey and the community we are part of helps us commit to the ongoing process of becoming like Jesus. The church is a living laboratory by which we work out faith. In a laboratory, we will fail often, but we fail forward in the hope of looking more like Jesus. Secondly, practice also presumes that there is an end or a goal toward which we aim our lives. In that sense, practice describes training for the role we will have as co-heirs with Christ in the age to come.

While there's much that can be said about what practicing for renewal might look like, we believe that a community marked by grace, rest, engagement, contribution, and reconciliation will be a welcome sign of God's desired future in an unsettled world. Imagine a community marked by these qualities—a unique people whose lives were a signpost of the coming renewal. A people of the future living in the present.

As beautiful as that would be, you'd be hard pressed to find people who are content with the degree to which their lives bear these marks. That's because it's remarkably easy to go through life without noticing the way God has built these qualities into us, much less all of the ways that are open for us to partner with the Spirit in the ongoing work of renewal within us. The truth is, we don't get there by ourselves. We will need to be part of a community that orders its life around these qualities and characteristics. For that reason, we'll refer to these as **community marks**.

In his book, *Orthodoxy*, G. K. Chesterton uses the analogy of a grand adventure story to describe the experience of life. He was a friend and contemporary of writers, C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien (I know, too many initials—apparently that was a thing in the 1930's) and together they would frequently discuss how at the heart of adventure stories there lies a quest that requires dedication and heroism if it is to be completed. These adventures inevitably involve the bravery of loyal companions who face great danger and sacrifice of themselves in order to achieve the goal. In short it takes a community.

The vision of life as a quest or a journey provides a structure that enables us to see the meaning of our joy, our struggles, and the ordinary events of our days. It enables us to see everything that happens in our lives, and the variety of ways we respond as either moving us closer to or further from the goal of being shaped in the likeness of Jesus. Once we take a step back and see the narrative unity of our lives, we might just be able to make distinctions between what helps and hinders us in our journey.

Thinking of our lives as a journey might also give us the vantage point to see patterns. What obstacles to renewal do we encounter on a routine basis? What other visions of flourishing command our focus away from the kingdom of God? Do we embrace the small moments of joy presented to us everyday? Are we part of a community that is helping us move closer to a life of virtue or further away from it? As noted earlier, it's remarkably easy to move through life, rushing from event to event without pausing to rest and notice the signposts of God's presence along the way.

So think of this community guide as an *aide* for the journey. Over the next seven weeks we are going to invite you to look back on the events of your life to see how God has shaped you through the unique persons, places, and circumstances of your life. We're also going to invite you to imagine how God might shape All Souls to participate in renewal by becoming people of **grace, rest, engagement, contribution, and reconciliation.**

You can't capture the spirit of a journey by simply pointing to a map or a travel itinerary, so we are going to ask that you bring your journey to life by telling a story. This community guide is designed to help you see your place within the narrative framework of your life thus far. The working thesis is that you'll know how you've grown (or how you need to grow) in each of these areas if you can tell a story about it. Ideally, we're creating a reference point to determine how our community is growing over the years.

One last thing about journeys—it's hard to even think about beginning one if we don't have a clear picture of the destination. Simply put, **our destination is nothing less than the kingdom of God.** As a community committed to *practicing the way of Jesus for the renewal of all things*, our journey is the process of being formed in the likeness of Jesus for the sake of the world. That is how we find our home in the kingdom.

These community marks we are going to explore are not to be confused with the kingdom, but they are certainly signs that we as a community are moving closer to (or further from) the destination.

Our prayer for the weeks ahead is that as we explore our stories together, we will see signs of God's promised renewal breaking into the present.

Blessings as we journey together,

Steven Good, Lead Pastor of All Souls Fellowship Church

U S I N G T H I S G U I D E

Journeys are rarely solo endeavors. We need companions to come alongside when the path gets lonely, to challenge us when we've lost our way, to encourage us when we think we can't continue. For that reason, we've designed this guide with community groups in mind as a companion to our Future:Present sermon series. Each Sunday marks the beginning of a new week.

The aim of the sermon series is to cast a vision for the future. What kind of community is God calling us to become? With that aim in mind, this tool will help develop a baseline for how we will determine the effectiveness of All Souls' ministry in the years ahead. Essentially, we're asking you to take inventory of how God has worked in your life with respect to each of the community marks and to tell a story about how God has shaped you in the last year. Our confidence is that you'll have more stories to tell next year. From the outset, we want to emphasize that this is the beginning of a journey—none of us has arrived. The strength of our community will be reflected by how well we grow together.

THE APPROACH:

The first week will consist of an exercise called a "Life Graph." This is a visual tool designed to help you reflect upon the people, places, events, and circumstances of your life where God's presence has been uniquely sensed or, conversely, where an awareness of God's presence has been elusive. From this, you'll begin to notice patterns or a sense of narrative unity to your spiritual biography.

WEEKS TWO THROUGH SIX WILL FOLLOW A
DAILY PATTERN AS FOLLOWS:

Sunday: Rest

Monday: A Brief Reflection On That Week's Community Mark

Tuesday: Prayer of the Day

Wednesday: Personal Narrative Questions and Story Prompts

Thursday: *Lectio Divina*

Friday: Personal Inventory

Saturday: Spiritual Practices

Community Group Questions for each week appear in an appendix at the end of the guide.

The bulk of the guide will help you understand how God has shaped your experience in each of the community marks. The narrative questions are designed to help you understand your own story and the personal inventory is designed to help you locate areas of perceived strength and needed growth in each of the community marks. Each week's reflection, lectio reading and prayer are to help you internalize God's story. The practices each week are meant for your ongoing formation. The idea isn't to immediately go out and start doing all of the practices at once. That will only add to the culture of exhaustion. Read through them and prayerfully consider which are appealing to you or which speak to the pressure points in your life.

Week seven is about helping you toward practical steps in the way of crafting a personal rule designed to help you grow in the areas you sense God's invitation. The first tool is a radar graph designed to work with each week's personal inventory. The goal is to help give a visual representation that will help you determine which practices you'd like to explore further. The second tool is a guide for crafting an ordered "practice plan" called a rule for life. At the end of this guide are resources for further study and growth.

Living a life marked by grace, rest, engagement, contribution, and reconciliation requires a community that is also ordering its life together by those things. If you are using the guide as an individual, we encourage you to enlist the help of a friend to help you understand what God is communicating to you.

NOTE TO COMMUNITY GROUP LEADERS:

This study guide works best when group members work through the guide prior to gathering. We've tried to make the questions accessible to a new participant, but preparation will enrich your discussion. The bulk of your time each week will be spent exploring and sharing each other's stories.

When it comes to sharing stories, we recommend each community group leader go first – that way you can model what it looks like each week. Sharing one's story requires vulnerability. When someone does share something personal that God has done in their life, take the time to thank them and find one thing to affirm.

You will find it is difficult to go through all five marks for each person in your group. Depending on how much time you wish to spend, you may opt to have each member choose one area of strength and one area in which they'd like to see growth in the next year. It will be helpful to have quarterly "check-in" times throughout the year. Below is a schedule for how to use the guide.

As a leader, the best preparation you can make is to pray for each member of your group throughout the week.

WEEKLY PLAN:

- WEEK 1: Intro, create Life Graph, (pp. 10-18)
- WEEK 2: A Community of Grace in a Culture of Judgment (pp. 20-37)
- WEEK 3: A Community of Rest in a Culture of Exhaustion (pp. 38-55)
- WEEK 4: A Community of Engagement in a Culture of Distraction (pp. 56-71)
- WEEK 5: A Community of Contribution in a Culture of Consumption (pp. 72-89)
- WEEK 6: A Community of Reconciliation in a Culture of Division (pp. 90-107)
- WEEK 7: Charting Your Path (pp. 111-113) and
Crafting a Rule of Life (pp. 114-117).

W E E K 1

INTRODUCTION

SUNDAY: **REST**

"...IT SEEMS TO ME THAT IT IS A BRIEF BUT TRUE DEFINITION OF VIRTUE TO SAY, IT IS THE ORDER OF LOVE; AND ON THIS ACCOUNT, IN THE CANTICLES, THE BRIDE OF CHRIST, THE CITY OF GOD, SINGS, 'ORDER LOVE WITHIN ME.'"

ST. AUGUSTINE, CITY OF GOD

MAY GOD ORDER LOVE WITHIN ME, WITHIN US, AS WE JOURNEY WITH HIM.

CREATING A LIFE GRAPH:

A Life Graph is a visual tool designed to help you reflect upon the people, events, and circumstances by which God has shaped your faith throughout the course of your life. These can be moments or seasons where God's presence has either been uniquely present—where faith has been natural and you are filled with an awareness of God's love, peace and grace—or those where God's presence has felt lacking. From this, you'll begin to notice patterns or a sense of narrative unity to your spiritual biography. To go back to the analogy of a journey. The life graph is a kind of map of where you've been. Think of this as an exercise in spiritual cartography.

On the following page you'll find a graph with an x-y axis.

With the zero value being a neutral point, the "x" (vertical) axis above the line represents high points. These are times when you've deeply known God's presence or have had intense experiences of faith. Low points appear below the line. (For the purposes of this graph, we are borrowing language from Ignatius of Loyola. The high points are experiences of consolation, the low points, desolation).

The "y" (horizontal) axis represents time. There's a myth in much of American Christianity that once one comes to faith, one's life will be a steady ascent. The reality is that there are several peaks and valleys throughout one's journey with God. Some of the valleys can last years—what the 16th century Carmelite mystic St. John of the Cross called "the dark night of the soul." It is not uncommon, however, for some of the most enduring lessons of faith to be born out of these seasons of seeming absence.

1. Before marking events on the timeline, it will be helpful to begin by dividing your life into time periods. For example: Childhood, Adolescence, Young Adulthood, Adulthood and Post-Retirement (or whatever divisions make sense for your age and stage of life).
2. For each of these time periods, create four columns marked by significant events, persons, circumstances, and places that have held meaning in your life. Spend some time brainstorming

these time periods and these four categories along your spiritual autobiography. Once you've got a good list, begin to assign values to them (-100 to 100).

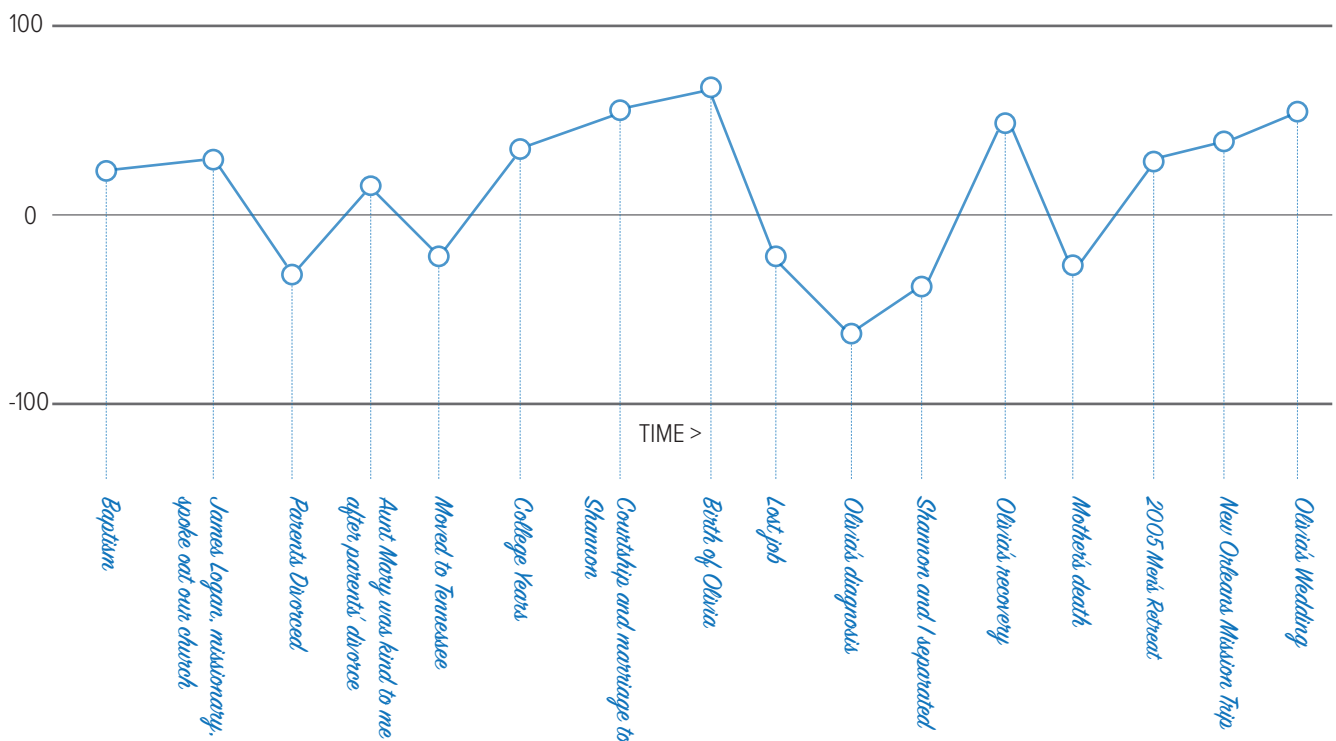
- Plot them along the graph. For the purposes of your group conversation, you may wish to choose the 15 most significant things from across the four categories.

As you move through this exercise, the hope is that you'll begin to notice the ways that God has used these people, places, and circumstances to shape you. You may also begin to have a better awareness of how God speaks to you through your life.

