

Practicing the Way



**6 weeks of Small Group Studies about
discipleship from *Practicing the Way*
by John Mark Comer**

Sermon-based Small Group Studies are designed to be explored with your Small Group after hearing the Sunday sermon. To access the sermon again, please go to the church website www.devonportcoc.com.au or YouTube channel.

Additional resources for this series can be found at www.practicingtheway.org

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“The greatest issue facing the world today, with all its heart-breaking needs, is whether those who... are identified as ‘Christians’ will become disciples - students, apprentices, practitioners - of Jesus Christ...”

Dallas Willard

Pre-reading for Session 1: “Apprentice to Jesus,” in *Practicing the Way* by John Mark Comer, pp. 1-31.

Following Jesus

Icebreaker Questions

1. Have you ever been or do you know someone who is a trade-related apprentice? What do you know about this method of learning?
2. If you are in a new group or have new people in your group, have everyone share briefly their spiritual journey so far. How did you come to know to Jesus?

OR

3. Has there been a catalyst moment, past situation or person that made you pause, rethink and change your life direction? (Career, location, faith, health...)

Session overview

Who or what are you following? Everybody is following somebody. Put another way: We're all disciples. The question isn't, "Are you a disciple?" but, "Who or what are you a disciple of?" John Mark Comer

In this session we explore what it means to be a disciple or apprentice of Jesus.

Watch the teaching video (note taking space on the next page)

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/11667089?video=1081911041>

1. What stood out to you from the video? Were there any new or challenging ideas, or something that resonated with you?

Practice: Prayer

Developing a daily prayer rhythm

We need more than information for transformation. The practices of Jesus (which we'll learn more about in Session 4) help to get the teachings of Jesus into the muscle memory of our bodies. They turn the *idea* of following Jesus into a *reality* in our daily life. And one of the best ways to begin to “be with Jesus” is by developing a daily prayer rhythm.

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

Whatever you decide, our Practice for Session 1 is to develop a daily time and place to commune with God through the practices of silence, solitude, and prayer. Here are some suggestions for your practice:

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

Find a quiet *time*. For many people, first thing upon waking is the best possible time to do this; but for you, it may be before bed, or while your baby is napping mid-morning, or on a lunch break.

The general rule is to give God your best time of the day.

1. What will be your best time and place to spend time with God in prayer this week? Write it down to help keep you accountable to it.
2. When you think about starting your day with silence, solitude, and prayer, what excites you? What challenges you?

3. Can you recognise any distractions or hindrances to being fully present with Jesus during your current prayer times? What could you do to resolve that?

Spend time in your Small Group praying for each other to close your time together.

At home: *Practicing a daily prayer rhythm*

Go to your nominated quiet place at your best time of day.

Take a few moments to unhurry yourself, put away your digital distractions and put unsettling thoughts out of your mind.

Invite God's Holy Spirit to meet with you in prayer.

For thousands of years, followers of Jesus have used the Psalms for daily prayer. The Psalms are a collection of poetic prayers, and they were designed to be *prayed*, not just read.

You can pray part of one psalm or pray a few; it's up to you. Here are some suggestions to start with: Psalms 1, 23, 37, 40, 42-43, 63, 84, 86, 103, and 139.

This whole exercise can be done in five minutes, or it can easily take up to an hour — that's up to you. The key is: Start where you are, not where you feel you "should" be.

If two or three minutes is all you can make happen, start *there* and take the next step.

If you are someone who already has an established and regular prayer rhythm, what will you do to extend, deepen or refresh your prayer time?

Pre-reading for Session 2: "Goal #1: Be with Jesus," in *Practicing the Way* by John Mark Comer, pp. 32-63.

Formation part 1

Icebreaker Questions

1. Share about one of your hobbies or interests (cooking, gardening, sporting, creative...), where the effort you put into it directly impacts or shapes the outcome?
2. Checking in from last session: What was most challenging about practicing a rhythm of prayer? What is something you enjoyed about it?

