

HUB CHURCH

P R A X I S

A D I S C I P L E S H I P

C U R R I C U L U M

2021 EDITION

HUB CHURCH

P R A X I S

O

W H A T I S P R A X I S

2021 EDITION



PRAXIS #0

WHAT IS PRAXIS

What's the most important thing about you? Is it the way you look? Perhaps the things you've accomplished in your life? Maybe the family, community or set of traditions from which you come? How about your income or education level? Is it your reputation or how many people follow you? What is it?

In his now famous book *The Knowledge of the Holy*, the late author and scholar A.W. Tozer unequivocally asserted that, "What comes into (your) mind when (you) think about God is the most important thing about (you)!" He went on to say that, "There's scarcely an error...or a failure in (our lives), that cannot be traced...to imperfect (or just wrong) thoughts about God." More specifically, author C.J. Mahaney says, "Very small errors in a person's understanding of the gospel seem to result in very big problems in that person's life." Even secularists agree; "The historian Tom Holland, a longtime secular progressive, recently wrote that despite his faith in God fading during his teen years, he now realizes his most fundamental instincts about life only make sense as an inheritance from the Christian story. Holland's book *Dominion* is a journey through Western history to narrate how our culture's moral ideals derive 'ultimately from claims made in the Bible: that humans are made in God's image; that his Son died equally for everyone; that there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female.'" Human rights, a universal concern for the vulnerable, human equality, sexual restraint, reverence for humility, and the notion of moral progress itself are just a few of our common ideals that have developed in light of the Christian story. Holland can't get past the irony: 'The West, increasingly empty though the pews may be, remains firmly moored to its Christian past.'"¹ Thinking correctly about God is imperative for life in every facet!

Now, there's been a considerable amount of ink spilled on this topic of thinking rightly about God and the Gospel. It is, after all in many respects, why God gave us His word, the Bible; so that we might learn to think (and then obey) His thoughts after Him!

60 or so years ago, starting with what the Bible says or what God is like as seen in the Bible, sufficed to help people enter into relationship with Him, because even those who were unchurched were far more church-ed than most are today. Generally speaking, at least in the modern west, there was a kind of cultural Christianity that shaped the way we understood the world around us. So for example, you could host a church service or religious event complete with a dynamic speaker and people would not only come, they'd receive the good news of Christ! You could produce systematic theology textbooks that gave categories by which to rightly understand the God whom we were interested in rightly understanding

¹ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/unbelievers-christian/>

And all of it was good! Today however; the rise of secularism, relativism, post-modernism and every other “ism” has lead the culture to become nothing short of post-truth, post-Christian, post-church, and basically, post-everything, such that what worked in the past no longer works in the present. No longer are people, including people in the church, as willing to simply believe and then practice propositional truth. Rather, the desire is to experience something, and only after, determine if it's true and therefore worth believing. It's certainly not ideal, but it's also not without hope. After all, if the God of the Bible is the author of life and truth (John 17:17), then anything truly true must be able to be lived and anything lived must point back to that which is ultimately true!

PRAXIS: PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND THEOLOGY IN PRACTICE

With insight and help from various friends and network partners like Lark Network (formerly The Table Network), 3DM, The Soma Family of Churches, The Summit Network, Redeemer City to City and others, *Praxis* is our attempt to unearth a few irreducible, but beautiful truths about the person and work of Jesus, in order to help you not just know more about God and the life He has for you, but actually begin to live it in ways that are life-giving for you and those around you! In other words, *Praxis* is as it sounds: practical theology and theology in practice! And it's predicated upon 2 great truths: A Message of Freedom & a Medium of Family:

A MESSAGE OF FREEDOM

Rewind 2,000 years to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and history will show that a shift occurred in the message the early church was *speaking* in comparison to the message those around them had *heard* in the name of religion. Theirs was a message, not about a new religion Jesus had ushered in, but about God having gone out of the religious business all together, and solved all the world's problems without any of our moral or religious endeavors. In Christ, God had poured out His love on sinners of the world, scandalously swallowed up our debt, and risen from the grave with the glorious declaration that we're now free to acknowledge our brokenness, drop our mildewed performances, be nothing in ourselves, and simply rest in Jesus' finished work on our behalf.

This message was and still is a complete shift from everything ever heard in the name of “religion,” “spirituality” or even “progress” - a message we wouldn't think up if we could and couldn't think up if we would, because it isn't about us. It isn't about doing anything to go faster, be better, get along, or “win at life.” Quite the opposite. It's about Jesus and all that He's done to give us life, by losing His. It's a message of true freedom and like spokes on the “hub” of a wheel, out of it springs beautiful things like dependency, hospitality, transparency and transformation.

A MEDIUM OF FAMILY

Rewind 2,000 years again; the second shift that was occurring was in what the early church was *doing* in comparison to what those around them had *seen* in the name of religion. For thousands of years, prior to the arrival of Christ, the medium that had carried God's message of

freedom had primarily been shaped by feasts and festivals, professional clergy, a place known as the Temple, and a myriad of religious rituals and routines. But with the arrival of Jesus, the family of God, known as “the church,” became the medium. Those who believed and followed Christ were made children of God, spiritual siblings to each other, and ambassadors for the family. And as a family, they were free to meet anytime and anywhere, so that as the homes and third spaces in which they gathered filled up - a result of each person intentionally and joyfully sharing what they knew of the freedom of Christ with those around them - new church families were forming all the time.

A LOOK AT TODAY

Fast forward to today. It appears that in many settings, perhaps especially in cities, not only has the church somehow shifted back to a message and medium that’s more in tune with the realities found prior to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, but the revolutionary good news of Jesus seems to have become encrusted with teachings and techniques that stop short of the life-changing love of God. Preaching has become limited to the work of a few professionals, and church expressions have become unable to meet people where they are, or worse, become completely irrelevant to peoples’ lives. The beautiful tapestry that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, put on display through the family of God, feels like it’s been graffitied over.

ANOTHER WAY FORWARD

With *Praxis*, our hope is to wash off as much of the graffiti as possible, so that Jesus’ message of freedom can be passed along to each and every person who wants it and wants to pass it along to others. That is what *Praxis* is all about: living out the beautiful realities of what’s already true in Christ!

WHAT MAKES PRAXIS UNIQUE?