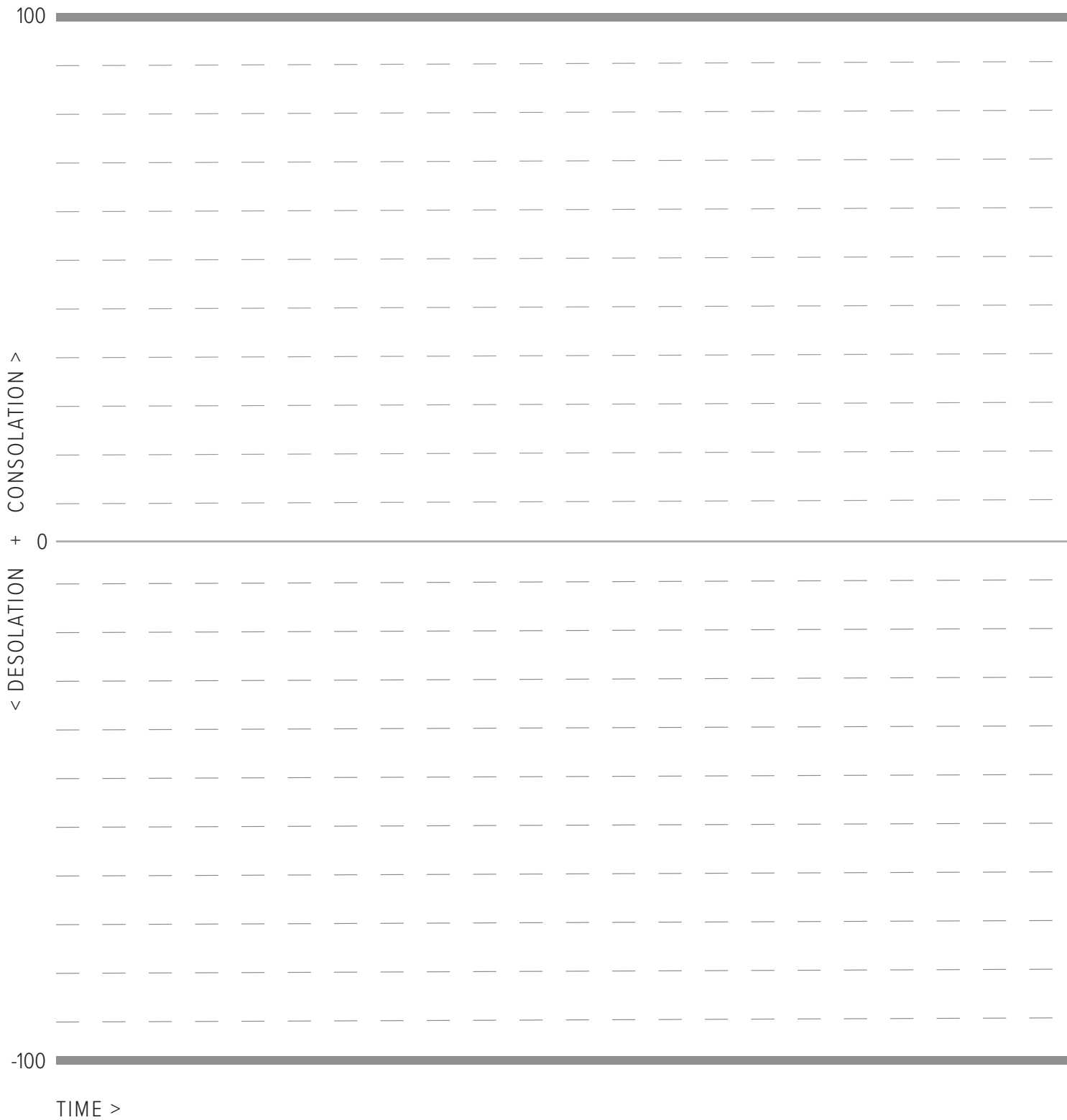
Below is the life graph of a fictional man that we'll use for illustrative purposes. In his story, the earthquake events of life surrounded relocating as a child, marriage and separation in early adulthood and later adulthood, the birth of a child and illness of a child, a spiritual reawakening around midlife.

Even though the timeline below is a work of fiction, you can see the arc of a spiritual narrative marked by particular events, persons, circumstances, and places. This exercise is about listening to God's voice throughout your life story and noticing the ways that God has most clearly spoken to you (or otherwise held your attention).

EXAMPLE LIFE GRAPH



LIFE GRAPH FOR _____





A large area of the page containing a grid of horizontal dashed lines, intended for handwritten notes or text.



A second large area of the page containing a grid of horizontal dashed lines, identical to the first one, for handwritten notes.



WEEK 1

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION + GROUP DISCUSSION

- How do you feel having completed the lifegraph? Did anything surprise you?

- What patterns do you notice?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION + GROUP DISCUSSION

- Which events feel the most significant? (Consider highlighting or drawing a picture to represent

- What correlation do you find between experiences of desolation and a deepening awareness of God's presence?

- As you reflect on your life, what questions do you have for God?

SHARING YOUR STORY WITH YOUR COMMUNITY GROUP:

The best stories have an unmistakable ring of authenticity. They're not always those with the most flourish or that contain the most drama, but the ones that resonate with us do so because we recognize our own story in them. Ultimately your story connects to the bigger narrative God is telling. When you share your story within the context of community, others will help you notice things that you didn't know were there. In the same way, when others tell their stories, you'll allow them to hear nuances and cadences they weren't able to grasp in the telling.

Secondly, the act of telling helps your story to become more a part of you. In the sharing of stories you'll begin to see some of the common, but no less powerful, ways that Jesus has shaped each of the lives of the members in your Community Group.

Lastly, the act of telling your story within a community helps you to know whether the story you are telling is true. Others may help you to see key aspects of your life in a new, and hopefully liberating way. You are invited to be honest and vulnerable.

Below are a view things to keep in mind as you listen to others tell their stories:

- Remember that telling our stories leaves us exposed. Lead with affirmation when others have taken the risk.
- Do you sense continuity between the stories you've heard and what you know to be true of each person? If so, tell them. If not, ask them later over coffee to share more.
- What similarities have you noticed between the story you've heard and your own?
- Where did you see God most clearly in the stories you heard?

W E E K 2

A COMMUNITY OF **GRACE**
IN A CULTURE OF
JUDGEMENT

SUNDAY: **REST**

“THE HEBREW EVENING/MORNING SEQUENCE CONDITIONS US TO THE RHYTHMS OF GRACE. WE GO TO SLEEP AND GOD BEGINS HIS WORK. WE WAKE AND ARE CALLED OUT TO PARTICIPATE IN GOD’S CREATIVE ACTION. BUT ALWAYS GRACE IS PREVIOUS. GRACE IS PRIMARY. WE WAKE INTO A WORLD WE DIDN’T MAKE, INTO A SALVATION WE DIDN’T EARN.”

EUGENE PETERSON, RHYTHMS OF GRACE

MAY I KNOW GRACE TO EMBRACE MY OWN FINITE SMALLNESS
IN THE ARMS OF GOD’S INFINITE GREATNESS.

MONDAY: REFLECTION QUESTIONS

In her recent TED talk, Jodi-Ann Burey tells a story of arriving at an October party in street clothes only to discover everyone else in full-out Halloween costumes. Her friend had told her to “come as you are,” but clearly, everyone else at the party came as someone else. She describes the “anxiety” and “bewilderment” she felt as the odd one out, the result of doing what she was told. “That’s exactly how I feel,” she transitioned, “when I am told to bring my full, authentic self to work.”

Authenticity is a defining word of our cultural moment. We are encouraged to “be your true self” and to “stay vulnerable” in order to have deeper relationships, to be a more effective leader, to become the person we are meant to be. However, the risk often feels too great. Our culture seems rigged with political, religious, racial, and social trip-wires. One wrong step and we’re left picking up the shattered pieces of our reputation. We think, “If they knew me, they would reject me.” We tip-toe around and hope to avoid questions that reveal too much. It’s tough to venture being who we really are in a culture poised to offer criticism.

Is that really how we’re meant to live? Unwinding the complex relational environment in which we find ourselves will require us to go back to the beginning. In the ancient near east, every culture had an origin story. In most, the gods create mankind as a personal labor-force to facilitate their comfort. Creation serves the gods’ pleasure and the people worship images of those gods to demonstrate their submission. If you saw the latest film in the Thor franchise, this was the animating complaint of the story’s villain: “god’s only care for themselves,” he scowls before going on a multi-versal campaign of decide. But the Bible has given us a different origin story, with a very different God at its center.

“So God created human beings in his own image.

In the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.” (Gen 1:27 – NLT).

God did not create humans to serve him under the harsh bite of judgment, but rather to bear the divine image in, through, and over the rest of creation. There is immeasurable honor in this simple verse.

As C.S. Lewis wrote in *The Weight of Glory*, “There are no ordinary people. You have never met a mere mortal.”

There is a grace to this origin story that is so often absent today. Everyone you meet each day is a person of inestimable dignity and worth because he or she bears the image of God. There is intrinsic value in each of us. This alone is reason to hold our heads high. But there is even more grace made available through Jesus.

Sin and brokenness have marred the image of God in us. We cannot avoid it. The fissures are present in each action and interaction. But we follow the one Paul calls “the image of the invisible God,” who made “peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Col 1:15, 20). Even though we were once “alienated from God,” he has reconciled us “by Christ’s physical body through death” so that we can be “without blemish and free from accusation” (Col 1:21, 22). This means that in the place of judgment, we receive grace.

We are a community of image-bearers, broken by the fall, but being remade into the image of Jesus. We do not need to exaggerate our goodness because it is not the foundation of our worth. We do not need to cover up our brokenness because Jesus took it onto himself on the cross. Instead of judging, we extend the grace we have received to each other.

Only a community of grace can pave the way for authenticity and vulnerability. We can take off our masks and live with ruthless honesty and relentless hope. Through the risk of vulnerability we can experience real community with others. In this culture starved for real connection, we can be a community grace where it is safe to show up “as you are.”

TUESDAY: PRAYER FOR THE DAY

When potters sit down at pottery wheels to create ceramics out of lumpy balls of clay, they must first center the clay. This is the most crucial aspect of “throwing” pottery because if the clay is wobbly or un-centered, it is impossible to make a symmetrical, usable pot. Potters use their hands to apply pressure to the clay as it spins, gently compressing the clay as it stubbornly fights shaping. Once potters can rest their hands on the clay without the clay resisting or moving of its own accord, the clay is ready to be shaped into a vessel. As you begin this time of prayer, take a few moments to be still before the Lord.

Center me, O God.

Meet me in that deepest intersection in my soul
where you dwell.

Quiet the voices—including my own—
that clamor to tell me

what I need to do,
who I need to be,

what I need to understand,
in order to be loved, validated, worthy.

Center me with your gentle hands.

May I believe, know, experience
that when you look at me,

you see through all my performing and striving,
past my proudest triumphs and spectacular failings,
directly to the truest, barest part of me.

And you pronounce me beloved.

Center me
and reorient my life around this truth.
So that once I settle into my worth in you
I might be shaped into a vessel,
able to encounter the world around me
and pour out the same
grace
upon grace
upon grace
that you daily give to me.

WEDNESDAY: REFLECTION QUESTIONS

“We’ve gone from that period of relativism—where everyone wanted to eschew judgment—to now a period of extreme judgment...it’s the age of politics; leaving the age of the moral individual and entering the age of “tribe.” So now on social media it’s understanding nowhere, but judgment everywhere and it’s just a punishing way to live.”

David Brooks, on The Russell Moore Show, (Feb 17, 2022)

All around us people are angry and looking to pass judgment. As you dig beneath the surface of all the vitriol and hate, people are afraid. Jesus’ vision of the church is of a community formed by grace and the reality that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12).

In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, he describes how God’s grace through Jesus has opened up for us the possibility of renewal where previously death was the only option. Not only have we been saved from something (death in our transgressions v.5), but we have been saved for something (to do good works, which God prepared in advance v.10). Part of that good work is to extend the grace God has shown us in a world desperate for kindness.

Read the scripture passage on the following page and reflect on the following questions with the last year or so of your life in mind.

SCRIPTURE: **EPHESIANS 2:1-10**

2:¹ As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴But

because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.¹⁰ For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

EXPLORING YOUR JOURNEY:

- In verses 1-3, Paul describes the reality that no one remains untouched by the effects of sin in the world. We each participate in activities, desires, patterns of thought and action that violate the shalom God breathed into creation. Given that the bent toward sin inside of each of us means we can’t stand apart from the brokenness of the world, what kind of posture are we called to have within it?
- As you think over the last year of your life, how have you grown in an awareness of your need for God’s grace?
- Reflecting on the life graph you developed last week, can you recall a specific instance when grace was shown to you? How did you feel in that moment? What story had you been telling about yourself (or about the other person)? How did the experience of grace change the story for you?
- When have you extended grace to someone else? (As you think about this experience, try to determine whether this was a “special occasion” or if this was an ordinary occurrence for you.)
- In which areas of life do you struggle to accept God’s grace? Where do you struggle with judgment and criticism?

TELLING YOUR STORY:

You can tell you've grown or changed over time if you have a story to tell about how God has moved you. Reflect on the answers you gave above and then use the prompts below to craft a story that you feel comfortable sharing with your community group. As you begin, remember that the goal isn't to scrutinize your actions or dwell on any regrets you may have. The point is to celebrate God's grace directed toward you and give a testimony about what that has looked like.

- In the last year, how has God shaped your understanding of grace and/or your ability to show grace to others? What obstacles and aids have you found along the journey?
- Has receiving and giving grace become a regular rhythm of your life, or is this an area in which you struggle?
- As a result of reflecting on your story, what is one thing you're beginning to understand about yourself?
- What invitation do you hear from Jesus to help you order your life in such a way that you might be more receptive to experiencing God's grace and extending grace to others?
- You can tell you've grown or changed over time if you have a story to tell about how God has moved you.

THURSDAY: *LECTIO DIVINA*

(Adapted from Sacred Rhythms by Ruth Haley Barton)

Lectio Divina (translated “divine or sacred reading”) is a meditative approach to scripture that allows us to listen to God’s voice spoken to us in the present moment through the written Word. The practice of *lectio divina* consists of four stages. It is rooted in the conviction that through the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures are indeed alive and active as we engage them for spiritual transformation.

Read and move slowly through each of the movements. Before reading, it’s essential that you prepare to meet with God: this may mean turning off digital devices or other things that call for your attention. Get comfortable in a quiet, solitary place. Still your body and your mind before God as a means of preparing your heart to receive the grace God has spoken through scripture. Finally, invite the Holy Spirit to guide your thinking and feeling as you read.

READ: LISTEN FOR THE WORD OR PHRASE THAT IS ADDRESSED TO YOU.

As you read the passage for the first time, listen for a word or phrase that strikes you or catches your attention. You may read silently or you may find it helpful to read out loud. Allow the words to sink in and settle into your heart. Be content to listen simply and openly, without judging or analyzing.

REFLECT: HOW IS MY LIFE TOUCHED BY THIS WORD?

Read the passage again and listen for the way the passage connects with your life. Ask, what is it in my life right now that needs to hear this word? Explore thoughts, perceptions and sensory impressions. If the passage is a story, put yourself in the scene.

RESPOND: WHAT IS MY RESPONSE TO GOD BASED ON WHAT I HAVE READ AND ENCOUNTERED?

Read the passage again, listening for your own deepest and truest response. Enter into a personal dialog with God sharing with God the feelings the text has brought up. Pay attention to any sense that God is inviting you to act or to respond to the word you have heard.

REST: REST IN THE WORD OF GOD.

In this final reading you are invited to release and return to a place of rest in God. You have given your response its full expression, so now you can move into a time of waiting and resting in God's presence.

SCRIPTURE: ROMANS 8: 31-39 (NLT)

³¹What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? ³²Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? ³³Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. ³⁴Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us. ³⁵Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? ³⁶(As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.") ³⁷No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. ³⁸And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. ³⁹No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

FRIDAY: PERSONAL INVENTORY

COMMUNITY MARK: A COMMUNITY OF GRACE

As you complete the assessment, avoid rushing. Listen for the Spirit's voice to encourage and challenge you. Consider these questions as one-on-one time with God. Be honest and intentional in how you are growing in the image of Jesus. Use the scale below to respond to each statement.

Never - 1 Seldom - 2 Occasionally - 3 Frequent - 4 Always - 5

PERSONAL INVENTORY:

RESPONSE:

I am able to speak about my weaknesses, failures, and mistakes without feeling like these form the core of my identity.

Because I operate out of an awareness of God's love for me, I do not need to look to others for approval.

I frequently am able to admit when I am wrong and can readily ask for forgiveness from others.

Because I am aware of how much God has forgiven me, I readily and easily forgive others.

When I am upset or "triggered" by others or by events, I am able to respond thoughtfully and compassionately rather than reactively or angrily.

I have at least one person in my life (outside of a spouse or parent) with whom I have no secrets.