Session overview

Spiritual formation isn't a Christian thing or even a religious thing; it's a human thing. To be human is to grow, to mature, to adapt over time. Formation is simply the process by which our "spirit," or inner person, is formed into a particular shape or character. Over a lifetime, we are spiritually formed by a complex alchemy of genetic inheritance, family patterns, childhood wounds, education, habits, decisions, relationships, environments, and more.

The problem is, most of our spiritual formation is unintentional. It just happens. And often, we are "conform[ed] to the pattern of this world," more than "transformed by the renewing of [our] mind."

John Mark Comer, Bible reference Romans 12:2

Spiritual formation is a *human* thing. Most of our formation is unintentional. We are formed by a complex web of forces, but especially by:

Habits

Relationships

Experience

Environment

Time

The stories we believe

2. When you consider the list of forces that unintentionally form us, does anything surprise you or stand out to you?
3. Reflect on some of your key relationships: How are the people you spend time with shaping you as a person? Who is someone who brings out the best in you?

4. Thinking about 'the stories we believe':

What stories do you believe about God? (What is he like/not like? How does he feel about you?) What 3 words would you use to describe God: _____

What stories do you believe about yourself? (How does God see you? How do others see you? What do you see for your future?)

What stories do you believe about happiness? (What do you think will make you most happy and peaceful? Is it God? Money? Marriage? Success? Holidays?) _____

Reflection: How are the core stories of my life forming me as a person?

Practice: Spiritual Health Reflection

How is your spiritual growth tracking? Try using a tool to take a small step in intentional discipleship.

If you have time in your Small Group, do this while together, otherwise, this will be your homework.

1. Go to practictheway.org
2. On the landing page, scroll down to the Spiritual Health Reflection and press the button “Start Your Reflection”.
3. You will need to sign up and create a password (8 characters).
4. Do the Spiritual Health Reflection (allow at least 15 mins). This tool allows you to honestly reflect on areas of your spiritual life on a sliding scale – where are you already growing and where could you lean in more closely to Jesus? It will store your responses and suggest one area to work on, with some recommendations for next steps.
5. During the week/fortnight, remember to check in on what your next step is and incorporate it into your regular routine.
6. Be prepared to share back with your group a focus area or next step from your Spiritual Health Reflection.

At home: Continue practicing the daily prayer rhythm you established last week. Complete the Spiritual Health Reflection if you haven’t already done it and incorporate one simple next step into your week.

Pre-reading for Session 3: “Goal #2: Become like him,” in *Practicing the Way* by John Mark Comer, pp. 64-117.

Formation part 2

Icebreaker Questions

1. Who is/was your favourite teacher (from any educational or training setting)? Why did you like them?
2. After learning about *unintentional* formation last session, did anything stand out to you during the week/fortnight where you might be conforming to the pattern of this world, which you hadn't noticed before?

OR

Share about how completing and implementing your Spiritual Health Reflection went (from last session, page 11, step 6).