1. *Praxis* is Malleable: It isn’t a rigid list of to-do’s, a formal Bible study, or even something you pick up and read cover-to-cover like a book. Instead, having been developed in a transient, post-Christian, post-church, post-Biblically literate, urban setting, it’s malleable enough to work as both a primer for those new to the Bible and a commentary for those who’ve been disciplined, but need something to look back on as they’re discipling others. In that way, it’s less about adding anything to your already busy life, than it is about being intentional within the busyness!
2. *Praxis* is Accessible: The dynamic combination of Scriptural passages, brief articles, and reflection/application questions means that *Praxis* is accessible to any number of people without being overwhelming. It works when you’re on the go and when you’re not. It works for those familiar with the Bible and those who aren’t. It doesn’t require a lot of time but you can go as deep with it as you want. And perhaps most importantly, it works in the context of your individual life and network of relationships.
3. *Praxis* is Irreducible: I think we can all agree, that we don’t lack for information. Our problem is not lack of knowledge, but overstimulation and inability to put into practice

what we already know. *Praxis* is not designed to give you everything. Rather, it's designed to de-clutter things a bit in order to give you a few irreducible essentials on which you can build the rest of your life. The truths found within *Praxis* are concepts we never graduate from, but only ever grow deeper in!

4. *Praxis* is Reproducible: *Praxis* is designed to give away. Whether its inviting someone to consider the Bible passages and questions presented in *Praxis*, sharing the compendium article with them to provoke conversation, simply using the illustrations to explain a concept, or even forming a group with which you can go through the material together, the goal of *Praxis* is to personally walk out the truths presented, while inviting others to do the same with you. In other words, *Praxis* is designed to provoke your heart and in doing so move you to share what you're learning and experiencing with your neighbor(s).

Given the uniquenesses of Praxis, we think it can be used in a number of different and effective ways:

1. Individual Use: As a kind of devotional curriculum, in which the Field Journal Scriptures are studied and the articles are used to supplement one's personal study of the Scriptures.
2. One-On-One Use: As a kind of on-going discipleship conversation, in which the Field Journal Scriptures are studied individually or together and the articles are discussed together.
3. Group Use: As a kind of practical theology class, in which the Field Journal Scriptures assigned for personal study, discussed in a group setting and then supplemented with the articles after the each group discussion.

THE CONTENT OF PRAXIS

- #1: Who Is Jesus
- #2: What Was Jesus' Mission
- #3: How We Become Followers of Jesus
- #4: How We Live And Grow With Jesus

- #5: Church As A Family
- #6: Timeless Family-Practice
- #7: Timeless Doesn't Mean Tiresome

- #8: Experiencing the Bible for All It's Worth (Picture)
- #9: Experiencing the Bible for All It's Worth (Process)
- #10: Enjoying God (Prayer)
- #11: Enjoying God (Contemplation)



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W H O I S J E S U S

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PRAXIS #1
WHO IS JESUS (FIELD JOURNAL)



MAIN IDEA :: *In Jesus all life is found and outside of Jesus there is no life.*

THEMATIC WORD :: *Life*

SCRIPTURES¹

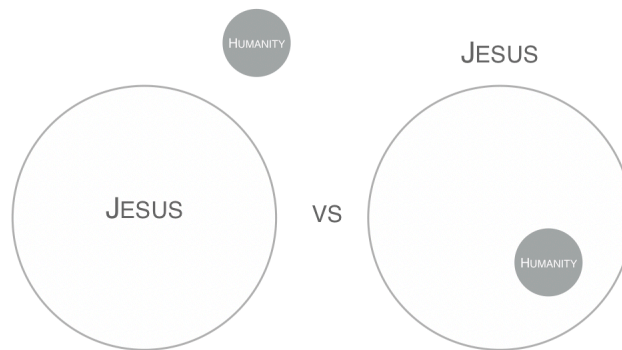
- Mark 1:14-15
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- John 1:1-14
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- Philippians 2:11
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- Colossians 1:15-20
 - Observations
 - Interpretation

¹ A proper understanding of Scripture always includes a methodical, orderly answering of questions which seek to get at what's called the authorial intent or originally intended meaning of a text within its context. The two most basic questions that need answering for any set of verses are: Observation and Interpretation.

- Observation means seeing what's in the verses and includes asking questions like, "What's the context in which the passage is found?; What's the literary form of the text?; What things are being emphasized, repeated, compared, contrasted, etc?; What things jump off the page to you or seem important?"

- Interpretation means understanding what's being said by the verses and includes asking questions like, "What does this passage tell me about who God is or what He has done in Christ?; What does it tell me about who I am and how I am created to live, etc?"

WHO IS JESUS VISUALIZED



In Jesus all life is found and outside of Jesus there is no life.

REFLECTION & APPLICATION QUESTIONS

What has been your view of and thoughts about who Jesus is?

What does the culture at-large say about who Jesus is? What have you heard?

What is the main idea of these passages regarding Who Jesus Is?

How might believing there is no life outside of Jesus change the way you think about your life?
How might believing that change how you see those around you, particularly those who don't believe in Jesus yet?

Is there anything you sense you need to believe, do or share with someone around you in light of this week's passages and main idea?

PRAXIS #1 WHO IS JESUS



MAIN IDEA :: *In Jesus all life is found and outside of Jesus there is no life.*

THEMATIC WORD :: *Life*

Renowned historian Huston Smith once noted that there have only been two figures in history who ever lived so radical a life that it caused people not to ask who they were, but what they were. Those two figures were Buddha and Jesus Christ. Prior to both, no one had ever seen integrity, love and life lived like those two displayed. And so with both, people naturally responded by worshipping them. Yet Buddha would not accept worship and instead pointed people to his teachings. Jesus on the other hand, accepted such worship unequivocally and did so by saying that He Himself was God and worthy to be worshipped!

THY KING(DOM) COME

Let's travel to a time before the name Jesus meant much of anything.

Around 4 BCE, a boy was born to peasant parents in what is now modern day Palestine. Denying that she had cheated on her fiancé, rumors spread of this mother's insistence that her pregnancy was divine. She had a baby boy. Controversy surrounded Him from birth. The boy grew up as a carpentry apprentice to His father. Even with this humble upbringing, this boy, named Jesus, astounded the leaders in the Jewish temple with His understanding of God and the Old Testament Scriptures.

When Jesus was roughly thirty years old, He stepped away from His profession as a carpenter into a different line of work. He started traveling to surrounding Jewish towns, talking about God. Before getting into what He said, we have to remember that the Jewish nation saw itself as the people of God, the ones chosen by God and through whom God would bless all of the other nations of the world. So for Jesus to go to the people who believed they were closest to God, and tell them about God...took grit!