I am rarely judgmental or critical of others, avoiding the temptation to create narratives about other's thoughts or intentions.

Others have noted that I am slow to speak, quick to listen, good at seeing things from another's perspective.

I see others as persons who bear God's image and treat them accordingly.

I regularly set aside time to read and meditate on scripture so I can receive God's gracious words about me and allow these to shape my sense of self.

Total Number:

It's important to bear in mind that this (and any kind of self-assessment) is a subjective tool designed to help you reflect on your life with God at this particular moment. It doesn't tell the whole story of how grace has been effectual in your life.

You can use the total number from this assessment during week seven (see, **Charting your Path** p. 111). From that, you'll consider what invitation you sense from the Spirit about how to create an ordered path for the journey ahead.

SATURDAY: PRACTICES

“In a state of grace, the soul is like a well of limpid water, from which flow only streams of clearest crystal. Its works are pleasing both to God and man, rising from the River of Life, beside which it is rooted like a tree.”

Teresa of Avila, The Interior Castle

Becoming a community who regularly extend grace to others, means first becoming a people who have internalized God’s grace and have allowed it to shape every aspect of our lives. In the same way that our lungs inhale and exhale, we need regular practices of taking in grace so we can demonstrate it to others.

There are a number of practices from the way of Jesus that afford us this pattern of inhalation/exhalation, but chief among them are those of scripture study and meditation. This is because the Bible is the true story of God’s grace in Jesus. We study the Bible to employ our mind, reason, and cognitive faculties in grasping the arc of God’s story so we understand the scope of God’s vision for the world and how we partner in Jesus’ work of renewal. Studying the Bible helps us see our place in the story and what we are to do within it.

Meditation certainly involves the mind as well, but its main purpose is to shape the soul in the likeness of Jesus for the sake of others. Through the prayerful reading of scripture we gain knowledge of God’s grace as a word spoken personally to us so that we can experience a deepening relationship with God. When we come to the Bible, we come in a heart posture of humility so we can hear God’s grace revealed to us through words.

If we remain open, the grace present in God's story will cut through to the very depths of who we are; even the darkened places we come to believe have long been untouched by God's presence. In that way, scripture holds up a mirror and allows us to see ourselves as God sees us.

There are several ways to engage in practices of study and meditation. Below are two such practices: the second, *Lectio Divina*, has been modeled throughout this guide each Thursday.

PRACTICE: INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

The three questions of Inductive Bible Study are observation (who/what is happening in the text?), interpretation (why is this happening and what does it mean?), and formation (what kind of person is this shaping me to become?). While you can practice the inductive method with any passage of scripture, here are a few suggested passages to start.

- Deuteronomy 7:7-12
- Ephesians 2:1-10
- John 15:1-17
- Romans 5:1-21

Use a commentary or Study Bible to help guide your understanding.

STEP ONE: OBSERVATION

In the first step of this study method we are locating the facts. The goal is to understand what is happening and so we ask the six key questions of investigation: who, what, when, where, why and how. The key process for this step is making lists of the salient facts and details of the story.

STEP TWO: INTERPRETATION

The second step of inductive study involves discerning the meaning of what you've observed. The goal is to determine the significance of the passage. How do the details work together to tell a particular story? The questions here shift to those of intention: what, why, how and the key process is identifying patterns from the points of input gained in the first step.

STEP THREE: FORMATION

The final step of the process is one in which we allow scripture to shape our world. The goal here is to understand how the passage calls us to understand and practice our faith. This step involves the imaginative exercise of transposing the values and context of scripture into our situation. The goal here is to help us see how our lives are to be conformed to the values and shaped by the desires of the Kingdom.

PRACTICE: MEDITATION THROUGH *LECTIO DIVINA*

Lectio Divina is a practice designed to help us meditate slowly on scripture. Whereas study sets its focus on learning about the context, structure, and meaning of the Bible, lectio divina is an ancient path designed to help us meet God in and through the words of scripture. In doing so, we allow the Spirit to lead us into further intimacy with God as we move slowly, deliberately, and repeatedly through a particular passage.

Any passage of Scripture can be utilized for the practice of lectio divina. Here are a few suggestions with which to start:

- Psalm 23
- Psalm 103
- John 15:1-17
- Psalm 145

After selecting one passage, read and move slowly through each of the movements. Before reading, it's essential that you prepare to meet with God: this may mean turning off digital devices or other things that call for your attention. Get comfortable in a quiet, solitary place. Still your body and your mind before God as a means of preparing your heart to receive the grace God has spoken through scripture. Finally, invite the Holy Spirit to guide your thinking and feeling as you read.

READ (LECTIO): READ THE PASSAGE SLOWLY AND CAREFULLY.

Take your time. As you move through the text, pay close attention to whatever words, ideas, and images uniquely draw your attention. When you find a particular word, phrase, or thought captures your imagination, pause momentarily to reflect.

REFLECT (MEDIATIO): AS YOU CONTEMPLATE THE PASSAGE, RETURN TO THE BEGINNING AND READ AGAIN.

On the second reading, allow the text to connect with you personally. Which words or phrases strike a chord in your heart, in whatever season of life or circumstance you find yourself in. Ask God, who are you calling me to be or become in light of this passage?

RESPOND (ORATIO): THE THIRD STAGE OF READING IS ONE IN WHICH YOU TALK TO GOD ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE READING.

If you don't understand, say so. If you have a clear emotional response, share that with God. If you are angry or upset, tell God what has caused this reaction and listen. Does what you read produce a desire to worship? Sing. If your reading has brought something else to mind, bring it to the Lord in the confidence that he will hear.

REST (CONTEMPLATIO): PAUSE TO SIT IN GOD'S PRESENCE BEFORE FLEEING FROM THE MOMENT.

Simply allow yourself to feel. Remember the word or phrase you heard and bring it to the Lord throughout this day or the next.

W E E K 3

A COMMUNITY OF **REST**
IN A CULTURE OF
EXHAUSTION

SUNDAY: **REST**

“SABBATH IS NOT DEPENDENT UPON OUR READINESS TO STOP. WE DO NOT STOP WHEN WE ARE FINISHED. WE DO NOT STOP WHEN WE COMPLETE OUR PHONE CALLS, FINISH OUR PROJECT, GET THROUGH THIS STACK OF MESSAGES, OR GET OUT THIS REPORT THAT IS DUE TOMORROW. WE STOP BECAUSE IT IS TIME TO STOP.”

WAYNE MULLER, SABBATH

MAY THIS DAY BRING SABBATH REST TO YOUR
HEART AND HOME.

MONDAY: REFLECTION

America's most original contribution to the world of literature may be the to-do list. This is not a slight on American authors as much as it is a recognition of our celebration of productivity. We love being productive. Amazon is loaded with resources to help you become a "productivity ninja" or achieve "extreme productivity" or master the art of doing "twice as much in half the time." No matter how much we manage to squeeze out of the day or week, we continue to try to ring out a few more drops. And so we, ourselves, feel squeezed.

In the academic journal, *Human Nature*, Allen Johnson describes this never-ending treadmill of production. "As a result of producing and consuming more, we are experiencing an increasing scarcity of time. ... Increasing efficiency in production means that each individual must produce more goods per hour; increasing productivity means . . . that to keep the system going we must consume more goods. Free time gets converted into consumption time because time spent neither producing nor consuming comes increasingly to be viewed as wasted..."

We squeeze more from less all while feeling like our more is less. This doesn't sound like freedom, it sounds like slavery.

Do you remember how Pharaoh liked to squeeze more from less? He made the Israelite slaves build his storehouse cities, made them move millions of stones to provide a place for his excess grain. When they complained about the labor, he told them to make more with less. More bricks, less straw. To Pharaoh they were only tools of productivity, their value locked up in endless doing. Until God rescued them out of that slavery.

But God knew the conditioning of 400 years of slavery would be difficult to shake. He knew it would be hard for them to find their value not in what they do, but in who they are as His image-bearers. And so, God gave his people a means of resistance, a way to rebel against the influence of Pharaoh and his mentality. This mode of resistance was called Sabbath.

“Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you.¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work,¹⁴ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work . . .¹⁵ You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm” (Dt 5:12–15).

Sabbath is a way of saying, “Enough!” Sabbath celebrates the God-blessed nature of work while declaring there is more to life than production. Sabbath is an art-form about connecting to the rhythm of creation, but it’s also a full-on, grunge-rock revolt against the way of Pharaoh and his empire. Sabbath breaks our addiction to accomplishment.

Imagine a day when you could turn off Pharaoh’s voice in your head and listen instead to the Creator God who invites you to rest. Imagine a day to remember you are no longer in slavery but follow a Good Shepherd who leads you to green pastures and beside still waters. Imagine a community of God’s people so at rest in this exhausted world that they appear as an oasis in a productivity desert. That is the community we long to be.

TUESDAY: PRAYER FOR THE DAY

O God, how much I have lost
by worshiping at the altar of productivity.
The sacrifices and offerings I have left
over the years are many—
Rest. Peace. Margin. Presence. Space for others.

I confess my inflated belief in my own importance,
as if the world would stop spinning
if I took a day off.

You never claimed to be an efficient God.
Why should I strive so hard to be such?

Teach me to surrender.
Guide my hand to lay down my work;
to close my computer,
to set down my pen or rake or hammer or dishcloth,
to breathe deeply and slowly and intentionally,
to let things take more time than I want them to.

Teach me to rest.
Give me courage to discard my badge of busyness
and accept instead limitations and boundaries.
Help me to be wise with my time—
not to fill every second of it
but to leave some space open
and see what might happen.

Remind me of this lesson,
whisper it to me over and over again:

Running myself ragged is not serving you.

Restore my soul
that I might truly believe
to you I am infinitely valuable
even on a day spent idly.

WEDNESDAY: REFLECTION QUESTIONS

“Sabbath is not just rest from making things. It’s rest from the need to make something of ourselves. It’s a day of noticing, a day of simple joyful presence, which is why community and eating together are such good Sabbath practices. It’s a day of presence.”

Rich Villodas, The Deeply Formed Life

If you were to scratch beneath the surface of some of the most pressing issues we face, you won’t be surprised to find **hustle** and its companion **hurry** scurrying about contributing to our sense of dis-ease. Corrie ten Boom famously said, “if the devil can’t make you bad, he’ll make you busy.” Part of the reason the last few years of American life have been so tense is that our culture is increasingly living out of a place of reactivity instead of a place of deep restfulness. But the promised rest that the writer of Hebrews envisions won’t come when we have finally accomplished all of our to-dos, it will come only when we are able to embrace the limitations God has placed on our lives. We simply aren’t made to go without ceasing. At heart, that’s what sabbath is about. The Hebrew word **shabbat** means “to cease.” To sabbath is to stop working, stop wanting, stop striving, stop worrying and simply rest in the presence of God. It’s a practice that has fallen out of step with the values of our culture, but is one of the most life-giving avenues for practicing the way of Jesus in the world. A people who embrace rest will be a signpost of the kingdom.

Read the scripture passage below and reflect on the following questions with the last year or so of your life in mind.

SCRIPTURE: HEBREWS 4:8-11

⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. ⁹ There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; ¹⁰ for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

EXPLORING YOUR JOURNEY:

- When have rest and enjoying restorative activity been regular rhythms of your life?
- What did you notice about your awareness and enjoyment of God during those seasons?

One of the hardest aspects of sabbath is trusting that God is still at work sustaining the world while we rest.

- How have you grown in your ability to embrace limitations and be okay with the fact that you will always have unfinished work?

The writer of Hebrews reinterprets sabbath rest to include the need to rest from our own self-justification.

- As you look upon your life graph and reflect upon your journey to this point, when were you able to rest in a conviction that Jesus was enough?
- At what points along the path were you restless and trying to hustle in order to save yourself?

Take some time to consider and pray through what your next step in sabbath taking might be, and what God is inviting you into in this season of your life. Remember, aim to start where you are, not where you think you “should” be.

TELLING YOUR STORY:

Reflect on the answers you gave above and then use the prompts below to craft a story that you feel comfortable sharing with your community group. As you begin, remember that the goal of Sabbath isn't to prove your piety or check a box; it's for the purpose of becoming the kind of person who is intentionally shaped week-by-week by the practices of stopping, resting, delighting, and worshiping.

- In the last year, how has God shaped your understanding of rest and/or your ability to engage in the practice of sabbath? What obstacles and aids have you found along the journey?
- Has taking a 24-hour period of time to stop, rest, delight, and worship become a regular rhythm of your life, or is this an area in which you struggle?
- What is one thing you're beginning to understand about yourself?
- What invitation do you hear from Jesus to help you order your life in such a way that you might be more receptive to resting and allowing others to rest?

THURSDAY: *LECTIO DIVINA*

(Adapted from Sacred Rhythms by Ruth Haley Barton)

Lectio Divina (translated “divine or sacred reading”) is a meditative approach to scripture that allows us to listen to God’s voice spoken to us in the present moment through the written Word. The practice of *lectio divina* consists of four stages. It is rooted in the conviction that through the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures are indeed alive and active as we engage them for spiritual transformation.

Read and move slowly through each of the movements. Before reading, it’s essential that you prepare to meet with God: this may mean turning off digital devices or other things that call for your attention. Get comfortable in a quiet, solitary place. Still your body and your mind before God as a means of preparing your heart to receive the grace God has spoken through scripture. Finally, invite the Holy Spirit to guide your thinking and feeling as you read.

READ: LISTEN FOR THE WORD OR PHRASE THAT IS ADDRESSED TO YOU.

As you read the passage for the first time, listen for a word or phrase that strikes you or catches your attention. You may read silently or you may find it helpful to read out loud. Allow the words to sink in and settle into your heart. Be content to listen simply and openly, without judging or analyzing.

REFLECT: HOW IS MY LIFE TOUCHED BY THIS WORD?

Read the passage again and listen for the way the passage connects with your life. Ask, what is it in my life right now that needs to hear this word? Explore thoughts, perceptions and sensory impressions. If the passage is a story, put yourself in the scene.

RESPOND: WHAT IS MY RESPONSE TO GOD BASED ON WHAT I HAVE READ AND ENCOUNTERED?

Read the passage again, listening for your own deepest and truest response. Enter into a personal dialog with God sharing with God the feelings the text has brought up. Pay attention to any sense that God is inviting you to act or to respond to the word you have heard.

REST: REST IN THE WORD OF GOD.

In this final reading you are invited to release and return to a place of rest in God. You have given your response its full expression, so now you can move into a time of waiting and resting in God's presence.

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 46 (MSG)

¹⁻³ God is a safe place to hide, ready to help when we need him.

We stand fearless at the cliff-edge of doom, courageous in seastorm and earthquake,
Before the rush and roar of oceans, the tremors that shift mountains.

Jacob-wrestling God fights for us,
God-of-Angel-Armies protects us.

⁴⁻⁶ River fountains splash joy, cooling God's city, this sacred haunt of the Most High.

God lives here, the streets are safe, God at your service from crack of dawn.
Godless nations rant and rave, kings and kingdoms threaten, but Earth does anything he says.

⁷ Jacob-wrestling God fights for us,
God-of-Angel-Armies protects us.

⁸⁻¹⁰ Attention, all! See the marvels of God! He plants flowers and trees all over the earth,

Bans war from pole to pole, breaks all the weapons across his knee.
"Step out of the traffic! Take a long, loving look at me, your High God,
above politics, above everything."

