

WA WILSHIRE AVE



the
Practices
of Jesus

prayer
bible reading
service
solitude
celebration
sabbath

HELPING PEOPLE FIND & FOLLOW JESUS

OVERVIEW

This handbook is a guide to exploring and learning some of the Practices of Jesus and how these help us to grow in our faith and become more like Jesus. Many of you may know or refer to these as “Spiritual Disciplines,” but we will primarily use practices of Jesus as we hope that as you begin to practice these in your life that they will become disciplines. These practices are not meant to be a burden or something more we need to do, but rather they are to draw us closer to God and His power and presence in our lives.

We will not be covering every spiritual practice, but have chosen several that we hope will be encouraging to your soul. We have provided some additional resources at the end if you are interested in exploring other practices or learning more on a certain practice.

I want us to start by looking at an excerpt from Dallas Willard and “The Spirit of the Disciplines.” If we are going to be looking closer at these practices it is important for us to know the “why” behind them. Please take a few moments to read through the excerpt and ask yourself, what stands out to you? Why do you think it is important for us to look at these practices in our lives?

“To excel in anything in life discipline is required. This is true for athletes, musicians, plumbers, accountants, and disciples of Jesus. Effective discipline is not drudgery, it is delightful! Of course, training has difficult aspects, but the hard work pays off to facilitate ease and joy of living. Just watch a master pianist and you’ll see that he or she is not straining to do well, but enjoying the music. Hence Richard Foster insists that we’re meant to “celebrate” as we practice disciplines for growth in Christ.

Dallas Willard insists that more important than our disciplines is the attitude (or spirit) we bring. In other words, why are we doing an exercise? What is our purpose? We need a vision that the risen Christ is

before us, inviting us to apprentice ourselves to him and learn how to live our whole lives in the Kingdom of God.

Two Keys to Success: *Practice and Habit*

A practice is something we can do that enables us to do what we haven’t yet been able to do by our own direct effort. When we practice these habits it connects us to a power much greater than our own – the Spirit of God that raised Jesus Christ from the dead!

So if you can’t break the power of an addiction to alcohol or pornography one step to get free (in addition to obvious measures like 12 Step Recovery, Celebrate Recovery psychotherapy, etc.) might be to fast from food. With practice you can experience the reality that fasting is feasting: even though you’re not eating you’re sustained in the joy and peace of God by meditating on Scripture and praying. If you can get past headaches and grumpiness when fasting and learn to be sweet and strong without getting the food you need then you can apply this to resisting your compulsive behavior.

The other way discipline works is because we’re developing new and healthy habits. You can’t be good at golf without developing a number of specific habits in your body — there are seemingly a hundred aspects to a good golf swing! We can’t even drive our cars safely without habits. Without thinking about it we notice conditions on the road and break when needed.

Our Spiritual life works the same way. We need bodily habits that engage our mind and heart with God. We want to get into a position in our daily lives where we find ourselves meditating on Scripture, praying, or blessing the one who curses us without even having intended to do so. Using an intelligently designed course of disciplines over time will do that.

From Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*

THE PRACTICES OF JESUS

As we continue to look at the spiritual practices it is key that we look to Jesus as our model and how we can grow in grace with Him. At Wilshire we say we want to **Find Jesus Daily**. We don't just come to know Jesus and then try to live life on our own. We want to practice being in the presence of Jesus every day. Often we think of practice as something we "have" to do, but I hope as you journey through some of these practices, you will see that these are things we "get" to do with Jesus and will help us to become more like Him.

Christ Jesus himself modeled these Spiritual Practices and this was crucial to the peace and power that he lived with. Studying our Master's rhythm of life in the Gospels is one of the most important things we can do. Jesus grew in grace (Luke 2:40, 52) and Peter urges us that we must do the same (2 Peter 3:18). Disciplines don't set aside our need for grace nor do they earn us anything — they simply are means to help us be with Jesus to become like him. As the Son of God abides in the Father's love so we abide in him and then he and the Father abide in us! (John 15:9-10)

John Ortberg, said, "Practices such as reading Scripture and praying are important — not because they prove how spiritual we are — but because God can use them to lead us into life."

Jesus is the way to life — and not just life after death, but life here and now. When he said, "Follow me," he meant it. At Wilshire our goal is to Help People Follow Jesus. This is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. In all he did and taught, Jesus conveyed that our spiritual life takes place in our physical reality as well as in the heart. If we believe what he said about the spiritual life, it only makes sense we should do what he did.