Suffice it to say, Jesus failed to ease His way into this new season of work. His first words in Mark's gospel were a stunning announcement, in which He *"came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel'" (Mark 1:14-15)*. For Jesus to speak with that kind of authority to His fellow Jewish people; declaring the kingdom of God had finally arrived, was the equivalent of saying "the Kingdom of God has come AND I AM the King!"

The word "repent" there literally means "to turn" or to "change one's mind." Jesus was telling them to turn *from* a belief they'd long held about God and to a new belief about Him; namely,

from the idea that God is far off and His kingdom unattainable, to an understanding of the kingdom and all **life**, now standing in front of them, in the person of a King, who had come!

However, Jesus did more than simply proclaim and paint pictures, through parables, of this kingdom-life. He put it on display as He healed the blind and the paralyzed; raised the dead, and even exorcised demons from people. Jesus wasn't just telling people that the Kingdom had come; He was showing them that *"the kingdom was at hand."* As He would later say, *"But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."* (Luke 11:20)

SUBVERSIVE & DISRUPTIVE

Saying and doing things like this dramatically upsets the status quo. Who has the most to lose when the status quo is upset? Those in power; in this case the religious and political elite!

Jesus was subverting the powers of His day. He was a threat to the carefully maintained system that kept people in line by keeping them dependent on those in power. To add insult to injury, Jesus linked up with 12 guys who were sure to be picked last in Jewish kickball, and soon began sending them to do the same things He was doing.

In the minds of the political and religious "elite," Jesus was attempting to start a revolution that needed to be stopped. A revolution was exactly what the commoners wanted though. They were tired of the injustice served to them by both the Romans and the religious elite. So they chose Jesus. They sat at His feet and wrapped themselves around His every word. Even the discarded and despised of Jesus' day shared meals and conversation with Him.

Jesus wasn't a passing fad like some had hoped or expected. Instead, it seemed that, by the day, He grew in popularity, leading those who opposed him to take more drastic measures. They eventually found one in Jesus' inner circle they could bribe. This man -- Judas -- would hand Jesus over to the Roman authorities for the modern equivalent of, roughly, \$400.

And that's exactly what happened. Jesus was arrested on the grounds of being both an insurgent and a heretic; the latter by virtue of having claimed to be one with God Himself (*"I and the Father are one."* - John 10:30; *"Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father"* - John 14:9). Though the official courts did not find any evidence to convict Jesus, those who hated Him relentlessly accused Him. They demanded His execution and under a banner of political expediency, the Roman government ultimately granted their request.

Jesus was known for miraculous healings, authoritative teachings and multiplying food. Yet He was killed, like a criminal, by crucifixion (the Roman punishment for those who opposed the empire). After His death, Jesus was laid in a tomb with a massive stone in place to block its entrance. Hardened Roman soldiers were stationed to guard it with their very lives.

The movement that had started to gain momentum around the person of Jesus seemed to die with Him. None were more surprised than His followers, who immediately retreated into hiding.

But a few days later, His formerly scattered and afraid followers began running around claiming to have seen Jesus alive and well. The tomb was undeniably empty and historical documents, from the Scriptures and even outside sources, record that more than 500 people saw Him alive. His followers swore to the truth of His resurrection, which eventually led to all of their deaths. No matter how many were threatened and ultimately killed, the message was unstoppable. This is the story of Jesus! This is the good news of the Gospel!

JESUS CHANGES EVERYTHING

When asked, “Who is Jesus?”, we start by explaining the historical narrative, because if this story is true, then the ramifications are paramount. If this story is true, then Jesus is the key to glorious things like hope, meaning, forgiveness, joy, purpose, and **life** itself. If this story is true, then the kingdom of God really is near; it’s not far off or unattainable. If this story is true, Jesus is our creator, sustainer, and reconciler.

In the Apostle Paul’s letter to the church at Colossae, he begins by reflecting on things that Jesus had said and demonstrated about Himself during His earthly ministry.

“He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” (Colossians 1:15-20)¹

When Paul writes “all things” multiple times there, he literally means everything. Everything in existence - past, present, and future - was and is created by Jesus, through Jesus, and for Jesus. By Jesus’ mere desire, the entire universe was created and even now, is sustained. In a very literal sense, Paul is claiming exactly what Jesus had already claimed about Himself; namely, that by His mere desire, all life/the entire universe was created and is sustained. Quite simply, He is; therefore, *“the way, the truth, and the LIFE. (And) no one comes to (God) the Father except through Him.”²*

Think about that! If we’re honest, it’s nothing short of a radical and even paradigm shifting thought. Because what both Paul and Jesus are saying is that no one - not you, not me, not your family, your neighbors, not a single person or thing, be that good or bad - exists outside

¹ A similar statement about life being by and in Jesus is made by the Apostle John in his Gospel: John 1:1-14

² John 14:6

of Jesus! When we take that thought, along with the myriad of people throughout history whose lives have been changed simply by encountering Jesus, we come to see that believing life apart from Jesus is possible, is like a child who covers their eyes in order to not be seen by their parents.

Jesus is the center of all things. In Him all things find their existence, purpose, and fulfillment. Practically, it means that in Jesus; we find the definition of goodness, which alleviates us of all fear. In Him we find the definition of greatness, which frees us from the anxiety of thinking we have to have control of our lives at all times. In Jesus, we find the definition of grace, which liberates us from the madness of needing to prove ourselves. And in Jesus, we find the definition of glory, which invites us to stop hunting for happiness and life outside of Him!

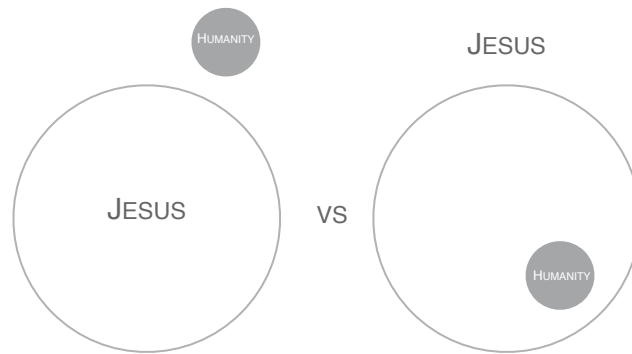
THE PROBLEM > THE SOLUTION

The problem is reality and perception rarely line up. For example, prior to Copernicus, the Earth was believed to be the center of the universe. For hundreds of years we perceived something to be true, when in actuality it was false. No matter how many refused Copernicus' astronomical model, reality still reigned. Likewise, regardless of if you persist in the belief of your own centrality, Jesus reigns and remains central to your existence!