¹¹ Jacob-wrestling God fights for us,
God-of-Angel-Armies protects us.

FRIDAY: PERSONAL INVENTORY

COMMUNITY MARK: A COMMUNITY OF REST IN A CULTURE OF EXHAUSTION

As you complete the assessment, avoid rushing. Listen for the Spirit's voice to encourage and challenge you. Consider these questions as one-on-one time with God. Be honest and intentional in how you are growing in the image of Jesus. Use the scale below to respond to each statement.

Never - 1 Seldom - 2 Occasionally - 3 Frequent - 4 Always - 5

PERSONAL INVENTORY:

RESPONSE:

I conduct my work out of a place of rest instead of using rest as a way to cope with or recover from work.

I sleep at least 8 hours per night and arrange my schedule accordingly.

I engage in weekly activities that enable me to take joy and delight in the beauty of life and/or creation.

I am able to let go of my responsibilities when I leave work because I have learned to embrace my limitations and trust that the world and God's kingdom do not rest on my shoulders.

I engage in a regular 24-hour period of time in which I intentionally set aside work so I can stop, rest, delight, and worship.

I practice Sabbath as a counter-cultural act of resistance against the societal temptation to define me by what I do rather than who I am.

I am able to say "no" to requests and invitations from others rather than over-extending myself.

I do not derive a sense of my own value based on how heavy or light my schedule is.

My patterns of work and rest allow me to be fully present to others.

I arrange my week so that I can prepare for a day of rest in advance and avoid commerce on my sabbath (thus allowing others to rest as well).

Total Number:

We're going to remind you each week that this is a subjective tool designed to help you have a reference point with regard to how well rest features in your life with God at this particular moment. Your self-assessment doesn't speak to what God will do in the year ahead as you partner with the Spirit in the work of renewal.

You can use the total number from this assessment during week seven (see, **Charting your Path** p. 111). From that, you'll consider what invitation you sense from the Spirit about how to create an ordered path for the journey ahead.

SATURDAY: PRACTICES

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Matthew 11:28–30

Let’s be honest – an easy yoke and a light burden sounds great, right?

Taking Jesus up on the invitation, however, is a lot more complicated. We have demands coming at us all the time. If it’s not the demands of work, it’s the things around the house that need doing. We love our families, but there’s a lot of work involved in being a spouse, a parent, or a dutiful child. Becoming a person of rest cuts against the grain of our culture and our lifestyles, into the heart of our spirituality.

Over and against our culture of progress and burnout, the scriptures and the way of Jesus invite us to what Hebrews calls “a Sabbath rest for the people of God.” For all of us who are tired, weary, exhausted, and burned-out... there is for us a rest that is built into the fabric and rhythm of creation itself. On the Sabbath we are freed from progress and from our internal pharaohs. Sabbath is a rest that we can set our watches to, that we can build our lives around, and that will bring us into the rest we really need.

A companion to the practice of Sabbath is the daily act of slowing. In his book, *Three Mile an Hour God*, the Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama writes,

“God walks ‘slowly’ because he is love. If he is not love, he would have gone much faster. Love has its speed... It is a different kind of speed from the technological speed to which we

are accustomed. It goes on in the depth of our life, whether we notice or not, at three miles an hour. It is the speed we walk and therefore the speed the love of God walks.”

His words come as a healing balm in a culture always on the move. The art of slowing down helps us claim margin and relaxation in the rhythms of everyday life. In a culture that runs on adrenaline and caffeine, it’s easy to lull ourselves into the belief that simply ticking off all the appointments on our calendar is what matters most. But we all know the frustration of meeting with someone – whether a coffee appointment with a friend we haven’t seen in a while, or a business meeting with a new client – only to have that person feel a million miles away, distracted, and frantic. Slowing down reminds us that it’s better to be unavailable than it is to be inattentive.

The following are practices from the way of Jesus to help you become a person who is able to engage others from a place of restfulness.

PRACTICE: SABBATH

At heart, the practice of Sabbath keeping is about ordering our lives around a pattern of working six days and then resting on the seventh. It’s a way of arranging our lives to embrace our limits, the goodness of God, and all of the glory of creation, in order to calibrate our hearts toward grace. Here are some thoughts to get started.

STEP ONE: MARK OUT A 24 HOUR PERIOD.

There are a couple of ways to do this:

- The traditional Sabbath is from Sundown Friday Night to Sundown Saturday Night. This works well for people (like Church employees) who work on Sunday.
- Sunday Sabbath: from Sunday morning to Monday Morning. This is probably the best option for most people. Sundays tend to be calm and worship is already built into the rhythm.
- Midweek Sabbath: For those (such as healthcare workers) who have sporadic schedules.

STEP TWO: PICK A RITUAL TO MARK THE BEGINNING AND END OF YOUR SABBATH.

The Sabbath is a day set aside as holy. Choosing a grounding ritual to mark the time will help you settle into the rhythm. Some examples of how to begin:

- Light two candles: symbolic of the commands to “remember” and “observe” the Sabbath. Invite the Holy Spirit to inhabit your home and bring the gifts of peace, joy, hope, and rest.
- Begin the day with Scripture and Prayer. Consider using a book of prayer like Phylis Tickle’s *Eastertide*.
- If you begin at dinner time, mark the start of Sabbath by eating a meal with family and/or friends.
- If you begin Sunday Morning, start with Worship.

Some examples to end your Sabbath time:

- Read a Psalm or Vesper Liturgy
- Take a walk around your neighborhood.
- Spend some time in gratitude—whether by journaling or sharing thanks with family and friends.
- Engage in the prayer of examen, wherein you lift to God the places you were aware of His presence, where you felt anxious and what you would like to lift to God as you look forward to the week ahead.

STEP THREE: STOP, REST, DELIGHT, WORSHIP.

The Sabbath is a day to enjoy the gift of God’s presence. Stop doing the things that are life draining and lean into those which draw you into an awareness and appreciation of the Father. Be specific about what is life-giving to you—this could be baking a recipe you’ve been wanting to try, meeting up with a friend for a run or walk, reading on a cozy chair, or even just taking a nap.

PRACTICE: SLOWING

Slowing is a means of overcoming the inner hurriedness and addiction to busyness by intentionally choosing things that require a slower pace. The following are some daily habits that can help you gain a more restful posture over time.

STEP ONE: BEGIN MEETINGS WITH A MOMENT OF SILENCE.

- As you have co-workers or employees coming to or from other things, consider beginning by asking everyone to take a deep breath and create space to mentally leave behind whatever they are coming from so you can each be present for the topic at hand.

- If you are meeting with other followers of Jesus, invite them to place their concerns in God's hands—whatever hurry or distraction may be claiming their attention.
- After a moment of silence, let the group know you're ready to begin.

STEP TWO: INTENTIONALLY ENGAGE IN ACTIVITIES THAT REQUIRE A SLOWER PACE SO YOU CAN RELISH IN THE MOMENT IN AN AWARENESS OF GOD'S PRESENCE.

- Cook a meal at home instead of ordering take out.
- Choose to linger at the dinner table ten to fifteen minutes longer.
- Walk or ride a bike to a nearby location instead of driving your car.
- Drive to a grocery store on a side of town where people don't necessarily look like you.
- Take a bath instead of a shower.

STEP THREE: READ SLOWLY.

- Engage in the pleasure of reading for formation rather than information.
- Choose a paper-bound book instead of reading from a digital device. One isn't inherently superior to the other, however, reading on a device like a tablet or smartphone often lends itself to distraction.
- If you come across a word, phrase, image or idea, let it roll around in your mind for a bit.
- Offer that bit of reflection as a means of engaging in conversation with God about what you're reading. You may be surprised to find that God enjoys good literature as well.

W E E K 4

A COMMUNITY OF **ENGAGEMENT**
IN A CULTURE OF
DISTRACTION

SUNDAY: **REST**

“IN THE TORMENT OF THE INSUFFICIENCY OF EVERYTHING
ATTAINABLE, WE LEARN THAT ULTIMATELY IN THIS WORLD
THERE IS NO FINISHED SYMPHONY.”

KARL RAHNER, SERVANTS OF THE LORD

MAY GOD'S IMAGE IN ME BE RESTORED, AND MY
IMAGINATION IN GOD BE RE-STORIED.

MONDAY: REFLECTION

A few years ago Andrew Sullivan wrote a thoughtful article in the *New Yorker* called “I Used to Be a Human Being” about, what he termed, “distraction sickness.” He begins his article checking-in to a spiritual retreat center for a technology detox. He describes the cocktail of panic, guilt, and embarrassment he felt when asked to give up his smart phone for the duration of the retreat.

He had sensed a personal crash in the works for about a year stemming from constant immersion in news, hot-takes, images, memes, tweets, breaking stories, and the endless carousel of deadlines. Life had become a “cacophonous crowd of words and images, sounds and ideas, emotions and tirades—a wind tunnel of deafening, deadening noise.” Sullivan summarizes the problem he, and we, face, “The threat is to our souls. At this rate, if the noise does not relent, we might even forget we have any.”

Sound familiar? The milieu of distraction and addiction robs us of the ability to be present—present to God, present to others, present to all that is good and beautiful and true. And even to be present to our souls.

At the beginning of Mark’s gospel, Mark tells the story of Jesus’ baptism. When Jesus comes out of the water, the heavens are torn open and a voice from the Father says, “This is my son in whom I am well pleased.” It’s a significant moment, for sure. But it’s more than an emotional or spiritual high. It’s the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry.

So, what is the very next thing Mark records? “At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan.” The first thing Jesus does after receiving the blessing of the Father is retreat into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan.

In some ways the wilderness is a character in the gospels. In Greek, the word for “wilderness” is **eremos**, and it can mean simultaneously: uncultivated, unpopulated, desolate, deserted, barren, solitary, and lonely. It is the place that provides needed quiet, freedom from disturbance and distraction.

It may seem that Jesus' temptation in the wilderness comes when he is most vulnerable. After 40 days, he is hungry, weak, and lonely and must confront the great enemies of the soul: the world, the flesh, and the devil. But read it again. The **eremos** isn't the place of weakness for Jesus, it's the place of his greatest strength. The place where, in silence and solitude, he receives from the father. And after forty days in the **eremos** the trio of temptations don't stand a chance.

Throughout the gospels, the busier Jesus got, the more he pulled away in silence and solitude. We tend to work the other way around. Things get busy, people and needs amplify, and quiet is the first thing to go, instead of the first thing we go to. But in silence and solitude we leave behind people and noise to be present with God.

We enter into the presence of God not to retreat from the world, but to retreat for the world. Because the inverse is not activity but reactivity. The opposite of a contemplative life is to be sucked into the vortex of urgency, not importance. We pull away in order to engage.

What if what the world needs most from us is simply a community of people who are emotionally alive and spiritually awake? What if our calling is to be present and offer an alternative to the chaos of the overbusy, digitally distracted, noisy, urban world? What if what our community needs most is people who can carry the **eremos** with them wherever they go?

TUESDAY: PRAYER FOR THE DAY

Here I am, Lord.

Tired, distracted, short on time, pulled in lots of directions.

Here I am, Lord.

Desirous of you—of your presence, your guidance, your patience, your love.

Here I am, Lord.

Slow down my spirit to be still. To rest in you.

Here I am, Lord.

In this house, on this street, at this church, in this city, with this family, near these neighbors.

Here I am, Lord.

Show me where you're moving where I already am. Remind me that I do not need to seek out places to serve in the world so much as I need my eyes to be opened to the people and situations you are placing in front of me.

Here I am, Lord.

Use my specific gifts, passions, callings. Help me to pay attention to the things that make me feel alive and the things that break my heart, and how you might have me lean into those places.

Here I am, Lord.

Thank you for this particular, unique life. (List tangible blessings or whatever you feel grateful for at this moment.)

Here I am, Lord.

Keep me focused on the people and tasks in front of me. Keep me from crowding my calendar so much that I don't have space or margin or energy to do your will. Keep me from the numbing distraction of screens.

Here I am, Lord.

Center me. Give me discernment to let go of the things that are not mine this season and energy to pick up the things that are.

Here I am, Lord.

May I be present to you this day. May I be present to myself this day. May I be present to others this day.

Here I am, Lord.

WEDNESDAY: REFLECTION QUESTIONS

We are constantly awash in the buzz, ding, haptic, or chime of digital devices letting us know that some new bit of information or communication or appointment awaits us. On the whole this allows us to live more organized and punctual lives (does anyone have an excuse to be late to anything anymore when google tells you not only that you have a coffee date, but also how long it will take and which route is fastest to get there?). Yet how often is it the case that the very devices that allow you to arrange your life to be with others also keep poking at you and pulling your attention from the person you've ostensibly arranged your schedule to be with. The milieu of distraction and addiction is robbing us of the ability to be present. Though it's a bit dated, Nicolas Carr's research on the effect the digital world has on our brains offers a compelling image. In his book, *The Shallows*, Carr writes:

What the Net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation. Whether I'm online or not, my mind now expects to take in information the way the Net distributes it: in a swiftly moving stream of particles. Once I was a scuba diver in the sea of words. Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski.¹

In our spiritual lives, growth is often slow-going and hard to sustain. If the constant stream of distractions keep us from engaging with each other, this will undoubtedly have implications for our life with God. It's not simply our devices that keep us from being engaged—they're just an obvious example—we are distracted by the pressure to receive our sense of being from what we do, from how others perceive us, from what we have or what we know. In all of these things we can get lost and pulled away from engaging with the God who created us to be present to Him.

Read the following scripture passage and reflect on the following questions with the last year or so of your life in mind.

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 4:1-11

4:¹ Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

⁴ Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:

“He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”

⁷ Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

EXPLORING YOUR JOURNEY:

- What are the principle things in your life that distract you from deep engagement with God? What do you notice about yourself when you are distracted?
- As you reflect upon your life, how has God shaped you through regular rhythms of engagement via silence, solitude, and stillness? What have you noticed God do in your life as a result of these practices?
- To those of you for whom the enneagram has been a helpful tool in your self-understanding, take a look at the lists on the following page and note where your internal narratives may be steering you and how the practices of silence, stillness, and solitude provide an avenue of engagement. How do the lists line up with your experience?

CORE NARRATIVE BY ENNEAGRAM TYPE:

(Adapted from *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, by Pete Scazzero)

- I am what I do/do not do (8, 9, 1)
- I am what I have/know/experience (5, 6, 7)
- I am what other people say about me/don't say about me (2, 3, 4)

DIAGNOSTIC BY ENNEAGRAM TYPE:

1. Good/Perfect/Person of Integrity – Rest in Stillness
2. Needed/Helpful/Caring – Consent to Solitude
3. Successful/Seen/Affirmed – Engage in Solitude
4. Special/Set Apart/Fulfilled – Rest in Solitude
5. Knowledgeable/Perceptive/Autonomous – Consent to Silence
6. Sure/Certain/Prepared – Engage in Silence
7. Happy/Feel Good Feelings/Avoid Pain & Sadness – Rest in Silence
8. Strong/Powerful/In Control – Consent to Stillness
9. Peaceful/Nice/Avoid Confrontation & Disruption – Engage in Stillness

TELLING YOUR STORY:

Reflect on the answers you gave above and then use the prompts below to craft a story you feel comfortable sharing with your community group.