The practices of Jesus have been recognized for centuries as the core activities of the spiritual life. In the same way a runner is equipped to compete in a marathon by the discipline of physical training, so training through spiritual disciplines frees us to live each day with the "easy yoke" and "light burden" Jesus spoke of (Matthew 11:30).

These practices do not earn us favor with God or measure spiritual success. They are exercises which equip us to live fully and freely in the present reality of God — and God works with us, giving us grace as we learn and grow.

HELPING PEOPLE FIND & FOLLOW JESUS

THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER

Prayer is our connection to God. We see often in the scriptures how Jesus went off to pray and talk to His Father. Prayer is not just a one way conversation. A helpful definition of prayer I found is: “The interactive conversation with God about what we are doing together”.

Prayer is, first and always, listening to God—seeking to grasp what His will is in any given circumstance. In listening and perceiving God’s will, the pray-er is inevitably a participant of change, within oneself and those circumstances and lives for which we pray. Prayer is a process of lifelong learning as we seek to approach our Father with openness, honesty, and trust as his child.

I believe it is important to have both a quiet and set aside time for prayer and also to as I Thessalonians 5:17 says to “pray continually”. This means that we can lift up our prayers to God at any time of the day, not just when we set aside time.

We have provided a couple of great resources for you to help you on this journey. One is our 21 Day Prayer Guide that will provide scripture, a short devotional and guided prayer questions to get you in the habit of praying on a regular basis. The other resource is our Fasting and Prayer guide that teaches the discipline of fasting or refraining from something to draw you closer to God. Both of these resources are here to encourage you to take the next step where God is calling you to connect with Him through prayer.

THE PRACTICE OF BIBLE READING

This practice is defined as: Trusting the Holy Spirit-inspired words of Scripture as our guide, wisdom, and strength for life.

The Bible has the power to change our lives. Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, it judges the thoughts and attitude of the heart”.

There are some great resources to help us engage in God’s word on a regular basis.

One that we have used to engage in God’s word is our S.O.A.P. method that stands for Scripture, Observation, Application and Prayer. The idea is to choose a passage of scripture to read, then make a few key observations

about the verses. After that to ask yourself how this applies to your life and then write out a prayer to God on what you are learning. This is a great way to engage in God’s word and apply it to your life.

There is also the YouVersion Bible app that provides a daily reading and plan to engage you in God’s word. Another option is to find a devotional book that you can use to help engage you in God’s word and how to apply it to your life.

I hope that wherever you are on the journey that you see the importance of being in God’s word on a regular basis as a habit that will help us to grow in our faith. I pray that you will be able to find time whether it is 1 minute a day or 1 hour a day to get into God’s word and see how it shapes and transforms your life.

THE PRACTICE OF SERVICE

The next of the spiritual practices I want us to look at is service. It is hard to really narrow down what service actually is, because it can take on a variety of different ways it can be done. One definition that I think helps when it comes to this practice is: “Humbly serving God by overflowing with his love and compassion to others, especially those in need.” What I love about this definition is that it reminds us that serving is to come out of the overflow of God’s love in our loves and then being poured out to others.

Another definition that is helpful for us to consider is: “Service is a way of offering resources, time, treasure, influence and expertise for the care, protection, justice and nurture of others. Acts of service give hands to the second greatest commandment ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’”

At Wilshire we like to call those who serve “**Difference Makers,**” because we believe that when you are serving others in any capacity you are making a difference in their lives and in the Kingdom. At Wilshire we have so many different ways to serve and get involved in what God is doing both in our church and in the community.

As you spend time thinking about this discipline, ask yourself and reflect on some of these questions:

- > What are some of the needs I see around me? In my church? In my community?
- > What are some of the talents and abilities God has given me to bless others?
- > What steps do I need to take to grow in this discipline of service?

We would love to talk with you more about ways God is calling you and encouraging you in serving Him and His kingdom. We have a lot of great opportunities to get involved in our church, community and around the world.

THE PRACTICE OF SOLITUDE

The next practice we are going to explore is the practice of Solitude. I am just going to put it out there that this is one of the hardest of the disciplines for myself. Over the years I have tried to practice this discipline and have had times where it went really well and other times where it was a struggle. My advice to you as we look at this discipline is to give yourself grace and start small.

A definition of solitude I found to be helpful is: “Refraining from interacting with other people in order to be alone with God and be found by him.” This is not easy to do! We are social beings and we are constantly being bombarded with noise and distractions in our lives. I have found that this discipline takes planning and oftentimes getting away. I have enjoyed times of solitude at the beach or up in the mountains but even then we get sidetracked and distracted.