Jesus freely gave Himself to rescue a hell-bent world that often thrives on the lie of independence and autonomy. The supposed "freedom" of life on our own terms is remarkable, given that the testimony of the Scriptures is that *"while we were still sinners Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8). It's even more remarkable to think that the very breath used to say, "Jesus, I love you," or "Jesus, I reject you" is provided by Him who gives breath. There is no escaping His presence; no hiding from His sight. He's relentless in His loving pursuit of you and those around you. Not only can forgiveness be found in Christ, but also life! For He is "life" (**John 14:6**). It's a myth to think we can have life apart from the One who created and sustains all life.

The kingdom is a King who's simultaneously right under your nose. The kingdom and kingdom-life is a King present within every single nook and cranny of the world He's made. Quite simply, "the Gospel" or message of Christ's Kingdom is that **we are free because "Jesus Christ is Lord."** (**Philippians 2:11**). We are now free from having to believe the exhausting notion that we need to build or bring a kingdom somewhere on earth; be that through social, political, economic, personal efforts or otherwise. It's already here and still coming without any of our good-intentioned or even religious help. And so, Jesus has invited us in Mark 1:14-15 to *"believe this gospel;"* this the 'good news' of a King who's just as close to you as He is with those who don't yet believe. Sure, people may not be experiencing this life-changing reality; they may be dead to this joy, fearing when goodness is at hand, worrying when greatness is before them, striving when grace is offered, and tirelessly seeking when glory has revealed itself. But the good news is that all they (and we) have to do is awaken to the King "at hand."

WHO IS JESUS VISUALIZED



In Jesus all life is found and outside of Jesus there is no life.

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PRAXIS #2
WHAT WAS JESUS' MISSION (FIELD JOURNAL)



MAIN IDEA :: *Jesus died so that we might receive life.*

THEMATIC WORD :: *Death*

SCRIPTURES¹

- Matthew 16:21
 - Observations
 - Interpretation

- Mark 10:45
 - Observations
 - Interpretation

- John 19:28-30
 - Observations
 - Interpretation

- 2 Corinthians 5:21
 - Observations
 - Interpretation

- 1 Peter 3:18
 - Observations
 - Interpretation

¹ A proper understanding of Scripture always includes a methodical, orderly answering of questions which seek to get at what's called the authorial intent or originally intended meaning of a text within its context. The two most basic questions that need answering for any set of verses are: Observation and Interpretation.

- Observation means seeing what's in the verses and includes asking questions like, "What's the context in which the passage is found?; What's the literary form of the text?; What things are being emphasized, repeated, compared, contrasted, etc?; What things jump off the page to you or seem important?"

- Interpretation means understanding what's being said by the verses and includes asking questions like, "What does this passage tell me about who God is or what He has done in Christ?; What does it tell me about who I am and how I am created to live, etc?"

WHAT WAS JESUS' MISSION VISUALIZED



Jesus died so that we might receive life.

REFLECTION & APPLICATION QUESTIONS

What is the main idea of these passages regarding Jesus' mission? I.e: What does Scripture actually say about why came and Jesus lived among us?

Have your thoughts on Jesus' mission changed in considering these passages? If so, how?

What do you believe the people around you, who don't follow Jesus think about His mission?

How might this belief regarding Jesus' mission to die change your mission in life? How does your life look in light of this mission now?

Is there anything you sense you need to believe, do or share with someone around you in light of this week's passages and main idea?

PRAXIS #2

WHAT WAS JESUS' MISSION



MAIN IDEA :: *Jesus died so that we might receive life.*

THEMATIC WORD :: *Death*

PREVIOUSLY...

In "Praxis #1: Who Is Jesus," we saw, very simply, that Jesus Christ is Lord. As such, ***in Jesus all life is found and outside of Jesus there is no life!*** The implications of this reality are far-reaching; impacting how we view Jesus, how we understand our own lives, and even how we relate to those around us.

WHAT ABOUT TODAY?

However, a question remains: If all life is found in Jesus and outside of Jesus there is no life, why are our lives and the lives of those around us filled with so much death? I think we can all agree...our world is messed up. Just turning on cable news for 5 minutes can have you pining for "The Late Show" to come on earlier, or more than that, just get you longing for brokenness and dysfunction, maybe in your own life, to be done away with for good. If that's you, you're actually similar to those in the Bible, who we're told, were awaiting a King, whom God had promised in various and repeated ways throughout the Old Testament, would come, mend brokenness, right injustice, and do away with evil for good. As the Prophet Isaiah long-foretold:

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore..." (Isaiah 9:6-7)

THE ARRIVAL

After a substantial period of time, the promised Son finally came. It was God Himself who showed up, in the person of Jesus, and announced *"The kingdom of God is at hand"* (Mark. 1:14). "Finally!" they thought, "Game on! God has come to rescue us, and make the world straighten up and fly right."

On the scene was a man named John the Baptist. His singular purpose in life was to prepare the way for Jesus, and he rejoiced by telling people that Jesus had come to separate the good from the bad and to judge with fire (Matthew 3:11-12). But when Jesus came onto the scene, none of those things appeared to happen. Rather, Jesus seemed to be content restoring sight

to the blind, healing those born lame, cleansing lepers, raising the dead, and preaching good news to the poor, oppressed, and discarded. He even went so far as to say that He had come primarily for *"the lost sheep of the house of Israel"* (Matthew 15:24), meaning for those, who in being religious and a part of the people of God, shouldn't have needed Him nearly as much as others.

All of this non-intervention and focus on "the wrong people" left John the Baptist doubting if Jesus was even the promised one to get the job done. As such, he sent messengers to Jesus asking if he should begin looking for another promised one or "Messiah" (Matthew 11:2-6). For those wanting a swift cleansing of the world, they ended up disappointed. At the end of all of Jesus' traveling, teaching, and miracles, He simply died and disappeared (literally, was crucified, witnessed to have resurrected but then ascended into heaven), seemingly leaving no kingdom that could provide rescue or reform for the world.

THE SOLUTION

In **1 Peter 3:8**, the Apostle Peter, who's writing to people just like us, about God intervening and solving brokenness, writes this: *"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God."* Now at first glance, that certainly doesn't feel like much of a solution right? - Jesus, the long-awaited King, suffering and dying? That sounds more like non-intervention and disappointment! Moreover, Jesus' life and ministry had demonstrated that He was perfectly capable of opening the proverbial "can" on all the world's evil. - Just look at his miracles! So why the delay? Why not wipe everyone out and take over, using what the 16th century reformer Martin Luther referred to as, "right-handed power"? Why die and disappoint?