- In the last year, name one way you've grown in your ability to prioritize your life with God. How has this affected/improved your relationship with others?
- Has setting aside time, free from distraction, to engage your spiritual life with Christ become a regular rhythm of your life, or is this an area in which you struggle?
- What is one thing you're beginning to understand about yourself?

- What invitation do you hear from Jesus to help you order your life in such a way that you might be more receptive to experiencing God's grace and extending grace to others?

THURSDAY: *LECTIO DIVINA*

(Adapted from Sacred Rhythms by Ruth Haley Barton)

Lectio Divina (translated “divine or sacred reading”) is a meditative approach to scripture that allows us to listen to God’s voice spoken to us in the present moment through the written Word. The practice of *lectio divina* consists of four stages. It is rooted in the conviction that through the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures are indeed alive and active as we engage them for spiritual transformation.

Read and move slowly through each of the movements. Before reading, it’s essential that you prepare to meet with God: this may mean turning off digital devices or other things that call for your attention. Get comfortable in a quiet, solitary place. Still your body and your mind before God as a means of preparing your heart to receive the grace God has spoken through scripture. Finally, invite the Holy Spirit to guide your thinking and feeling as you read.

READ: LISTEN FOR THE WORD OR PHRASE THAT IS ADDRESSED TO YOU.

As you read the passage for the first time, listen for a word or phrase that strikes you or catches your attention. You may read silently or you may find it helpful to read out loud. Allow the words to sink in and settle into your heart. Be content to listen simply and openly, without judging or analyzing.

REFLECT: HOW IS MY LIFE TOUCHED BY THIS WORD?

Read the passage again and listen for the way the passage connects with your life. Ask, what is it in my life right now that needs to hear this word? Explore thoughts, perceptions and sensory impressions. If the passage is a story, put yourself in the scene.

RESPOND: WHAT IS MY RESPONSE TO GOD BASED ON WHAT I HAVE READ AND ENCOUNTERED?

Read the passage again, listening for your own deepest and truest response. Enter into a personal dialog with God sharing with God the feelings the text has brought up. Pay attention to any sense that God is inviting you to act or to respond to the word you have heard.

REST: REST IN THE WORD OF GOD.

In this final reading you are invited to release and return to a place of rest in God. You have given your response its full expression, so now you can move into a time of waiting and resting in God's presence.

SCRIPTURE: ROMANS 12:1-2 (MSG)

12¹⁻² So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

FRIDAY: PERSONAL INVENTORY

As you complete the assessment, avoid rushing. Listen for the Spirit’s voice to encourage and challenge you. Consider these questions as one-on-one time with God. Be honest and intentional in how you are growing in the image of Jesus. Use the scale below to respond to each statement.

Never - 1 Seldom - 2 Occasionally - 3 Frequent - 4 Always - 5

PERSONAL INVENTORY:	RESPONSE:
I regularly schedule time alone in prayer so I can live out of an abiding relationship with God.	
When I become anxious or hurried, I intentionally practice slowing down to be with God as a way to refocus and recenter.	
I spend at least two hours per week in which I am silent before God and others so I can hear.	
In my prayer life, I spend as much time listening to God as I do talking to God.	
Others would describe me as patient and open to interruption.	
I maintain intentional spiritual rhythms and practices that enable me to enjoy God regardless of the expectations and demands around me.	
I am routinely aware of and think about God during my waking hours – at work or at home and while doing routine tasks such as errands, exercising, eating, being with friends and family, etc.	
Setting aside digital devices for long periods of time does not cause me to be anxious or worried or fear that I am missing out.	
I regularly spend time free from distraction in order to become still in God’s presence.	
I remain confident of God’s love and provision even in the difficult seasons of life.	
Total Number:	

Your weekly reminder that this only meant to provide a baseline by which to determine how regularly (or how deeply) you engage with God through intentional practices at this stage in your apprenticeship to Jesus. We have to be realistic about the stage of life we're in. If young kids are in the house, someone is not experiencing silence and solitude on the regular. Go easy on yourself!

You can use the total number from this assessment during week seven (see, **Charting your Path** p. III). From that, you'll consider what invitation you sense from the Spirit about how to create an ordered path for the journey ahead.

SATURDAY: PRACTICES

“Solitude is the furnace of transformation...[It] is the place of the great struggle and the great encounter—the struggle against the compulsions of the false self, and the encounter with the loving God who offers himself as the substance of the new self.”

Henri Nouwen, The Way of the Heart

Throughout his ministry Jesus regularly retreated to quiet places, away from the demands of the crowds in order to hear the voice of the Father. This wasn't a way of permanently detaching from the world or because he resented the fact that people needed him so much—he pursued silence and solitude to gain what he would need to fully engage in the places that were broken. Ultimately Jesus withdrew to receive from the Father so he could bring about the restoration of shalom wherever he went.

As followers of Jesus practitioners of his way, we need no less. Spiritual formation is about growing in the likeness of our rabbi for the sake of others. Silence and solitude are an invitation to enter a space that allows us to be free from the clutter and noise that is constantly distracting us from our calling. Only when the noise around us and the noise within us comes to stillness will we hear the voice of God. Solitude and silence are basic needs of the human spirit. They form the environment for listening and speaking to God. Solitude isn't about being alone, it's about being alone with God. Silence is more than not speaking, it's about listening to God.

To grow as a person of engagement, you'll need to create intentional rhythms of silence and solitude. In that space you learn how to set aside the need to be productive or to perform. The great challenge you'll face is in trying to distance yourself from the need to measure the effectiveness of this time by tying it to a kind of epiphany or moment of clarity. It's a practice, not a product. Most of what happens in silence and solitude is up to God.

PRACTICE: SILENCE

In silence, God molds us in his image by freeing us from the noise and compulsions that constantly seek to tie our value to external, demonstrable things. All of the spiritual practices are done in the spirit of “...as you are able.” When it comes to silence, the invitation is to set aside as much time as you can in a quiet place where you’re not distracted by other things: a familiar park bench where you can sit alone, a quiet room before family are awake. As relaxing as music can be, or as edifying as a good book can be, it’s important to set these things aside so you can come to a place of stillness.

You may find it helpful to begin this time by relaxing and paying attention to your breathing. Your mind will wander—that’s simply part of our humanity. The invitation is to trust that God is present in the wandering and on the other side of it.

PRACTICE: SOLITUDE

Closely related to carving out regular periods of time for silence is the practice of solitude. While silence can be practiced in proximity to others, solitude is an intentional withdrawal from others or their influence so that you can place yourself in the presence of God.

For some of you this will require a weekend away or perhaps getting up an hour or two earlier than usual—Jesus employed both tactics. Regardless of how the time alone with God comes, consider that God is as near to you as your next breath. Let the following questions guide your time.

- What do you want God to show you about Himself?
- If you find your mind wandering to the concerns of the day, ask God what He would like to see happen with those concerns?
- Ask God to reveal who you are in Him.

W E E K 5

A COMMUNITY OF **CONTRIBUTION**
IN A CULTURE OF
CONSUMPTION

SUNDAY: **REST**

“ONLY IN STOPPING, REALLY STOPPING, DO WE TEACH OUR HEARTS AND SOULS THAT WE ARE LOVED APART FROM WHAT WE DO. THE SABBATH TEACHES GRACE BECAUSE IT INVITES US TO REST AND REJOICE IN WHAT WE HAVE, RATHER THAN FOCUS ON WHAT WE DO NOT HAVE. THE SABBATH INVITES US TO PRACTICE THANKFULNESS.”

LYNNE BAAB, SABBATH KEEPING

MAY THE GRAVITY OF MATERIAL THINGS BE LIGHTENED, AND THE RELATIVITY OF TIME SLOW DOWN.

MONDAY: REFLECTION

In 2007, the market research firm Yankelovich estimated that a person living in a city sees over 4000 advertisements a day. Less than 15 years later, the number is more than double. Up to 10,000 times a day someone attempts to shape your desires so you will buy, borrow, and consume their products.

The philosopher James K.A. Smith calls this cultural power of formation “cultural liturgies.” As Smith puts it, “these cultural liturgies aren’t just something that you do; they do something to you.” Mass marketing and media, as well as other cultural rhythms, do not aim to change what we believe as much as to shape what we love. Because they know “you are what you love.” If we love the new product, the next release, the upcoming update, we become more committed consumers. The endless propaganda of “more” begins to shape the way we view work and how we use the gifts God has given us.

The #blessed life of our social media feeds hooks us with a vision of the good life based on endless consumption and boundless desire. However, the life of blessing within God’s community follows a very different storyline. In Genesis 12, the Lord appears to seventy-five year old Abram in northern Mesopotamia. He promises blessing to Abram: “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great.” As we see from Abram’s story this blessing includes land, people, and wealth. However, this blessing was not intended for Abram alone. The Lord continues, “so that you will be a blessing.” God’s purpose in blessing Abram was so he would be a conduit of blessing to others.

Perhaps this is one of the problems with our culture of consumption. It has a broad inlet and a small outlet. If you’ve ever visited the Dead Sea in Israel you understand what happens when water flows in but no water flows out. It creates an environment conducive to a good float, but not to a good life (or any life at all).

As a community shaped by a vision of God’s kingdom, one of the ways we tell a different story in a culture of consumption is by seeing how what we’ve been given is an opportunity for us to give away. We look for ways to serve, to give generously, to be a blessing to others, to see our gifts as a way to

contribute to the flourishing of our community, our neighborhoods, and our city.

The disciples James and John tried to talk Jesus into blessing them with seats of honor at his right and left hand. Jesus's response was counter to his culture and to our own. "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them . . . But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant" (Mk 10:42,43). Greatness in Jesus' kingdom is not measured in an honored position or secure blessings, but in the degree to which those blessings are given away in service to others.

Of course, these were not just words for Jesus. This was the life he lived and the death he died. The Blessed One, the very Son of God, wore a crown of thorns. And on the cross he ascended, his side was pierced from which flowed the blood and water that bring life to all who follow him.

What kind of community could we be if we were defined more by our contribution than our consumption? What gifts and blessings has God given to our community so they can flow out to our neighbors in Decatur, in Tucker, in Clarkston, in Atlanta?

TUESDAY: PRAYER FOR THE DAY

O Lord,
How easy it is to exist for myself.
How easy to believe the lie
that I am the center of the universe
and everyone around me is just the supporting cast.

Some days I am too selfish to look outward.
Other days even if I want to, I have no margin,
busy treading the churning waters of my own life
with no capacity to worry about anyone else.

But what kind of life is a life lived solely for myself?

I cannot ignore your teachings
that if I seek to find my life, I must lose it,
that the first will be last,
that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Pry open my clenched fingers
and remind me
We only lose what we cling to.

May I be willing
to be inconvenienced and interrupted.
May I take joy in opportunities
to offer love, to contribute, to give of myself to another.

Give me a heart to serve the world around me,
and use my hands to accomplish your purposes.

WEDNESDAY: REFLECTION QUESTIONS

“During the year 1957, I experienced, by the grace of God, a spiritual awakening which was to lead me to a richer, fuller, more productive life. At that time, in gratitude, I humbly asked to be given the means and privilege to make others happy through music. I feel this has been granted through His grace. ALL PRAISE TO GOD...

This album is a humble offering to Him. An attempt to say ‘THANK YOU, GOD’ through our work, even as we do in our hearts and with our tongues.”

—*John Coltrane, from the liner notes of “A Love Supreme”*

In our culture, work is often seen as little more than a means to an end. Often that end is tied up in a vision of life based on acquisition and leisure. We are told that chasing the good life will make us happy, but the enjoyment we receive from shiny new things and experiences seldom lasts.

The way of Jesus, on the other hand, calls us to create space—in our schedules, in our homes, in our finances—for what really matters. The vision of the Bible, from the beginning to the end, is about stewardship of our whole lives; partnering with God for the flourishing of creation. As Coltrane noted in the quote above, work done from a posture of gratitude becomes a tangible way of loving others. Joy is linked to generosity; in the logic of the kingdom, we receive it not by amassing more for ourselves, but by giving ourselves away—like Jesus—for the flourishing of our neighbors, our church, our community.

Read the scripture passage on the following page and reflect on the following questions with the last year or so of your life in mind.

SCRIPTURE: GENESIS 1:26-29; 2:8-15

1:26 Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

27 So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

29 Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.

2:8 Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.⁹ The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰ A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters.¹¹ The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold.¹² (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.)¹³ The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush.¹⁴ The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

EXPLORING YOUR JOURNEY:

- In what ways are you able to see your work as a way of helping others flourish?
- As you reflect upon your life, how has God shaped you through acts of service and generosity toward others?
- Is generosity part of your current financial practice? How does giving money away affect you?

- Have you noticed any correlation in your own life between how much you own and how content you are? What are one or two ways you know a lack of contentment is contributing to consumption in your life? What are those areas?
- As you look over the last month (or two), how are you using the gifts God has given you to serve your family, your neighbors, your church community, and the broader community? How has using your gifts challenged and changed you?

TELLING YOUR STORY:

Review and reflect on the answers you gave above and then use the prompts below to craft a story that you feel comfortable sharing with your community group.

- Has giving generously out of the gifts and resources God has given you become a regular rhythm of your life, or is this an area in which you struggle?
- In the last year, how has God shaped your practice of giving? Are you giving more or less of your income? Is the time that you are giving to others producing good fruit in your life?
- What is one thing you're beginning to understand about yourself with regard to your contribution?
- What invitation do you hear from Jesus to help you order your life in such a way that you might be more receptive to using the blessings you have been given to be a blessing to others?

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THURSDAY: *LECTIO DIVINA*

(Adapted from Sacred Rhythms by Ruth Haley Barton)

Lectio Divina (translated “divine or sacred reading”) is a meditative approach to scripture that allows us to listen to God’s voice spoken to us in the present moment through the written Word. The practice of *lectio divina* consists of four stages. It is rooted in the conviction that through the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures are indeed alive and active as we engage them for spiritual transformation.

Read and move slowly through each of the movements. Before reading, it’s essential that you prepare to meet with God: this may mean turning off digital devices or other things that call for your attention. Get comfortable in a quiet, solitary place. Still your body and your mind before God as a means of preparing your heart to receive the grace God has spoken through scripture. Finally, invite the Holy Spirit to guide your thinking and feeling as you read.

READ: LISTEN FOR THE WORD OR PHRASE THAT IS ADDRESSED TO YOU.

As you read the passage for the first time, listen for a word or phrase that strikes you or catches your attention. You may read silently or you may find it helpful to read out loud. Allow the words to sink in and settle into your heart. Be content to listen simply and openly, without judging or analyzing.

REFLECT: HOW IS MY LIFE TOUCHED BY THIS WORD?

Read the passage again and listen for the way the passage connects with your life. Ask, what is it in my life right now that needs to hear this word? Explore thoughts, perceptions and sensory impressions. If the passage is a story, put yourself in the scene.

RESPOND: WHAT IS MY RESPONSE TO GOD BASED ON WHAT I HAVE READ AND ENCOUNTERED?

Read the passage again, listening for your own deepest and truest response. Enter into a personal dialog with God sharing with God the feelings the text has brought up. Pay attention to any sense that God is inviting you to act or to respond to the word you have heard.

REST: REST IN THE WORD OF GOD.