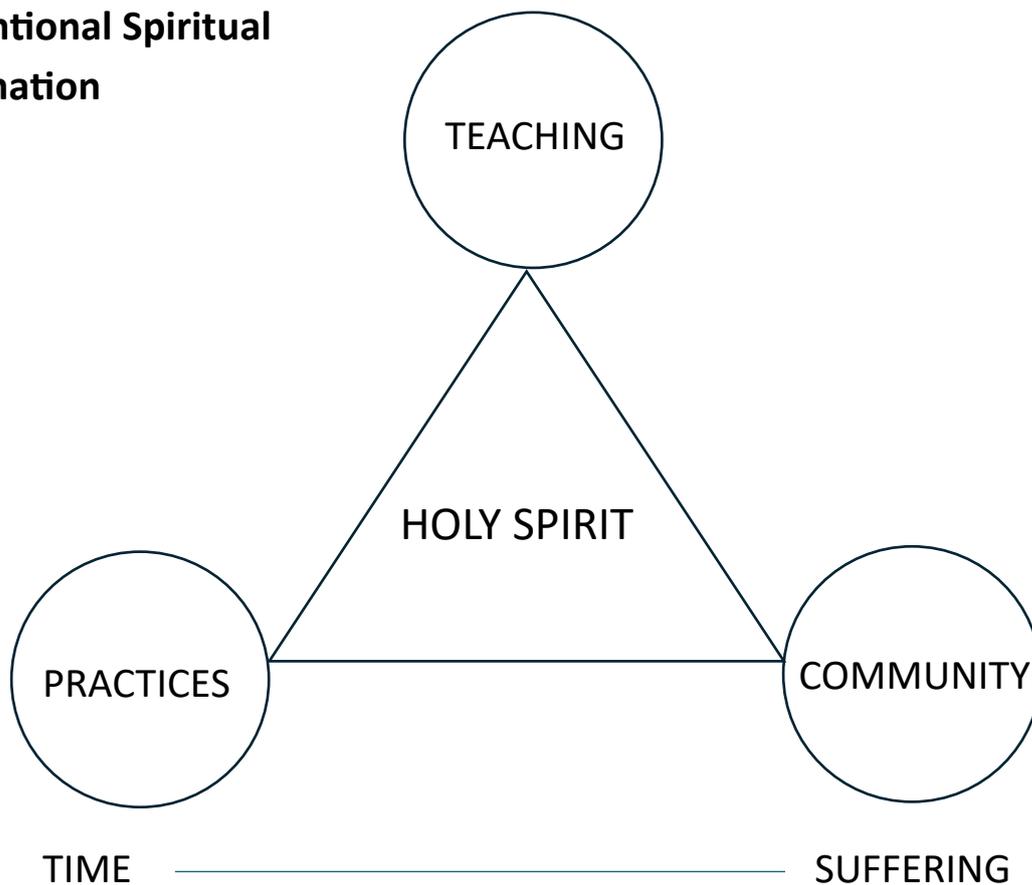
Session Overview

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

Watch the teaching video (note taking space next page)

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/11672782?video=1081908184>

Intentional Spiritual Formation



3. Looking at the diagram above, how are you already participating in intentional formation?
In which area do you think you need to lean in more?
4. Read 1 Peter 1: 6-7. Have you ever intentionally offered your pain (past or present), suffering or trials to God? How did God meet you and spiritually re-form you through that experience?

Practice: Daily Reading of Scripture

Information alone doesn't produce transformation. To grow, we need to put what we've learnt into practice. This session's practice is to replace an old habit (that may have been unintentionally forming you) with a new practice that will help transform you into the likeness of Christ. If you don't currently have a daily Bible reading habit, it's a great time to start that practice.

If you have started a daily prayer rhythm, try incorporating Bible reading into that time, where you are already finding a quiet place and time for God. Remember, give God your best time of day.

There are many ways to read God's Word.

1. In your group, share what your process is for reading Scripture. Do you follow a Bible reading plan? Do you journal or write notes? How do you choose which part of the Bible to read next? Do you regularly invite God to speak to you through his Word?
2. You could join church's Bible Reading Plan for this series and aim to complete it as a group.
3. If you already have an established Bible reading habit, how will you extend or deepen that practice? One method is *Lectio Divina*, which involves 4 steps of read, meditate, pray and contemplate. (There are many online resources about the Lectio Divina method).

At home: *Practicing daily reading of Scripture*

Go to your nominated quiet place at your best time of day.

Take a few moments to unhurry yourself, remove digital distractions and put unsettling thoughts out of your mind.

Invite God's Holy Spirit to speak to you through God's Word.

The key is: Start where you are, not where you feel you "should" be. If you miss a day, it's OK, God's Word will never pass away, so come back to it tomorrow.

Pre-reading for Session 4: "Goal #3: Do as he did," in *Practicing the Way* by John Mark Comer, pp. 118-155.

The Practices

Icebreaker Questions

1. What is something that motivates you to get out of bed earlier than your usual routine?
2. How did your practice of reading Scripture progress after last session? Did you experience any resistance or distractions? In what ways did you encounter God through his Word?