What we need to understand however, and what Peter is saying is, just because Jesus' solution to evil and brokenness was unexpected; that doesn't make it any less a solution! Actually, while unexpected, Jesus' solution was more comprehensive than we could have imagined! He won by losing! He exercised what the Luther called, "left-handed instead of right-handed power."...

RIGHT-HANDED VS LEFT-HANDED POWER

Statistics say that the majority of us - something like 90% of all people - are right-handed. So for most of us our right hand is our dominant one,¹ meaning "right-handed power" is a dominant kind of power. It's straight-lined and efficient, like removing dust with a cloth, or your enemy with a weapon. However, it's not great at preserving relationship. If that's what's desirable, then left-handed power is what's needed, because left-handed power is paradoxical power. It almost doesn't seem like power, because it can look like weak, shameful losing.

Left-handed power is the kind of power Jesus evidenced on the Cross. After all, the cross was the instrument of death chosen by the Romans to declare their victory over someone in the most humiliating and painful of ways. And while it didn't instantly set things right, which would

¹ <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Handedness>

have meant wiping out all sin, and with it, you and me as sinners, it did preserve relationship. More specifically, as Peter says, it gave us opportunity to be *"brought back to God...once and for all."*

Here's the point: More important to Jesus than cleaning up your circumstances, was cleaning up your hearts, life and future! Instead of wiping you out, Jesus sought to win you back, by Himself getting wiped out on the cross. Again as Peter says, *"the righteous for the unrighteous."* In other words, He traded right-handed for left-handed power - something for which He spoke plainly and soberly during the three years He spent with His disciples. Matthew, one of Jesus' disciples, recorded, *"From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things...and be killed, and on the third day be raised"* (**Matthew 16:21**). Again, Jesus said to them, *"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many"* (**Mark 10:45**).

Like most people bent towards the winner's circle - people like you and me, and especially those of us with religious or spiritual backgrounds and upbringings focused on performing, projecting, posturing and procuring, the disciples didn't understand or believe Jesus' announcements. It never really sunk in with them that Jesus would not be the prototypical action hero, bringing swift, right-handed judgment on God's enemies. They persisted in thinking that surely, there would be a heap of bodies and a whole lot of blood by the time He was done with them. But in the end, it was Jesus' body that was horrendously disfigured. It was His blood that was shed. Instead of judgment being brought on God's enemies, it was brought on God's Son.

MISSION COMPLETE

In Jesus' dying, we come to discover the heart of God toward the losers of this world - me and you - who have done a number on His creation and yet still think we're winners and God's gift to creation. We see that Jesus' mission was not to fix the Roman Empire. Nor was it to disciple or empower people so that they could fix Rome and the rest of the world thereafter. His mission was to die!

This is not only good news, it's the best news the world has ever known! Because in dying on the cross, Jesus announced His Father's dealings with the sin problem that brought evil and dysfunction into this world in the first place, are "finished."

*"After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit" (**John 19:28-30**).*

Jesus' death on the Cross was a "left-handed" act, so subversively powerful that evil itself could not undo it. It was a "left-handed" act, so powerful no one will ever need to do a single religious or moral act to improve upon it. There's not a single thing you need to DO to be

"brought back to God." It's been DONE by Christ, the *"righteous"* one suffering in your place. You're free! Or Galatians 5:1 says, *"it was for freedom that Christ set us free,"* which is to say, in Jesus, we have been set free from the project of self; both fixing ourselves and needing to fix others, because again, in what Luther called "The Great Exchange", our sin was placed on Christ and, by faith, the very righteousness and perfection of Jesus is placed on us. *"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"* (**2 Corinthians 5:21**). We, the world, need nothing else, but to place our faith in Him and rest in His finished work!

GOOD NEWS

As we look to the Scriptures through this lens, we learn that Jesus did bring a kingdom! It wasn't the kingdom of right-handed power built with force, strength and charisma and propelled by performing, projecting, posturing and procuring. Instead, it's the left-handed power of a King who descends from His throne to die for the rebels of His kingdom so they can live and rest.

The Kingdom of God; the rule and reign of Jesus Himself in the world, has no walls or boundaries. It doesn't have ladders providing new levels to attain or obstacles to overcome. This is because the Kingdom of God is a King who has made everything, reconciled everything, and holds everything in Himself (Colossians 1:15-20). He is the "Word," and there is not one ounce of soil found in this world where He's not been "sown" (Luke. 8:4-21). The Kingdom is not something we build. It's "unshakable." It's someone we simply "receive" (Hebrews 12:28). Truly the Kingdom got ushered in because ***the King was willing to die so that we might receive life!***

The question is: will you rest in this "finished" work of Jesus and relate this Good News to those around you? Or will you persist in thinking and present to others that something more is still needed to change or fix the world?

WHAT WAS JESUS' MISSION VISUALIZED



Jesus died so that we might receive life.

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PRAXIS #3

HOW WE BECOME FOLLOWERS OF JESUS (FIELD JOURNAL)



MAIN IDEA :: *Becoming a follower of Jesus and enjoying the life He died to invite us into requires faith in Christ alone!*

THEMATIC WORD :: *Faith*

SCRIPTURES¹

- John 3:16-18
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- Romans 3:23
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- Ephesians 2:8-9
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- Hebrews 7:26-27
 - Observations
 - Interpretation

¹ A proper understanding of Scripture always includes a methodical, orderly answering of questions which seek to get at what's called the authorial intent or originally intended meaning of a text within its context. The two most basic questions that need answering for any set of verses are: Observation and Interpretation.

- Observation means seeing what's in the verses and includes asking questions like, "What's the context in which the passage is found?; What's the literary form of the text?; What things are being emphasized, repeated, compared, contrasted, etc?; What things jump off the page to you or seem important?"

- Interpretation means understanding what's being said by the verses and includes asking questions like, "What does this passage tell me about who God is or what He has done in Christ?; What does it tell me about who I am and how I am created to live, etc?"

HOW WE BECOME FOLLOWERS OF JESUS VISUALIZED



Becoming a follower of Jesus and enjoying the life He died to invite you into requires faith in Christ alone!

REFLECTION & APPLICATION QUESTIONS

When you hear the words "disciple" or "Jesus-follower" what comes to mind?

What is the main idea of these passages regarding how we become followers of Jesus? Based on these passages, what does Scripture actually say about how we become disciples or followers of Christ?

Given what these passages say about how a person becomes a "follower of Jesus," would you consider yourself a Jesus-follower? If so, why? If not, why not?

How might this message of reckless grace free you to live both as a follower of Jesus and one seeking to help others follow Jesus?