In this final reading you are invited to release and return to a place of rest in God. You have given your response its full expression, so now you can move into a time of waiting and resting in God's presence.

SCRIPTURE: 1 PETER 4:8-11

⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

FRIDAY: PERSONAL INVENTORY

As you complete the assessment, avoid rushing. Listen for the Spirit’s voice to encourage and challenge you. Consider these questions as one-on-one time with God. Be honest and intentional in how you are growing in the image of Jesus. Use the scale below to respond to each statement.

Never - 1 Seldom - 2 Occasionally - 3 Frequent - 4 Always - 5

PERSONAL INVENTORY:	RESPONSE:
I am aware of my unique gifts and abilities and take joy in using them for the glory of God and the help of others.	
I see my work as a calling and am able to bring my full presence and a motivation of love to ordinary tasks as a means of participating in Christ’s renewal of all things.	
I recognize that all I have and all I am comes from God and I feel compelled by gratitude to use everything I have for the sake of the kingdom.	
I freely recognize and celebrate the gifts of others without defensiveness or envy.	
With regard to possessions and acquisition, I experience a great deal of contentment.	
I am able to recognize the different situations where my unique skills and personality may be a help or a hindrance to others.	
I take great joy in using my money to meet the needs of others.	
I enjoy and seek out ways to use my gifts as a way of coming alongside people who are underserved and in significant need.	
I feel more free, more happy, more content, more in the inner-life of God as I learn to give more of my finances and my time to others.	
I intentionally choose a life of simplicity so I can be free to give to others, particularly those who are poor or in need.	
Total Number:	

Weighing the demands on our time and resources is one of the biggest challenges in our culture. There's never enough time and the cultural liturgies that shape us are powerful. Remember, we're only ever aware of how we're being shaped above the surface. God is present in ways we don't yet see.

You can use the total number from this assessment during week seven (see, **Charting your Path** p. 111). From that, you'll consider what invitation you sense from the Spirit about how to create an ordered path for the journey ahead.

SATURDAY: PRACTICES

“God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another... I have a part in a great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall love as Christ loved, I shall do his work.”

John Henry Newman, Meditations and Devotions

Contribution is about more than our things, it involves giving of ourselves in terms of our skills, resources, and personality for the flourishing of others. There’s a concept in Hebrew known as **kavanah**. It refers to an act done with holy intent. **Kavanah** is when we bring our full selves and a posture of grace and excellence to our work or any ordinary task in order to reveal the glory of God latent in creation.

The earliest narratives of the Bible reveal a God whose desire for creation is that humans will become partners in its cultivation and flourishing. This is at the heart of becoming a community of contribution. We are called to give to the world what we have received from our God. In this respect, two practices that help orient our hearts toward God’s desire for the world are service and generosity.

PRACTICE: SERVICE

Jesus steps into creation “as one who serves” (Luke 22:27). He teaches his disciples that service is at the heart of the kingdom and how the world discovers the heart of God. We are the means God uses to bless the world. The primary ways we do this are through the daily work we undertake to contribute to the flourishing of others, caring for the poor and vulnerable outside the church, and building one another up in faith. On the following page are just a few avenues by which you can participate in God’s work.

SERVE THOSE CLOSE TO YOU.

For the next two weeks, ask your spouse, a co-worker, children “What can I do to make your life easier today?” Then do it. In your conversations with God, tell him what this is like.

SERVE WITH ALL SOULS MISSION PARTNERS.

Participating in a service project with others places us on a level playing field and unites in a common purpose. Serving others also exposes us to people with gifts and sensibilities quite different from our own, and enlarges our heart toward others. We have a few mission trip opportunities coming up in the near future as well as some local mission partners with regular opportunities to receive your contribution.

SIGN UP ON OUR VOLUNTEER BOARD.

Every apprentice of Jesus is a minister of the gospel. It takes all kinds of gifts to make the church flourish. Consider aligning your passion with our needs.

SERVE THROUGH YOUR VOCATION.

The work we do matters to God, as does the posture with which we do it.

PRACTICE: GENEROSITY

Another way we contribute to the flourishing of the world is through giving our resources. The Biblical principle of stewardship recognizes that nothing we possess really belongs to us. We hold things in trust for God. Choosing lives of simplicity and generosity ensures that our possessions don't possess us; it frees us from an entitlement mentality and the need to impress others with what we have. While there are many ways to give, below are a few suggestions to consider.

GIVE A PERCENTAGE OF YOUR INCOME.

Instead of a dollar amount, consider choosing a portion of your earnings. If you are not currently giving anything, consider giving one or two percent of your pre-tax income. Talk with God about the mission and ministry of All Souls or our mission partners, a non-profit or para-church that is doing good work and give as you are led. As your income rises and falls, give accordingly. Increase the percentage as you earn more or as your expenses decrease.

GIVE TO PEOPLE.

Take a look at those who are regularly in and out of your life. What responsibility do you feel for their needs? Is there a student you know for whom the expenses of college may be overwhelming? A young couple just starting out who may not have the free income to pay for a babysitter? How can you be a source of blessing and provision to someone you know?

SIMPLIFY YOUR SPENDING.

Living simply reminds us that our needs are much smaller than our desires. Spending less on things we don't need frees up resources for others in need.

- Choose a few areas in which you would like to practice letting go (consider going through your closet/garage, etc. and giving away items you haven't used in a year). Allow the experience of giving things away frame your mindset when it comes to purchasing new things.
- Bring a sack lunch to work two days a week. Put the savings in a jar and give it away over time.
- Consider downsizing your next vehicle purchase instead of trading up.

Often when it comes to giving, we can feel paralyzed by the weight of obligation. If it's at all possible, take the "ought" out of the equation and simply ask, how might giving generously bring joy to myself and to others?

W E E K 6

A COMMUNITY OF **RECONCILIATION**
IN A CULTURE OF
DIVISION

SUNDAY: **REST**

“THE SEVENTH DAY IS LIKE A PALACE IN TIME WITH A KINGDOM FOR ALL. IT IS NOT A DATE BUT AN ATMOSPHERE.”

ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL, THE SABBATH

MAY GOD'S WORD FEED ME AND HIS SPIRIT LEAD ME INTO THE WEEK AND INTO THE LIFE TO COME.

MONDAY: REFLECTION

The Slovenian philosopher and cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek claims that “the world runs on antagonism.” One need look no further than one’s own social media feed to see the merits of his argument. More than at any point in recent memory, it seems there is no shortage of people today looking to harness the animosity of a crowd and weaponize anger toward an object or a group. Some of this drive is rooted in a place of righteous anger at the callousness with which legitimate grievance has been disregarded. Other times the origin is more base; it arises from the naked lust for political, cultural, or ideological power.

Irrespective of the cause, it seems that conversations about the weighty moral and ethical matters of life have become interminable. We talk to each other across a yawning gap in coded language that those on the other side don’t understand. And then we ridicule the other side for their lack of understanding in an attempt to score points with our team. Gathering divided people for a common cause seems like a fantasy, so we descend to the tribal. While it feels safe in the moment, the group that gathers in antagonism will always look for another episode of rage in order to justify the fight. Eventually it will turn on itself. Without true reconciliation and setting things right, things will only get worse.

What does it take to build a community of reconciliation?

In our cultural moment the divisions are often manifest in our differences, whether those are due to class, political affiliation, religious, or ethnic background. These distinctions can be small and insignificant (cue Dr. Suess’ Sneetches with “stars upon thars”), but they can also underscore important gospel or justice issues, such as the legacy of racialized oppression in the United States. But what if division is primarily spiritual in nature? Writing to the church in Ephesus, Paul reminds the fledgling Christian community that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (6:12). There is a spiritual substructure to every division and every lie we pursue in perpetuation of creating “flesh and blood” whom we treat as “other.” As followers of Jesus, we are called to distinguish between that which is good, true, and beautiful and the world, flesh, and the devil

that opposes them. We become true to our faith in the process of pursuing reconciliation in our community.

One of the most fascinating paragraphs in the Bible is one you might usually skim through. Each synoptic gospel—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—includes a list of Jesus’ disciples (Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:14-19, and Luke 6:13-16). These lists include people you would never expect to find in the same room, much less traveling together and sharing their meals. There is an anti-government Zealot and a Roman collaborator. There are working-class laborers and small-business owners with dreams of greatness. There is a hard-headed theologian who should doubt himself more. There is a doubting skeptic who should trust Jesus more. Jesus’ disciples were a diverse bunch. And this doesn’t even include the diversity in the early church that followed Pentecost (see Acts 2:8-11 and 13:1).

What held these followers together in spite of their differences? It was the clarity of who they were following. Jesus said, “Follow me,” and they followed. Give the disciples a theology quiz anytime during those first three years and there would have been a lot of divergence (and much of what they would have agreed upon would have been wrong!). Give them a political survey and it would have revealed strong opposition. They had reasons for division and yet they came together, united in their following of Jesus.

When we focus on following Jesus we develop a strong center and soft edges. When Jesus is the most important thing to us, other things (which are often sources of division) become less important. As we follow Jesus, he leads us to share a meal with those across traditional dividing lines. We show hospitality to the stranger. We find ourselves in a diverse company of Jesus followers as well as those who are yet to follow Jesus and those who maybe never will.

Jesus calls his church to experience reconciliation to teach the world what it takes to be united. He makes a disparate group of disciples into marvelous, cooperative, collaborative children of his Father. He does this through the meal we share as his body. He does this through the meals we share as a body. He does this through the ministry of reconciliation he has called us to participate in (2 Cor 5:18).

TUESDAY: PRAYER FOR THE DAY

God, there are so many broken places
and hurting people
in the world;
so much division and strife,
injustice and oppression.
Disagreements and blind eyes and hardened hearts,
even within the so-called church.

O, that we would be a people
who offer radical acceptance and fierce love,
who act justly and love mercy
and walk humbly with you.
Not merely in name, but in spirit and in truth.

Fling open wide the doors of our church.
Expand our vision for your kingdom.
Remind us of the value you place on every individual,
and give us an openness to seek out common ground
over differences.

You first reconcile us to you through Jesus,
and then you invite us to participate in the mission
of bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth
of renewing all things
of entering into rocky, barren places
and cultivating new life.

May we be instruments of your peace.

May we go out into the world
and widen the circle of our family.

WEDNESDAY: REFLECTION QUESTIONS

“Justice is what love looks like in public, just like tenderness is what love feels like in private.”

—*Cornell West, April 2011 speech at Howard University*

There is a depressingly relentless news cycle of political enmity within nations and militarized conflict between the cultures and regions of the world. Just recently, the collapse of Haiti and the escalating tension between China and Taiwan. More locally, we’ve seen profound racialized injustice evidenced by the neglect of infrastructure in places like Flint and Jackson. There’s constant suspicion and separation between the various communities in our nation—be they between non-white and white, rich and poor, right-wing and left-wing, or urban elites and rural working class. The list is endless.

How is lasting peace –what the Old Testament calls *shalom*– even possible in a world so divided? As impossible as it sounds, this is the new humanity that Christ makes possible. We see glimpses of it if we have eyes to see. Palestians who once fought for liberation now join with Israelis in distributing bread in the West Bank because they have become reconciled in Christ. Once they were enemies who wished for each other’s destruction, but now they are brothers and sisters united in a common cause, under the reign of a common Lord.

Reconciliation marks the presence of God’s community in the world. Where there is no reconciliation, there is no gospel. Paul goes so far as to call Christians ambassadors of Christ’s work in the world. As representatives of the new humanity in Jesus, we are called to till the ground in places where strife, injustice, and brokenness reign and allow the seeds of the kingdom to break through. This is only possible because Christ first reconciles us to himself. Reconciliation isn’t an achievement on our part, it flows out of a relationship with Jesus.

SCRIPTURE: 2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-6:2

¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

6:¹ As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. ² For he says,

"In the time of my favor I heard you,
and in the day of salvation I helped you."

I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

EXPLORING YOUR JOURNEY:

- Paul uses the image of an ambassador to describe the role of Jesus' apprentices in the world. What does that image mean to you? In what ways do you function as an ambassador?
- How specifically have you been called to join Christ's "ministry of reconciliation"? What are you currently doing that would be considered part of the work of reconciliation - be it working for racial justice, giving voice to the voiceless, working for those who are poor and marginalized, caring for the orphan and the widow?
- As you look upon your life graph and reflect upon your journey to this point, when have you experienced the healing that comes from being reconciled to someone? How does that help you have an image of what Paul is describing?

Take some time to consider and pray through what your next step in joining Christ's work of reconciliation might be, and what God is inviting you into in this season of your life. Remember, aim to start where you are, not where you think you "should" be.

TELLING YOUR STORY:

Reflect on the answers you gave above and then use the prompts below to craft a story that you feel comfortable sharing with your community group. As you begin, remember that reconciliation is an accomplishment given to us through the cross of Jesus, not a result of your work. The work you do flows out of the reconciliation he has accomplished.

- In the last year, how has God shaped your understanding of reconciliation and/or your ability to engage in the ministry of reconciliation? What obstacles and aids have you found along the journey?
- What is one thing you're beginning to understand about yourself?
- What invitation do you hear from Jesus to help you order your life in such a way that you might be more receptive to partnering with the Spirit in Christ's reconciling work?

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THURSDAY: *LECTIO DIVINA*

(Adapted from Sacred Rhythms by Ruth Haley Barton)

Lectio Divina (translated “divine or sacred reading”) is a meditative approach to scripture that allows us to listen to God’s voice spoken to us in the present moment through the written Word. The practice of *lectio divina* consists of four stages. It is rooted in the conviction that through the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures are indeed alive and active as we engage them for spiritual transformation.

Read and move slowly through each of the movements. Before reading, it’s essential that you prepare to meet with God: this may mean turning off digital devices or other things that call for your attention. Get comfortable in a quiet, solitary place. Still your body and your mind before God as a means of preparing your heart to receive the grace God has spoken through scripture. Finally, invite the Holy Spirit to guide your thinking and feeling as you read.

READ: LISTEN FOR THE WORD OR PHRASE THAT IS ADDRESSED TO YOU.

As you read the passage for the first time, listen for a word or phrase that strikes you or catches your attention. You may read silently or you may find it helpful to read out loud. Allow the words to sink in and settle into your heart. Be content to listen simply and openly, without judging or analyzing.

REFLECT: HOW IS MY LIFE TOUCHED BY THIS WORD?

Read the passage again and listen for the way the passage connects with your life. Ask, what is it in my life right now that needs to hear this word? Explore thoughts, perceptions and sensory impressions. If the passage is a story, put yourself in the scene.

RESPOND: WHAT IS MY RESPONSE TO GOD BASED ON WHAT I HAVE READ AND ENCOUNTERED?

Read the passage again, listening for your own deepest and truest response. Enter into a personal dialog with God sharing with God the feelings the text has brought up. Pay attention to any sense that God is inviting you to act or to respond to the word you have heard.

REST: REST IN THE WORD OF GOD.

In this final reading you are invited to release and return to a place of rest in God. You have given your response its full expression, so now you can move into a time of waiting and resting in God's presence.

SCRIPTURE: EPHESIANS 2:14-22 (NLT)

¹⁴ For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. ¹⁵ He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. ¹⁶ Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.

¹⁷ He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near. ¹⁸ Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.