Session Overview

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

Watch the teaching video (note taking space next page)

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/11672780?video=1081904687>

1. What stood out to you from the video? Which of the Spiritual Practices or Disciplines would be most difficult to fit into your life?

The Practices: Sabbath | Prayer | Fasting | Community | Generosity | Solitude | Scripture | Service | Witness

3. Do you, or have you previously, practiced any kind of Sabbath or day of rest?
4. From the video: If the practices (Sabbath, Prayer, Fasting, Community, Generosity, Solitude, Scripture, Service, Witness) are a “means to an end”, what do you understand the “end” of the spiritual life to be?

Practice: Sabbath

To grow, we need more than information; we need real, lived practice.

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

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

Four things to keep in mind:

- Begin by connecting with God. The Hebrew people called this “sanctifying the day,” setting it aside from the other six days. You could light candles or pray or share a meal or begin with Sunday worship at church. But have a clear moment with God that *begins* and *ends* your Sabbath time.
- If you can, spend part of the day with your family or friends who follow Jesus. You could host a Sabbath meal, go for a walk together or just spend unhurried time in conversation.

- Do whatever makes you come alive in God. Nap, read, play basketball with your kids. Pursue whatever activities make you feel joyful, rested, and alive to God - whatever it is you do that makes your heart spontaneously burst into gratitude and worship.
 - Keep at it. Integrating Sabbath keeping into your life usually takes months or years, not weeks. Just start small and aim at joy.
1. Does this type of practice of Sabbath sound achievable, or even enjoyable to you? Think about a time or day you could incorporate Sabbath rest into the coming week.

At home: *Plan a Sabbath rest (and try to do it!)*

When will you Sabbath? _____

How will you mark the beginning and end of your Sabbath time? (A ritual or prayerful moment) _____

What will you do with your devices? _____

What do you need to get done in advance to prepare? (Grocery shopping, emails, errands, work tasks, phone calls, etc.) _____

How will you include friends and family? _____

What will you do to fill your heart with joy and peace?

How can you create sabbath for those who have none?

Pre-reading for Session 5: "How? A Rule of Life," in *Practicing the Way* by John Mark Comer, pp. 160-202.

Crafting a Rule of Life

Icebreaker Questions

1. How do you feel about rules?

Rules are good, they provide boundaries

Some rules have value, such as safety

Rules are an opportunity for creative interpretation

2. Share your challenges and successes in practicing Sabbath. Did it help you slow down and enjoy God's presence, or did it become another item on a to-do list?

Session Overview

Transformation is possible, but it's not inevitable. A Rule of Life is a schedule and a set of practices and relational rhythms that create space for us to be with Jesus, become like him, and do as he did. It's an intentional plan to slow down and simplify our life around being spiritually formed by Jesus. To turn the vision of spiritual formation into a reality."
John Mark Comer

Watch the teaching video *Note, our study skips 2 sessions from the original course. The link will take you to [Session 7: Crafting a Rule of Life](#).*

This video continues with extra content, so leaders will need to stop it at around the 17 minute mark.

Six tips for Crafting a Rule of Life

1. Start small
2. Think subtraction, not addition
3. Take a balanced approach
4. Take into account your personality and season of life
5. There is no formation without repetition
6. Do this in community

Practice: Crafting a Rule of Life

1. In what ways have you already tried to orientate your life, so that following Jesus was a high priority?
2. How do you feel about a Rule of Life for spiritual growth guiding your schedule, rather than spiritual growth fitting around your already busy timetable?
3. As you think about crafting a Rule of Life, what do you think are the spiritual needs of your personality and stage of life? Which Spiritual Practices (page 16 & 23) would act like a supportive trellis for your spiritual growth?
4. Who would be important to incorporate into the process of building your Rule of Life?

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

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

1. Go to <https://www.practicingtheway.org/> and log in. (Or create a log in if you haven't already.) *Your group can browse this tool together, or begin to create their individual Rule of Life with it now.*
2. Click on the Rule of Life Builder and follow its prompts. It will guide you through daily, weekly, monthly, and seasonal practices in a number of categories.
3. You can utilize the suggestions, write yours completely from scratch, or do a mix of both.