Is there anything you feel you need to believe, do and/or share with others in light of this week's passages and main idea?

PRAXIS #3

HOW WE BECOME FOLLOWERS OF JESUS



MAIN IDEA :: *Becoming a follower of Jesus and enjoying the life He died to invite us into requires faith in Christ alone.*

THEMATIC WORD :: *Faith*

PREVIOUSLY...

In "Praxis #2: What Was Jesus' Mission," we saw that ***Jesus died so that we might receive life.*** Contrary to the expectations and hopes of those around Him (and those who had come long before Him), Jesus did not come to earth with a mission to conquer. He came with a mission to be conquered - to die - so that by His death, people everywhere could be invited into new life under His Kingdom reign. Jesus' "left-handed" power ensured that the problem of sin could be destroyed without us sinners being destroyed in the process.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL

Now, the idea of "sin" is no-doubt a touchy topic. It invokes thoughts of Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter," witch trials, or simply self-righteous and prudish moralists. But the reality is, no matter where you go in the world, you'll find a society that, while it may not use the word "sin," and might even espouse that everything is relative, it nevertheless has an understanding of beliefs or behaviors that are, and are not acceptable. Even here in America, where we pride ourselves on being "tolerant," we still find extreme intolerance of certain "sins." And so the question is not "IF sin," but "HOW to deal with sin." After all, the Bible is very clear that ever since the first act of disobedience in the Garden of Eden, humanity has been dead in its sin. We've become irreversibly bent toward living for ourselves at God's expense and preferring things other than God for our ultimate happiness - a function of choosing to distrust God unto rule-making (ie: I do what I want to do.) or rule-breaking (ie: I don't do what I don't want to do.) As Apostle Paul says in his letter to the Romans, "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (**Romans 3:23**). No person, regardless of background or upbringing, time or space is immune to sin, and it's assertion that life is about "me." So again, the question is "HOW to deal with sin."

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

For many, that "how" comes down to simply getting people to "sin less." This is why we've created correctional facilities, rehabilitation programs, classes on ethics, and self-help books. Capitalism and communism, governments and gangs, movements for more freedom and more restraint, have all tried to heal our sense of sin and brokenness. These inventions fall short however, because they cannot, and will never, change the self-obsessed heart of humanity.

God's solution to the problem of sin was different. His solution was to target our hearts from which sin comes, and forgive it, by dying for it, so that in doing so, the Father's dealings with the problem of sin would be "finished." As we saw in "Praxis #2: What Was Jesus' Mission," that's really what the Cross of Christ was; the announcement that God has destroyed sin without destroying sinners. **Hebrews 7:26-27** says it this way: *"For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself."* The author of Hebrews is saying that God does not need to crucify His Son again and again in order to deal with the sin of every sinner! No! *"He did this once for all when He offered up Himself."* Jesus, quite literally, did everything necessary for sinners like you and me to be invited into the new life of His kingdom and ultimately free from the effects of sin and brokenness. As Jesus Himself said, *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"* (Luke 4:18-19).

But that begs a question: "So what now?" Sin has been justly punished on the Cross. It's penalty was removed in the Resurrection, and that's an act in history that can't be undone. We are actually free to leave the exhausting madness of trying to clean-up or hide the sin and junk in our lives! We are quite literally free to be nothing in ourselves - free to rest! And yet, Jesus dying for all doesn't mean all know Him and are enjoying the freedom at their disposal! So how does someone/anyone awaken to this freedom, life and "salvation" and become a follower of Jesus? That's the question!

THE GOOD NEWS

In perhaps the most famous verse in all the Bible, **John 3:16**, Jesus (or depending on your translation: John, writing on behalf of Jesus) gives the answer to the question. He says this, *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."* Then in **v.18** He continues saying, *"whoever believes in Him is not condemned."* What's so wonderful about Jesus' words here is that they aren't advice; they're news! Advice tells us things we should, could or ought to do to bring about a possibility right? News though, is true regardless of if we do anything about it or not. Jesus is saying, *"News-flash, whoever simply believes in me will be saved and become a follower of mine!"* It's a promise!

Similarly, **Ephesians 2:8-9** says it this way, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."* Salvation is a "gift" that's solely from God, and received by "faith" alone in the person and work of Jesus. It's about simply having confidence in what Jesus has accomplished.

Now let's ask ourselves, does that sound radical? It should, because generally-speaking, you and I - and everyone around us - tends to believe that God or karma, or whatever you want to call it, is playing a game of tit-for-tat. So the idea of God saving sinners solely based on the life, death, and resurrection of His Son - ie: loving us without us ever making ourselves lovable - seems crazy! After all, aren't we so prone to believing that it takes more than just faith alone to become a follower of Jesus? There's got to be something we do right?

And yet, the overwhelming testimony of Scripture is that salvation isn't about behaving better, but about believing in the work of God on our behalf! Just do a quick study of the parables Jesus told. Have you ever noticed the badness of the parables' good characters? It's by design. Jesus is trying to show us the need for faith, not better works, by always rewarding the un-reformed. For example:

- The younger, prodigal brother who gets a welcome-home party is as wild and self-centered as they come, while his older brother, who's upset and won't come to the party, is a guy who has always done what is right. (Luke 15:11-32)
- The laborers, who get paid a full days wage for only an hour of work are freeloaders, while the all-day laborers who get pushed to the end of the line are the 'responsible' employees. (Matthew 20:1-16)
- The wise virgins - the bridesmaids, who ignore the needs of others with their noses in the air enjoy the party with the bridegroom, while the bridesmaids who left, out of a desire to better themselves, come back to find that they are not welcomed. (Matthew 25:1-12)

The list goes on-and-on with the same theme: life, freedom and salvation aren't about behaving better. They're about believing in the work of God on our behalf! Or to say it another way, even though our tendency is to resort to motive-correcting and behavior-adjusting as a means for obtaining or even maintaining salvation; Jesus isn't interested in anything that isn't a declaration of your inability and desperate need for Him! He's interested in your faith - your confidence in Him!

PUSHBACK #1

If becoming a follower of Jesus is a work of grace through faith, then why does the Bible talk about the act of repentance?

Contrary to what is often taught in church, the word "repent" is a translation of the Greek word *metanoein*, which means "turn your mind around." So when Jesus uttered the phrase "repent and believe" (Mark 1), that shouldn't be read as two separate acts. It's not, "repent first, and once you have that down, then you believe." Instead, it is a double imperative doing duty for a conditional statement of a single truth. For example, the proverb "spare the rod and spoil the child" means "If you spare the rod you will automatically spoil the child." These are two different sides of the same coin. To "repent and believe" means that when you turn to Jesus as your only hope - ie: you agree that you are dead and that you need His resurrection life - you are, in that moment, believing. Repenting and believing happens together as one act of faith.