¹⁹ So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. ²⁰ Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. ²¹ We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. ²² Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

FRIDAY: PERSONAL INVENTORY

As you complete the assessment, avoid rushing. Listen for the Spirit's voice to encourage and challenge you. Consider these questions as one-on-one time with God. Be honest and intentional in how you are growing in the image of Jesus. Use the scale below to respond to each statement.

Never - 1 Seldom - 2 Occasionally - 3 Frequent - 4 Always - 5

PERSONAL INVENTORY:	RESPONSE:
I intentionally pursue the presence of <i>shalom</i> in the places I have influence instead of settling for the presence of artificial harmony.	
I intentionally seek out mutual relationships with people who think, act, dress, look, and/or believe differently from me because I value the image of God in them.	
I reflect God's heart for racial justice in the ways I spend my time, money, actions and with the things that demand my attention.	
People close to me would describe me as patient and calm in the midst of failures, disappointments, and setbacks.	
I engage in intentional formation to learn about God's heart for justice and peace, allowing Scripture to provide the evaluative criteria as opposed to cultural narratives.	
I receive others in the same spirit of hospitality with which God has received me.	
I resolve conflict in a clear, humble, and respectful way, going to the person (or persons) with whom I am in tension directly instead of going to a third party.	
Neighbors and friends seek me out when they are in trouble and view my home as a safe haven.	
I regularly engage in works of compassion and mercy among the poor and marginalized.	
I intentionally seek out ways to bring about healing where there is brokenness, strife, and division in my community.	
Total Number:	

You've made it to the final inventory. Three or four months from now, you may find it helpful to go back over this and see what kind of new things God has shown you. As with any kind of self-reporting tool, this will be valuable only to the extent that you take your time and approach it as a means of talking with God about what you are doing together. Remember: when it comes to following Jesus, there are no masters, only apprentices.

You can use the total number from this assessment during week seven (see, **Charting your Path** p. 111). From that, you'll consider what invitation you sense from the Spirit about how to create an ordered path for the journey ahead.

SATURDAY: PRACTICES

“Reconciliation is an ongoing spiritual process involving forgiveness, repentance, and justice that restores broken relationships and systems to reflect God’s original intention for all creation to flourish.”

Brenda Salter McNeil, Roadmap to Reconciliation

There can be no reconciliation without justice. When relationships are damaged, wrongs must be put to rights before friendship or intimacy can resume. The Biblical vision of *shalom* is not merely the absence of overt conflict, it is the presence of conditions where conflict becomes unimaginable. It is a place of mutual flourishing characterized by the removal of abuses and the redress of sins against those who have been oppressed.

While pursuing this vision of justice will unquestionably affect how we steward our vote at the ballot box, it is not primarily about politics pulling the levers of legislative power. Reconciliation becomes possible on the local level (in our neighborhoods, schools, churches, places of work) when we address power imbalances that are unfair or abusive, and work with others to bring about fairness, equity, and structures that allow for mutual benefit.

Another way we can partner with Christ in the restoration of community is through the practice of hospitality. The great writer of the spiritual life, Henri Nouwen, once described hospitality as “the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place.” This is how Jesus reconciles us at his table. He takes us in while we were enemies and makes us friends. Hospitality is a posture of welcoming people into our home in the spirit with which Christ greets us.

PRACTICE: PURSUE RACIAL JUSTICE

In his book, *The Deeply Formed Life*, Rich Villodas offers a few practices of racial justice that help create the conditions for reconciliation. (For a full exploration, see chapter 4 of *A Deeply Formed Life*).

AUDIT RACIAL HABITS:

Whatever our background, we all have predispositions to see others in particular ways. Some habits are rooted in love and compassion and an appreciation of the differences and graces in others cultural or ethnic background. Others are rooted in fear or ignorance.

ENGAGE IN SELF-EXAMINATION:

What effect did your upbringing have on how you view people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds? What were you taught by your parents or by your community with regard to race? What were the subtle messages you picked up or internalized about whiteness? How do those affect the way you see the world?

PRACTICE INCARNATIONAL LISTENING:

Listen to others even when the conversations are painful. This is particularly important for those who are in the majority culture within a system. Conversations about race are painful for everyone. We are often anxious about offending or about justifying our beliefs or that we might be in the wrong. The words of James Baldwin are helpful; “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

CONFESSION & FORGIVENESS:

Ultimately, reconciliation is possible because of the reconciling work of Christ. We come to one another as broken and flawed people who must be open to the ways we have wronged others by the things we have done with malice and the things we have left undone by careless neglect.

STEWARD POWER:

God speaks to Israel through the prophet Jeremiah, reminding those in exile to “seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” How can we seek the peace of the city in which we live so that all people are given a chance to prosper? Where are the imbalances that we can address in housing, education, nutrition, employment? As we seek to be a community of contribution and reconciliation, these are ways we can partner with Jesus in the renewal of all things.

PRACTICE: HOSPITALITY

Your table is an extension of Christ's table. This makes it a sacred space that is as full of God's grace as any other. When you set a table, cook a meal, or wash the dishes, you are providing a context in which God's love can be experienced and where the Spirit can be at work in the lives of your guests. Remember that at Christ's table you have been welcomed and received. In a world that is frequently hostile, hospitality creates a safe space for others to enter, be welcomed, where their gifts can be recognized so they can offer the best of who they are.

In a culture that often blurs the lines between offering hospitality and entertaining guests, here are some key distinctions:

ENTERTAINING	HOSPITALITY
Exclusive	Inclusive
Performative	Service Oriented
Host/Guest Distinction	Host/Guest Interchangeable
Sporadic	Way of Life
Reciprocal	Generous
Reflects Social Distinctions	Reflects God's Justice

PRAY FOR THE PEOPLE WHO COME INTO YOUR HOME.

Pray as you invite them. Pray as they come into your home and as they leave. How has receiving them changed you?

HOST A BLOCK PARTY.

Most people don't know their neighbors well. Invite others to bring their family recipe or something they crave, like their favorite "comfort" food. Focus on the guests rather than the meal.

HELP YOUR CHILDREN GROW TO UNDERSTAND THAT HOSPITALITY IS A GIFT FROM GOD.

When they have play dates, ask them to think about how they can make the friend they are inviting over feel special. If they're older, consider hosting team parties so you can get to know the parent.

HAVE AN “OPEN DOOR POLICY” WITH NEIGHBORS.

Let new people know that if they ever need anything, from a shoulder to lean on to a stick of butter for cookies, yours is a home they can come to, no questions asked.

W E E K 7

CREATING A RULE
OF **LIFE**

ARRANGING FOR A LIFE TRANSFORMATION

A renewed creation needs a renewed people.

One of the time-tested ways of growing into the likeness of Jesus is by putting into practice the things we see in his life that are appropriate to the areas we sense a need for growth. Like all tools, this is imperfect, but it is designed to help us recognize the areas in our spiritual life in which we are progressing and those in which we are struggling. While the practices described at the end of each week are foundational to the way of Jesus, weaving them into your personal rhythm isn't a one-size-fits-all process.

For instance, if you long to experience a deeper understanding of God's grace, you might lean more on studying and meditating on the scriptures so you can see the arc of God's grace through his dealings with people and then most fully in the person of Jesus. Similarly, those who would like their lives to be marked by a deeper sense of meaningful contribution may need to explore the practice of service.

As their name indicates, spiritual practices require consistency and time. They are not a recipe for "living your best life now"; they're a pathway to channel our longing after God. Becoming a people of the future doesn't happen by accident. In the same way a concert musician submits herself to countless hours pouring over the intricacies of a Tchaikovsky score to gain the skill for performance, so must the apprentices of Jesus practice the things Jesus did in order to live deeply and well.

A well-ordered life requires a scaffolding to support growth. This week will focus on crafting a rule for life—a structure to place the practices within reach. It's not a rigid or fixed thing. Instead, think of it as a tool designed to be recast and renegotiated depending on your life circumstances, and changing needs. The process of arranging our lives for transformation requires us to be clear about which commitments, relationships, and roles are etched in stone and which are scribbled on sand. Above all, it requires prayer and a healthy amount of grace.

As you partner with the Spirit, you'll no doubt see change and growth in your life. Because we can expect this change, the way we engage the practices should be revisited frequently and adjusted as we change.

One note of encouragement: Practicing the way of Jesus takes time. You should expect at the outset a period of experimentation and exploration with various practices so as to gauge a sense of the meaning they have in your life and what sort of adjustments will be needed to meaningfully incorporate them. This is a deeply personal process. Not only will we apply practices that help us pull the future into the present, the methods by which we practice will be unique to us.

Whatever areas of sin or negative patterns God has brought to your attention, there are practices that help us address them. But the point isn't to become fixated on problem solving. This is all invitation. All grace. The goal is to practice the way of Jesus so our lives look more like his.

Blessings on the journey!

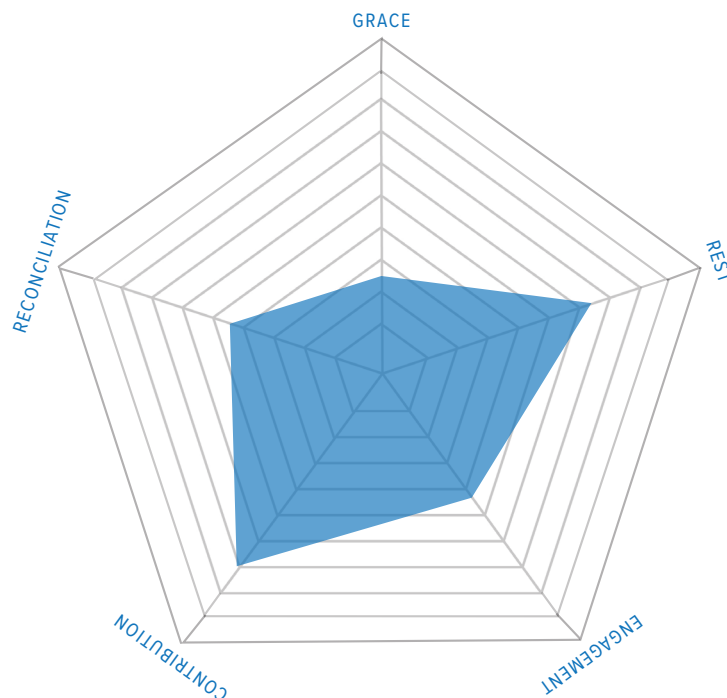
CHARTING YOUR PATH

As we said at the beginning, these community marks are not to be confused with a destination. They are merely signposts that point us in the direction of the kingdom as we grow in our apprenticeship to Jesus.

Below is a visual tool to help you see the “shape” of your spiritual life (at least as you understand it in this particular moment) as defined by these community marks. Over time, this shape will change and grow as we live into our calling as a community. Jesus is the embodiment of a life filled with these marks. Avoid the temptation to over-spiritualize or judge yourself by where you think you ought to be. Like all tools, this one has limitations. It’s designed simply as a means of helping you see where you’ve grown and where you can experience growth. No one scores 50 all around, and none of us are stuck at one everywhere. No one else needs to see this. Ultimately, this is a chance for you to take stock of where you are.

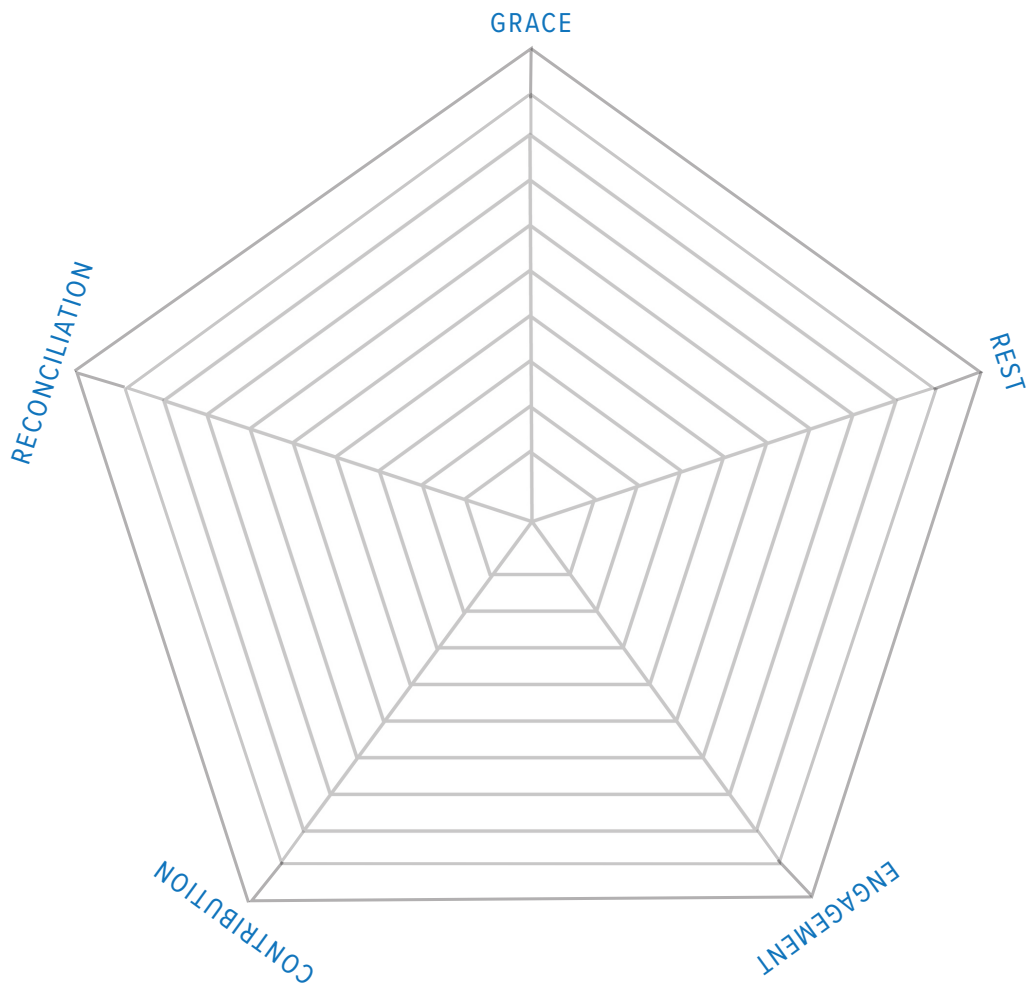
Below is a sample of what it could look like:

EXAMPLE: “SHAPE” GRAPH



With the blank graph below, create your own. To do this, simply refer to the total number from each of the Friday “Personal Inventory” sections. Before marking it down, take a moment to re-read your responses. Did your Community Group help you see something different about yourself? Feel free to adjust your previous responses based on these conversations.

“SHAPE” GRAPH



When you’ve completed your graph, reflect on where you see areas where the Spirit has been at work in your life and an area you’d like to follow Jesus more closely in. This may help you decide which practices to prioritize as you develop your own Rule for Life.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Does this chart make sense to me? What do I see?
- What might those close to me say about this? Consider asking them.
- If I were to imagine myself ten years ago, what might this have looked like?
- Where do I sense God's invitation to grow?

