



Practicing the Way of Jesus - Part 1

Leader's Note:

CG material is shifting from being weekly to being split into parts. This practically means that each material isn't necessarily meant to take just one week. Perhaps you might split one part over two weeks. Feel free to go at your group's pace.

Value for Today's CG:

For this study, we will practice open-mindedness. Throughout the time, don't let previous preconceived notions prompt you to disengage or distract you from exploring what it means to "practice the way of Jesus."

Connection and Unity Exercise:

Can you name a core value of Reality SF, the church vision statement, or the Community Groups vision statement? (Answers are in the paragraph after next.)

Practicing the Way of Jesus at Reality SF:

This part is the first of six installments of CG material that will guide us in understanding the vision behind "practicing the way of Jesus," how we define this at Reality SF, and what it means for our church and Community Groups.

We define who we are as a church through our vision and values. We are "a community following Jesus, seeking renewal in our city." The vision for our Community Groups is to be "neighborhood-based communities that seek to know God and one another while practicing the way of Jesus together." The vision of our church and CGs is expressed through our values of faith, humility, hospitality, and rootedness.

Ask:

What do you think of these vision and values? What seems unclear, challenging, or inspiring to you as a group?

These central statements and core values focus our church in a unified direction — even if the expression of this vision is as diverse as our church's members. Another way of putting it is, "X marks the spot" for our destination as a church. This vision is the X, but we might get there a little differently while caravanning together within our different Community Groups.

So, how do practices tie in with who we are as a church? "Practicing the way of Jesus together" is our means of both expressing the presence of Christ already among us as a church as well as moving toward intimacy with God so we may be transformed into his likeness more fully. The way of Jesus and His church is *practical*. It involves how we live, structure our days, use our time, relate to others, and so on. And when we commit ourselves to practicing the way of life that Jesus modeled and taught, it's like getting caught up in a great river that's splashing and swooshing toward God's Kingdom and impacting all it

touches — including our own lives and the lives of those around us who do not yet know Christ.

But what are the practices associated with the way of Jesus? There are two channels to this river:

- 1) *Inward practices, or spiritual disciplines*, are done individually or corporately to direct our hearts toward God through devotional reflection. Spiritual disciplines include practices like silence, solitude, fasting, singing praise, taking communion, Scripture reading, and so on.
- 2) *Outward practices are actions* that seek to affect the world in the style of God's Kingdom, and these might include compassionate service to the community, bold stands for justice, and even changes in how we spend money, work, treat strangers, and so on.

Both channels make up the river taking us toward God's Kingdom. Both are necessary! While these outward practices of the Kingdom are so important, we're focusing first slightly more on the inward practices or spiritual disciplines of Christ's way. Therefore, when we use the word "practices," we're referring to these inward practices or spiritual disciplines.

Ask:

Have you had any experience with inward practices or spiritual disciplines? If so, how would you define what practices are? If not, what do you envision them to be?

Here is our definition of practices:

"Practices, or spiritual disciplines, are a training of mind, heart, and body in the love of God and others."

First and foremost, these inward practices are *training*. That is, they are intentional and meant to build something in the person practicing them, just as a marathon runner trains to build stamina and strength. Spiritual disciplines, however, train *mind, heart, and body*. They target the whole person — how we think, feel, imagine, move, focus, and remember.

When the whole person is trained through spiritual disciplines, they are trained in *the love of God and others*. The chief end of spiritual disciplines is to enhance our capacity for genuine Christian love for God and others. So while spiritual practices might require lots of inward reflection, they are fundamentally as much for God and others as they are for ourselves.

Ask:

In light of your discussion and the definitions we have given, how do you see our vision and values connected to practices?

Scriptural Examples of Practices in the Early Church:

Even though our vision and values are carefully drawn from Scripture, let's take a closer look at some passages that help us ground practices in how the Bible describes the early Church.

Split into groups and read each of the following passages. Discuss the way you see spiritual practices in the text, and then return back to the larger group to report your findings.

Acts 2:42: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching [a practice] and to the fellowship [relationships], to the breaking of the bread [a practice] and to prayer [another practice].”

Furthermore, we see other practices in the book of Acts:

Acts 3: Peter and John practice the discipline of compassion. They don’t just pass by the lame beggar; they practiced compassion. How is their compassion an example of outward practice?

Acts 4: Peter and John practice the discipline of storytelling/witness by giving an account to what they witnessed. In v. 23-31, we read about them practicing intercession, and then in the remaining verses, they practice detachment by sharing their possessions. In what ways are the actions of the disciples practiced by the entire community?

Acts 3:1;10:9: John and Peter practice the discipline of fixed-hour prayer, and then in 10:9, we see Peter observing that practice as well. Why would such a rhythm of prayer be important as a practice?

Acts 14:23: The discipline of fasting is being practiced in order to help with the task of committing the appointed elders to the Lord. What are some purposes of practicing fasting?

Acts 15: We see here a whole counsel practicing the discipline of discernment about theological matters that were essential to practicing the way of Jesus in the community of the early Church. How might theological study and discernment be an important practice?

1 Timothy 4:7: Paul calls Timothy to “train yourself to be godly.” What does this training in godliness mean in context? What do you think Paul means by godliness?

Group Practice (Journaling):

Let’s take some time to quiet our hearts and journal responses to these questions:

1. As a reminder, the definition that we use is, “Practices, or spiritual disciplines, are a training of mind, heart, and body in the love of God and others.” So what difference would practicing the way of Jesus make in your life and the lives of those you care about?
2. What are your hopes for it? What are your concerns?

If time permits, invite those who perhaps spoke the least in discussion to share their thoughts if they would like.

Closing:

Have one person close the time in prayer, asking God to give you His vision for your group’s practicing the way of Jesus together. Pray that this good vision would inspire your group and our church as a whole.