PUSHBACK #2

If becoming a follower of Jesus is an act of faith alone, then what do we do with the call to obedience, responsibility, "works," etc, as seen in the book of James for example?

James 2:17 says, "... faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." In John 14:21 Jesus basically says, "those who love Me, obey Me, and so prove to be My disciples." While these are hallmark verses we often use to support a notion of "works," we must remember that, these passages are promises, not marching orders. Read within their context, and interpreted in light of all that Jesus has done and declared, they are rightly seen as things that characterize a follower of Jesus not make one a follower of Jesus!

Consider two key questions...

1. What are works?

A 'work', by definition, requires two things: (1) a plan for action, and (2) execution on your part to achieve that planned action. Consider then some things that AREN'T works: Suppose I want to make an orange. Even if I have a plan to make one, by say, planting an orange tree, we could not say that the production of any orange would, in any way, be a work of my own. After all, I did not have the ability to execute on that plan. All I could do is trust or have faith that the orange tree would do the work of producing an orange for me.

2. What is faith then, and how does it differ from works?

Suppose you're in the hospital - unable to move and unable to even pay for the care you're receiving. Now imagine your friend stops by for a visit and tells you, "*if you don't get your roof replaced ASAP, it's going to collapse.*" Then let's say they visit you again in a week and tell you they hired a roofer and the job is done. It's finished. At this moment, with this declaration, they invite you to put your mind at rest and trust their word about your roof. Would you say that act of faith or confidence on your part counts as a work? Of course not! You're paralyzed and poor. You didn't make a plan to deal with the roof because you didn't even know it was an issue until your friends told you. And you certainly didn't execute on a plan while being laid up in the hospital. Your only two options, when your friend presents you with this news, are to: (1) refuse to believe what they have declared about your need and go on worrying, or (2) believe your friend at their word, relax in gratitude, and enjoy the work they did for you. If you choose the latter, would you then be able to say that your "act of faith" caused your friend to work on your behalf? Of course not! This was their idea, not yours. They carried out the work without your help or even cooperation. In fact, it never even occurred to you to trust them until they told you about your need and the job was already completed on your behalf. Your faith, at the end of the day, did nothing in this scenario except enable you to enjoy a free gift from your friends. All you did was decide to trust and subsequently enjoy the gift.

The same is true for the finished work of Jesus on our behalf. We can trust and taste new life in Him, or we can disbelieve and keep hopelessly seeking life in other people and things that will ultimately disappoint!

RECEIVE AND REST

Sure, this message of seemingly irresponsible grace and scandalous love wars on our law-loving, fix-it-yourself, have-something-to-bring-to-the-table hearts. But as one person said, "if there is anything more for us to do than receive His gift of grace; anything we have to bring to the table other than faith, we would never make it to dinner! ***Becoming a follower of Jesus and enjoying the life He died to invite you into requires faith in Him alone!*** As Jesus said, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." (**John 3:16**).

HOW WE BECOME FOLLOWERS OF JESUS VISUALIZED



Becoming a follower of Jesus and enjoying the life He died to invite you into requires faith in Christ alone.

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4

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PRAXIS #4

HOW WE LIVE AND GROW WITH JESUS (FIELD JOURNAL)



MAIN IDEA :: *Faith in the finished work of Christ is not only what brings us TO Christ; it's what allows us to live and grow IN Christ.*

THEMATIC WORD :: *Abide*

SCRIPTURES¹

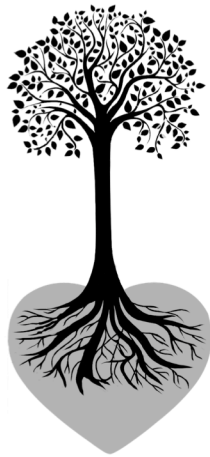
- John 15:1-11
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- Romans 8:1-4
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- 1 John 4:19
 - Observations
 - Interpretation

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- Observation means seeing what's in the verses and includes asking questions like, "What's the context in which the passage is found?; What's the literary form of the text?; What things are being emphasized, repeated, compared, contrasted, etc?; What things jump off the page to you or seem important?"

- Interpretation means understanding what's being said by the verses and includes asking questions like, "What does this passage tell me about who God is or what He has done in Christ?; What does it tell me about who I am and how I am created to live, etc?"

HOW WE LIVE AND GROW WITH JESUS VISUALIZED



Faith in the finished work of Christ is not only what brings us TO Christ; it's also what allows us to live and grow IN Christ.

REFLECTION & APPLICATION QUESTIONS

How do people seek to grow and change? What have you heard?

How have you struggled with the ideas of growth and change in light of your views about God and self?

What is the main idea of these passages regarding how we live and grow in Jesus?

How does believing what Scripture says about how we live and grow in Jesus free you to live now? How might this message of replacement be freeing for those around you?

Is there anything you feel you need to believe, do and/or share with others in light of this week's passages and main idea?

PRAXIS #4

HOW WE LIVE AND GROW WITH JESUS



MAIN IDEA :: *Faith in the finished work of Christ is not only what brings us TO Christ; it's what allows us to live and grow IN Christ.*

THEMATIC WORD :: *Abide*

PREVIOUSLY...

In "Praxis #3: How We Become Followers of Jesus," we saw that ***becoming a follower of Jesus and enjoying the life He died to invite us into requires nothing more and nothing less than faith*** (ie: confidence) in what Jesus accomplished on your behalf.

MOTIVATION AND METHOD

After talking with those who've placed their confidence in Christ and received the gift of the freedom, life and salvation, we often find that a question lingers. And really it's a question that's on all of our minds: Is real change possible? And if so, how does it happen? Can a fearful person become brave? A racist become tolerant? The un-disciplined develop self-discipline, etc? If you don't believe me, just consider the big-business that is the self-help industry. We all want to know if change and growth is possible and if so, how?

Rightly so, one of the great motivations for placing our initial confidence in Christ is that we've come to see that confidence in ourselves is a futile endeavor. Like Jesus' famous "Parable of The Prodigal Son," (which should really be titled, "Parable of The Prodigal Sons," since it begins with Jesus saying, "*There was a man who had two sons*" - Luke 15:11), we come to realize that we were all equally dead in our sin; some of us dying in our irresponsibility and rebellion, like the irreligious, whore-mongering, younger brother in the parable; others of us dying in our responsibility and self-righteousness, like religious, straight-edge, but admittedly self-righteous older brother. But just as both were pursued by the scandalous love of the father, so too we have been pursued by scandalous love of God our father! And so we rejoice that salvation is something made possible by Jesus alone and received by faith alone, as a "gift" from God alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). We rejoice that becoming a follower of Jesus simply requires confidence in Jesus!