CRAFTING A RULE OF LIFE

A lot of the time we feel stuck in our spiritual life. Like there's a gap between the life we read about and see in the life of Jesus and the life we're actually living. We ask, "is what I'm experiencing really the kind of life Jesus described as one of abundance? There must be more." We grow to a certain point, but then we plateau. Usually it's not because we don't know enough or because we don't believe enough. It isn't really a question of faith or trust. We just feel stuck.

There's a saying in business literature that "your system is perfectly designed to produce the results you're currently getting." While our lives aren't like a corporation, there's a certain wisdom in this little aphorism that translates to our life with God. An hour at church on Sunday isn't enough to shape us as people of the future. We need to arrange our lives for transformation. Generations of apprentices to the way of Jesus have called this kind of ordering a "rule of life."

WHAT IS A RULE OF LIFE?

Simply put, a Rule of Life (or personal rule) is an arranged set of practices and relational rhythms that help us partner with the Spirit to create space in our busy lives for the work of spiritual transformation in the image of Jesus, and in alignment with our deepest passions and priorities.

While the word "rule" may sound a little harsh, the Latin word we translate "rule" (*regula*) was originally the word for a trellis in a vineyard. In the same way a vine needs a trellis to lift it off the ground so it can flourish, we need a rule as a kind of support scaffolding to organize our life around "abiding in the vine," (John 15:1-8) in the way Jesus imagined.

A simple definition of integrity is when our stated values and beliefs match our actual practices. A rule of life is simply a tool to that end. Rather than a rigid, binding set of demands, it's a life-giving structure for freedom, growth, and joy.

HOW DO I DEVELOP MY OWN?

There's no one way to design your own rule. The most important step is to pray and ask God to reveal to you how and where you can partner with the Spirit. As you look over your inventories and the visual feedback you received from "Charting your Path," where do you feel restlessness and longing, or where have you identified patterns of negativity and spiritual bondage from which you desire freedom? Where do you simply sense an invitation from Jesus to lean in further in one of the community marks?

HERE ARE SOME POSSIBLE STEPS:

STEP 1:

Pray for clarity, courage, and the conviction to follow through.

STEP 2:

Take a look at the questions below and write or think through your responses:

- Which spiritual practices and relationships have been the most powerful in both shaping my desires and in causing me to long for the Kingdom?
- What are the realistic boundaries on my time? You may want to do them all. You simply cannot do everything, nor should you try. Pray against any self-condemning voices that tell you you're not doing enough.
- What do I need in terms of community resources, time, and space to keep my commitment?
- What role does community need to play in my formation?
- Which of these disciplines can I share with friends or my Community Group?
- What am I beginning to understand about myself and my limits?
- Which disciplines do I know that I need to engage in regularly as a means of offering myself to God? Where am I resistant and why is that?
- Do I really want spiritual transformation? It seems hard.
- What are the sins and negative patterns that I'm aware of in my life?
- Where will I engage in these disciplines and what kinds of activities will I need to cut out of my life to make room for this?

STEP 3:

Write out some of the different habits or practice categories in your life. Here are some examples: dwelling in God's presence through scripture and prayer, engaging God through study and meditation, caring for your body (sleep, diet, etc), relational connection with others who encourage your faith, rest and sabbath, work and finances, practicing justice and mercy, etc.

(For some sample practices, see the **Baseline Practices** at the end of this document.)

STEP 4:

Look over the **Rule of Life Chart** below and reflect upon it. How does it relate to the various habits and practices above? What habits and practices are already in place?

STEP 5:

Draft a **Rule of Life** using the chart below:

RULE OF LIFE CHART

DISCIPLINES	PERSONAL	CORPORATE	OTHER
Daily			
Weekly			
Monthly			
Quarterly			
Semi-Annually			
Yearly			

STEP 6:

Test Drive. Give it a few weeks. Kick the tires, see how it corners the various aspects of your life. Are you finding more joy? What's working? What's boring? What gives life and what drains it? Talk about it with a friend or community group. Now, take a look at the earlier questions (**Step 2, above**) again. Be ruthlessly honest.

STEP 7:

Revise, and prayerfully commit. Based on what you've found from revisiting those questions in step six, what seems best? Give it a go for three months to a year and keep an open line of

BASELINE PRACTICES

GRACE	REST	ENGAGEMENT	CONTRIBUTION	RECONCILIATION
Study	Sabbath	Silence	Generosity	Hospitality
Meditation	Slowing	Stillness	Serving in the church	Lament
Confession	Delighting in Creation	Solitude	Caring for the Poor and Vulnerable	Working for Racial Justice
Community	Worship	Prayer	Mission	Self- Examination Repentance

COMPANIONS ON THE ROAD: RESOURCES FOR FURTHER READING

Invitation to Silence and Solitude

by Ruth Haley Barton

The Gospel Comes

with a House Key

by Rosaria Butterfield

Spiritual Disciplines Handbook

by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

Reading While Black

Esau McCaulley

Roadmap to Reconciliation 2.0

Brenda Salter McNeil

Invitation to the Journey

Shaped By the Word

by M. Robert Mulholland Jr.

The Way of the Heart

by Henri Nouwen

The Paradox of Generosity

by Christian Smith and Hilary Davidson

The Good and Beautiful God/Life/

Community/You

by James Bryan Smith

The Deeply Formed Life

by Rich Villodas

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APPENDIX A

WEEK 1: JOY IN THE CITY

Note: Prior to this week's Community Group Discussion, please complete the Life Graph activity, starting on page 12.

COMMUNITY GROUP QUESTIONS:

In Acts 8, persecution breaks out following the death of Stephen, one of the first deacons and martyrs in the church.

- To what end does God use this scattering?
 - What does the church do once it is sent out?
 - How might God use the church to bring joy to our city?
-
- As you look over your life graph, when have things that at first appeared to be setbacks or interruptions actually led to something greater than you could have predicted?
 - What patterns do you notice?
 - Which events feel the most significant? (Consider highlighting or drawing a picture to represent these.)
 - What correlation do you find between experiences of desolation and a deepening awareness of God's presence?
 - As you reflect on your life, what questions do you have for God?

WEEK 2: A COMMUNITY OF **GRACE** IN A CULTURE OF JUDGMENT**SCRIPTURE: EPHESIANS 2:1-10**

2:¹ As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What does this passage have to say about the basic human condition and God’s posture toward humanity?
- Why is grace foundational to the Christian story?

For Paul, the gospel is about the kind of power that gives life to the dead. He describes it as a free, undeserved gift. And yet, we tend to get the message in just about every avenue of life that salvation (if the need for salvation is acknowledged) will be accomplished by the things we achieve.

- In what ways are you tempted by the felt need to earn God’s favor or grace?
- Why do you think it’s hard to trust that grace comes freely?
- How might that posture of earning translate to your expectations for others?

In verse ten, Paul describes how a new community lies at the heart of God's new creation. Those claimed by Christ, he says, are God's handiwork. The word translated "handiwork" in Greek is *poema* from which we get the words poem and poetry.

- As you look on the course of your life, how do you see God's artistry at work in you and in your story?

CREATING SPACE FOR EACH OTHER:

Spend a few moments telling the story you wrote based on the Wednesday reflection questions. In the last year, how have you grown in either your understanding of grace or your ability to show grace? What obstacles and aids have you found along the journey?

Eugene Peterson once wrote that "stories are verbal acts of hospitality." This is true in both the telling and the hearing. With that in mind, your job is simply to listen carefully as others tell their story. When they finish, thank them, and offer encouragement. Try to avoid editorializing or offering advice. Just listen and be encouraged by when and how God shows up.

WEEK 3: A COMMUNITY OF **REST** IN A CULTURE OF EXHAUSTION

SCRIPTURE: HEBREWS 4:8-11

⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. ⁹

There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; ¹⁰ for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- The writer of Hebrews speaks about "entering rest" as a way of imitating God. Why is it important to understand that God rested? What does this suggest about the necessity of rest?
- Verse ten describes how anyone who enters the future rest will take a rest from all their works. What kind of works does the writer have in mind?
- What does your practice of Sabbath look like right now? Do you have any fears or difficulties regarding the practice of Sabbath?
- In what ways do you think our social and economic context affects how faithfully the church lives out the sabbath command?

CREATING SPACE FOR EACH OTHER:

Spend a few moments allowing a few group members to tell their stories based on the Wednesday reflection questions.

In the last year, how has God shaped your understanding of rest and/or your ability to engage in the practice of sabbath? What obstacles and aids have you found along the journey?

Remember, your job is simply to listen carefully as others tell their story. When they finish, thank them, and offer encouragement. Try to avoid editorializing or offering advice. Just listen and be encouraged by when and how God shows up.

WEEK 4: A COMMUNITY OF **ENGAGEMENT** IN A CULTURE OF DISTRACTION

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 4:1-11

4:¹ Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

⁴ Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.

⁶ “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:

“He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”

⁷ Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The writer of Hebrews makes the claim that Jesus “has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.” It doesn’t come as much of a surprise, then, that after a moment of great joy, clarity of vision, and affirmation by the Father that he faced the subtle voices of temptation. He was able to recognize them as the great enemies of the soul and they are the same temptations we face throughout our journey.

- How do the temptations play on Jesus' identity as the Son of God?
- What means does the tempter offer to sway Jesus from abandoning his mission? What are the temptations Jesus rejects?
- How have the practices of silence and solitude worked in your life as a means of providing both the time and space to engage with God?
- What kinds of distractions sway you from the calling God has given you?

CREATING SPACE FOR EACH OTHER:

Spend some time allowing a few group members to tell their stories based on the Wednesday reflection questions.

Remember, your job is simply to listen carefully as others tell their story. When they finish, thank them, and offer encouragement. Try to avoid editorializing or offering advice. Just listen and be encouraged by when and how God shows up.

WEEK 5: COMMUNITY OF **CONTRIBUTION** IN A CULTURE OF CONSUMPTION

SCRIPTURE: GENESIS 1:26-29; 2:8-15

1:26 Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

27 So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

29 Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.

2:8 Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. 9 The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

10 A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. 11 The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. 12 (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) 13 The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. 14 The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

In Genesis 1:28, God commissions humans to work.

COMMUNITY GROUP QUESTIONS

WEEK 5

- Have you considered that your work is associated with God's kingdom work?
- What helps you to identify your work with God's?
- In what ways do you perceive God to be present in your work?

In Genesis 2, part of the work that humans are commissioned to perform involves the cultivation of the soil. By extension it also involves cultivating the soul or creating culture.

- What is something that you feel like you were made to do?
- Even if you don't have your current dream job, what are some ways you can contribute to others out of the gifts and graces you do have?
- How has giving of yourself (financially, spiritually, vocationally) allowed you to experience the joy of God?

CREATING SPACE FOR EACH OTHER:

Spend a few moments telling the story you wrote based on the Wednesday reflection questions. In the last year, how has God shaped your desire to contribute to the flourishing of others?

Remember, your job is simply to listen carefully as others tell their story. When they finish, thank them, and offer encouragement. Try to avoid editorializing or offering advice. Just listen and be encouraged by when and how God shows up.

WEEK 6: A COMMUNITY OF **RECONCILIATION** IN A CULTURE OF DIVISION

SCRIPTURE: 2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-6:2

¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

6:¹ As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. ² For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What Paul mean when he writes about "no longer regarding others from a merely human point of view"? (5:16).
- What does it look like to be a "new creation"? (5:17)
- What does Paul mean when he writes that Christ has given us the ministry and message of reconciliation (vv 18-19)?
- What does an ambassador do? How does that apply to your own self-understanding as a follower of Jesus? As a Community Group?
- Paul warns the church "not to receive God's grace in vain" (6:1)
- What would it look like to do so?
- What kinds of internal changes do you think need to happen in our church community in order for us to bear the mark of reconciliation?

CREATING SPACE FOR EACH OTHER:

Spend a few moments telling the story you wrote based on the Wednesday reflection questions. In the last year, how has God shaped your heart with respect to his work of reconciliation?

Remember, your job is simply to listen carefully as others tell their story. When they finish, thank them, and offer encouragement. Try to avoid editorializing or offering advice. Just listen and be encouraged by when and how God shows up.

WEEK 7: CREATING A RULE OF LIFE

Note: Prior to this week's Community Group Discussion, please complete the Creating a Rule of Life activity, starting on page 108.

COMMUNITY GROUP QUESTIONS:

- What is one thing you're beginning to realize about yourself and your place in the community as a result of this study?
- What is one area in which you sense God's invitation to grow?

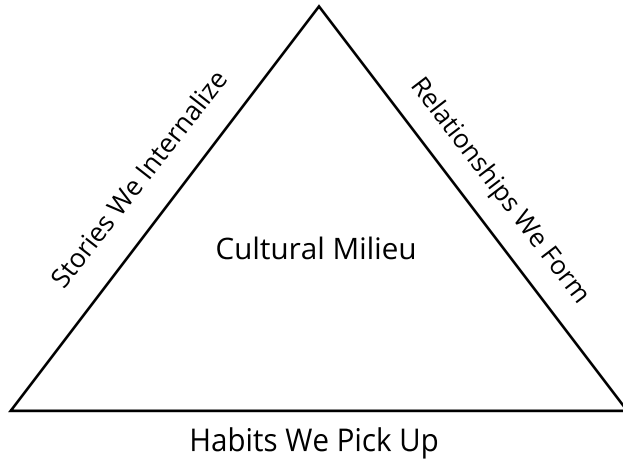
Spend some time sharing any insights or questions you have about the Rule for Life exercise.

- Which practices do you hold in common with members of your group?
- What is one thing your community group can pray for as you begin to implement parts of your Rule for Life?
- How has the process of sharing stories in community helped you see patterns in your life that you would like to explore further with God?

APPENDIX B

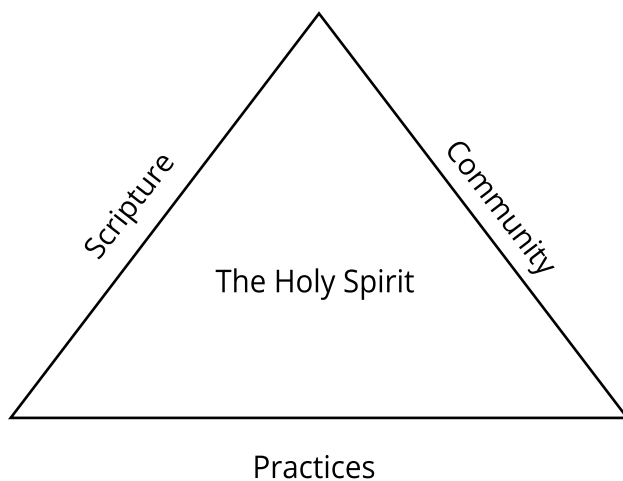
Appendix B. Paradigms of Formation

Unintentional Formation



1. Which false narratives have you internalized? (i.e. cultural storylines: "some people are inherently superior because of gender, ethnicity, or nationality," or "sex is meaningless bodily activity:" Family Scripts: "you're a bad child," or "You must do *this*, to be worthy of love..." etc.
2. Which relationships are currently shaping you the most?
3. Which habits are generating your desires and directing your attention?

Intentional Formation



1. How does the gospel present a true narrative over/against the false storylines you've internalized?
2. How does Christ-centered community help you shed a false self and live authentically?
3. Which practices are directing your desires and attention toward the kingdom?



ALL SOULS
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647 East College Avenue, Decatur, GA 30030
404.270.9900 | info@allsoulsfellowship.org