Deitrich Bonhoeffer wrote about this discipline and said, “We are so afraid of silence that we chase ourselves from one event to the next in order to not have to spend a moment alone with ourselves, in order to not have to look back at ourselves in the mirror.” As I said this is not an easy discipline but is one that requires planning and intentionality.

We see this modeled by Jesus often in the scriptures. In Mark 1:35 it says, “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” I often tell myself, if Jesus needed to do this in His life, how much more do I need to practice this in my life?

For this practice, I encourage you to look at your calendar and pick a day that you can possibly get away, maybe it is just a few hours or actually a full day to just be with God and to practice solitude. Don't bring your phone or anything else that can distract you and just spend time being with God and allowing His love to fill your life. It probably won't be easy, but I believe the time will be worth it.

THE PRACTICE OF CELEBRA- TION

We worship an AMAZING God! Just take a moment and begin to think or better yet, get a piece of paper and write down all the ways you see God as amazing in your life. With all that happens in our fast paced world it is often easy to miss and forget about all the ways God is at work. The practice of Celebration helps us to find times and ways to give praise, glory, honor and celebrate all that God is doing.

One of my favorite times of the week is during our staff meetings when we take the first several minutes and go around sharing “Wins” from that week. It is so encouraging to hear all the different things that are shared and they don’t all have to be huge, even the simplest things can encourage us and show us how faithful our God truly is.

Take a moment and look at Acts 3:1-8. After Peter heals the man, it says in verse 8, “Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking, jumping and praising

God.” That is celebration! God loves to celebrate and loves even more when we, as his people, join him in celebrating all the wonderful things he has done for us.

Celebration can take place in a variety of different ways. It can include time spent with others, sharing meals, working, serving, worshiping, laughing, listening to music, dancing and so on. It is definitely easier for most of us to find the negative or the things that are not going the way we want or expect them to go. This discipline causes us to be aware and pay attention to what God is doing around us and then take the time to celebrate that.

Begin to pray for eyes to see all that God is doing. If it helps write down on a notepad or a note in your phone when you see God at work. As you build your list, spend time celebrating those things and giving God the glory He deserves.

THE PRACTICE OF SABBATH

Even God rested. We see in Genesis that after God created the heavens and the earth and everything in them, that He took a day of rest. The practice of Sabbath can also be a difficult one for us in our busy and always on the go world. Taking time to rest is a great reminder that God is the one in control of everything. The Sabbath is a gift from God, as it says in Mark 2:27, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”

We most likely will always have a “to do” list of things we need to get done, want to get done or keep putting off. It seems to be never ending and it is not good for our bodies to keep going and going. We need rest and what better way than to rest in God and trust that He is in control. A helpful definition of Sabbath is “Doing no work to rest in God’s person and provision; praying and playing with God and others”.

What does that look like for you? What are some ways that you can take time and rest in God’s person and provision? Are you able to turn off your computer and phone for a period of time and trust that God is in control?

I love what author Wayne Muller says in his book “Sabbath.” He says, “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.”

If we are not intentional about planning a time for Sabbath, I can assure you it won’t happen. As I said earlier, there is always something we can be working on or doing. Can we be intentional about taking time on a regular basis to set aside to just rest and be in God’s presence? Answer the following questions.

The day I will Sabbath:

Ways I will Sabbath and rest from striving:

Devices, technology, activities I will rest from:

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Thank you for going on this journey through some of the Practices of Jesus. I hope you have enjoyed them and will continue to use them in your journey with God and connecting with Him. There are many other spiritual practices we can look at for our lives. If you are looking for more resources on the Spiritual Practices here are a few suggestions:

Richard Foster's classic book, ***Celebration of Discipline, The Path to Spiritual Growth***. Hailed by many as the best modern book on Christian spirituality, Celebration of Discipline explores the "classic Disciplines," or central spiritual practices, of the Christian faith. Along the way, Foster shows that it is only by and through these practices that the true path to spiritual growth can be found.

John Mark Comer's book, ***The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the Modern World*** is a great modern resource with practical ways to live out these spiritual practices in our busy world.

Another great resource to look at is the ***Spiritual Disciplines Handbook, Practices that Transform Us*** by Adele Calhoun. This resource has over 70 different disciplines that we can practice to help us become more and more like Jesus.

We would love to hear any feedback, stories and ways these practices have helped connect you to God. Please reach out to bryan@wilshireave.com.