



Practicing the Way of Jesus - Part 6

Leader's Note: CG material is shifting from being weekly to being split into parts. This practically means that each part 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:

In this material, we'll practice our church's core value of *faith*. In practicing *faith*, we trust the work of God, even if we can't see it perfectly clearly. We believe that God might bring awareness of His kingdom in ways we've never considered. Especially practice the faith to freely and openly dream aloud together and encourage each other's hopes for life with God in community.

Connection and Unity Exercise:

Share with one another some of the dreams you had for your life when you were a kid.

A Quick Recap:

- Practices or spiritual disciplines are a training in mind, heart, and body in the love of God and others.
- When we do a practice, we "lead with the body to open the heart to the Spirit of God."
- Our temperaments affect how we engage with practices — like a bee, sloth, butterfly, or peacock.
- Practices reveal our hearts to God, and we need communities of support and accountability as we practice the way of Jesus.

Beyond Devotion to Mission:

In this material, we will solidify how practices transform us and empower us to help see God's Kingdom come on earth. So far we've focused on the ways spiritual practices open our hearts to God, both individually and as a community. This includes seeing practices like Scripture reading or silence as opportunities to build personal intimacy with Jesus, as well as how keeping communal practices together helps us build intimacy with one another through accountability and encouragement. But isn't there more to our faith than just personal piety and communal connection? Absolutely! Spiritual practices have purposes beyond just what takes place personally and in Christian community. Spiritual practices are a crucial part of God's big redemptive mission to see His Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. But how?

When we practice the way of Jesus, we find ourselves more and more personally connected to Jesus and transformed into His likeness. Each person and whole communities take on Christ's way of life and the fruits of the Spirit, which are marked by beautiful qualities like sacrificial love,

patience, kindness, trust, hope, perseverance, faith (1 Corinthians 13:4-13), joy, peace, forbearance, goodness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). God's Kingdom has a culture, just like how companies, friend groups, and countries do, and *these qualities form the culture of God's Kingdom*.

These virtues and values distinguish the Kingdom's culture, and when we embody them and introduce people to Jesus, we help God's "Kingdom come, [His] will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). We join in with Paul, a fellow follower of Jesus, who claims, "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" (2 Corinthians 5:20). As representatives of Jesus, we help bring his Kingdom by inviting people to be reconciled to God. (Consider watching the [Read Scripture Video on "Heaven & Earth"](#) for more background.)

Spiritual practices connect us to God personally while joining us all to God and one another communally. *And* they do much more. They transform and empower us to live in the style of God's Kingdom as ambassadors to the world all around us — our families, our neighborhoods, our workplaces, and beyond.

Ask:

1. When is a time you felt like you got to live out one of these virtues of the Kingdom in the world? (For example, when was a time you brought Christian patience or gentleness into your workplace?)
2. How did that change the environment?
3. How did you see yourself as an ambassador of Jesus?

The Inspiring Vision of God's Kingdom:

In his phenomenal book *You Are What You Love* (which we highly, highly recommend), James K. A. Smith explains how humans are built to be inspired by a social vision for a good life:

To be human, we could say, is to desire the kingdom - *some* kingdom. To call it a "kingdom" is to signal that we are not talking only about some personal, private Eden - some individual nirvana - but that we all live and long for a *social* vision of what we think society should look like too. That's why there's something *ultimate* about this vision: to be oriented towards some sense of the good life is to pursue some vision of how the world ought to be. To be human is to be animated and oriented by some vision of the good life, some picture of what we think counts as "flourishing" (p.11).

As Christians, we hope that the social vision for life in God's Kingdom is what truly inspires and drives us. When we do spiritual practices, they solidify in us the hope we have for the Kingdom of God and equip us to help bring this Kingdom.

Practices train us in the love of God and others. When we say we want to see God's Kingdom come, we mean that we want to see the world operate in view of love for God and others. Isaiah

11:6-9 gives a poetic metaphor for God's Kingdom on earth, and it is meant to provide God's people with a hopeful vision for what's to come in the world.

The wolf will live with the lamb,
 the leopard will lie down with the goat,
 the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
 and a little child will lead them.
 The cow will feed with the bear,
 their young will lie down together,
 and the lion will eat straw like the ox.
 The infant will play near the cobra's den,
 and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.
 They will neither harm nor destroy
 on all my holy mountain,
 for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord
 as the waters cover the sea.

Ask:

1. Interpret this poetic metaphor. How do you understand Isaiah's vision of God's Kingdom?
2. How would this translate into a modern setting?
3. What would be different in the world as we know it if the Kingdom of God was more evidently present?

Group Practice (Silence & Journaling):

Based on Isaiah's vision of life in God's Kingdom and the previous quote from James K. A. Smith, take 3-5 minutes to silently sit and ask God to stir in you an image or vision of the good life in God's Kingdom. What kind of stuff do you picture for your life and the communities and environments you live in? Take 5-10 minutes to write out this dream of life with God and others.

Depending on time, invite a few in your group to share, or have everyone share. Take care to encourage one another in the good and holy visions of Kingdom life that are shared.

Closing:

Have one person close the time in prayer, requesting that God would 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.