Remember: start small. Your Rule can begin with just a few small practices and rhythms. A Rule of Life isn't static, but dynamic. It changes with the seasons of our lives and stages of our discipleship. This digital template is easy to return to and modify. As time goes on, revisit your Rule and take the next step in your spiritual journey. It's an exercise you can practice for the rest of your life.

At home: As you think about your Rule Life this week, share with your family or friends any changes you are making and why. Use the digital tool *Rule of Life Builder* for planning. Choose one small change and implement it this week.

If the digital tool is not accessible for you, choose one of the Spiritual Practices below that you don't usually engage with and implement one small change this week. (Spend time in solitude with God, be more generous, try fasting, serve a neighbour...)

The Practices: Sabbath | Prayer | Fasting | Community | Generosity | Solitude | Scripture | Service | Witness

Pre-reading for Session 6: "Take up your cross," the final section of *Practicing the Way* by John Mark Comer, pp. 206-221.

Life Together

Icebreaker Questions

1. What is a group or community that you've been part of, where you felt a sense of belonging and value?
2. Share how you went with the homework of crafting a Rule of Life. What was the small step you chose to implement during the week?

Session overview

"If you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go together."

We are not designed to travel the spiritual journey by ourselves. We need community to practice the Way. And Jesus' call to community goes far beyond church attendance to relationships of depth, vulnerability, and a commitment to transformation. John Mark Comer

Watch the teaching video *Note, our study skips 2 sessions from the original course. The link will take you to [Session 8: Life Together](#).*

This video continues with extra content, so leaders will need to stop it at around the 16 and a half minute mark.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMUnlq08BWw>

Read Romans 8:14-16

3. Through Jesus, you have been adopted into the family of God, and you are not an only child. John Mark Comer said, “Jesus’ desire is to form each of us into a person of love, and through us, to form a community of love.” How might this change the way you approach Sunday mornings?

From the video: *Four layers of community*

Intimates: 1-5 people who deeply know and love us

Friends: 15 people with whom we do life

Village: 150 people (the maximum we can be in relationship with)

Tribe: The larger groups we belong to and identify with.

4. Spiritual friendships are marked by 3 core characteristics: depth, vulnerability, and a commitment to transformation. Of these 3, which is the hardest for you?

Practice: Do life in community

1. In your Small Group community, share something you think God has shown you over the last few weeks through this course. What has really stuck with you?

Jesus’ call to community isn’t a theory or an idea, it’s a practice — a relational way of doing life together. Jesus would preach to crowds of thousands, but he spent most of his time with a small circle of disciples, in homes and around tables.

It's important to worship in church on Sunday and be part of a larger community, but it's just as important to know and name your "twelve" and your "three." To cultivate spiritual friendships that last for years.

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

2. If you are a new Small Group, or are a new member of a group, talk together about whether you would like to continue meeting. Or perhaps your group would like to have a celebratory meal together after completing the course.

At home: *Practice doing life together*

1. Spend time this week thinking about your "intimates" and "friends" (p26). Who are your spiritual friends? Do you need to cultivate more of these? Or are you trying to manage too many people in those close layers of community?
2. Have a spiritual conversation with someone in your "intimate" layer, even if that is something you're not used to doing. Share a prayer point for yourself, and commit to praying for them this week. If you live in the same house, consider praying regularly together.
3. Apart from this Small Group, how are you intentionally investing in Jesus' call for us to become a community of love at our church? How could you serve, who could you smile at or encourage, is there a group or a relationship you could commit more effort to?
4. Have a coffee, go for a walk, or just get in touch with someone you would like to cultivate a deeper friendship with this week.

There are many free resources available, including studies on each of the Practices, available at practicingtheway.org. There are steps for newer and more experienced Christians. You do have to sign up, but this may be something your Small Group is interested in pursuing.