And yet, just because we become a Christ-follower doesn't mean everything in our lives gets immediately changed for the better. On the contrary, as many have said, the longer you are in relationship with Jesus, the more you realize your need for Jesus. And so the question remains: Is real change possible? And if so, how does it happen? What's the method?

Unfortunately, as we search for the answer to that question something in us often moves our focus away from a life full of grace in Christ, and towards one of tireless, anxiety-driven performance. Even after becoming followers of Christ, we can easily believe life to be a kind of vague exam, in which we are never really sure if we're passing or failing. And so we keep pressing; exhausted and crashing, or exhausted and escaping, but never truly growing and changing - at least not from the inside-out! In other words, somewhere along the way, we trade faith for activity, only to get angst rather than rest. But consider what the Scriptures say...

ABIDING NOT ACTIVITY

In **John 15**, Jesus gives one of the most important teachings on how people change and subsequently what a disciple of His really is. He says,

*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." - **John 15:1-11***

In short, Jesus is equating spiritual growth to that of a plant, which of course is organic rather than mechanical in nature. By mechanical growth, we mean growth or change that is motivated by external compulsion. In agricultural terms, mechanical growth would be something like stapling blossoms on the branches of a plant to make it "grow." While the plant might "appear" healthy from a distance and perhaps satisfy some internal "desire" on the part of the gardener to "see something happen," the obvious reality is that stapling blossoms is not only unhealthy and unsustainable, it might be down-right destructive!

And yet, this is often how we conceive of growth and change in our own lives. We assume that "stapling" to our lives external motivators like rules, fear, the threat of punishment, social awkwardness, discomfort, etc will prompt us to change. We even assume this with Jesus when, for example, we believe He'll punish us if we don't change and bless us if we do. And so we "get busy" with spiritual activity hoping that growth and change will follow. And to be sure, from a distance, all our spiritual action may look like love for God, when in-fact it's simply some external compulsion driving us toward greater activity. As one person said, "religion can make us busy for Jesus without making us a friend of Jesus."

By contrast Jesus says that true growth and change is not mechanical, but organic. It happens from the inside-out and in that way is both healthy and sustainable even if delayed. As Jesus says, *"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing..."*

There are two things to take note of there:

- First, by using this branch and vine analogy for our lives (branches) in connection to His life (vine), Jesus is reminding us that just as a branch has no life apart from a vine, neither do we have any spiritual life apart from connection to Him. As we saw back in *"Praxis 1: Who Is Jesus,"* **Jesus is life and there is no life outside of Him!**
- Second, the word "abide" is the Greek word "meno." It literally means to "make your home in." Jesus is saying that when you plant yourself into Him, His life will flow in you. You will "bear fruit," or grow. By contrast, not having our lives planted in Christ results in, as Jesus says, being able to "do nothing." Now, that obviously doesn't mean "no-thing," as clearly lots of people who aren't connected to Jesus do lots of things; even religious things! What it means is "nothing of eternal value;" nothing with real life in it.

So that leaves us with a question: If abiding/planting ourselves in Jesus is what allows us to organically grow, change and "bear fruit," how do we actually do that? How do we "abide in Christ?" To that Jesus says, very clearly, *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love."* What an astounding statement! Jesus is inviting you to consider the Father's love for Him as His Son, which is obviously a love beyond anything we can comprehend. Parents, think of your love for your child. As hard as it might be to fathom, your love for your child is just a shadow of God the Father's love for His Son, Jesus. God has a perfect, everlasting love for His Son, and THAT is the love with which Jesus has loved you and in which you are to "make our home/plant your life." - *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love."*

To abide or plant your life in that love means that you rest in it. Abiding is not so much about the things you are to do for Jesus, as it is resting in the things He's done for you! To be fair, this is perhaps, the hardest part of life with Christ for us to learn - that God's acceptance of you is given to you not as a reward for what you have done, but as a gift. This is why scholars have long termed it "gift righteousness": God's righteousness given to you as a gift, through faith in Christ! It runs completely counter to our thoughts of needing to act or live a certain way in order for God to accept and approve of us! And yet, this is why the Gospel of Jesus Christ is such "good news" - because it's a Gospel of grace in which God offers you righteous standing with Him as a gift, not according to what you've done, but according to what Christ has done in your place. As **Romans 8:1-4** says,

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

When you receive, abide, and rest in that, Jesus' life starts to flow in you, at which point you begin to change. For example, you become a more humble person because you realize that your standing with God is not predicated upon anything you've done. You become less judgmental and more accepting of others because you see that grace is neither something that you've merited or something that others are failing to merit. You become less anxious because you see that you no longer need to prove yourself to God or others in order to be accepted. You become a more real and inviting person because you know yourself to be free from having to perform, posture, or pretend, since God has loved you for who you are, where you are! You become generous with your time, money and relationships, because you understand that the grace which you enjoy was given to you out of the extreme generosity of God the Father. The list goes on-and-on! You begin to change NOT because you are told or externally compelled to change, but because you yourself are changing from the inside-out! Your very desires, not just your behaviors, are changing. In other words, by virtue of "abiding" in Jesus' love for you, you begin to "bear fruit." This is why we can say: Real growth and change begins not with you being told what you are to do for God (ie: Activity), but in believing what God has done for you (ie: Abiding/Faith). Or to say it another way, believing rightly precedes behaving rightly, such that it really is true that, **Faith in the finished work of Christ is not only what brings us TO Christ; it's also what allows us to live and grow IN Christ!** The only reason we ever move away from a life full of grace-provoked growth in Christ, and towards a life of tireless, anxiety-driven performance is because we forget that **the grammar of Christianity is abiding, not activity!**

PUSHBACK #1: WHAT ABOUT OBEDIENCE?

At this point, many will rightly point to Jesus' words in v.10 - *"If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love."* - and say, *"You just talked about gift righteousness and resting in God's grace, but that sounds a lot like Jesus is saying that abiding in Him is conditional on keeping His commandments."*

And it's a great question. However, if we look again, we realize that Jesus is not saying that His love is a reward for having kept His commandments, but that one of the ways we remain connected to His love is by keeping His commandments. In other words, He's reminding you that obedience is not a way to earn God's favor, but the result of resting in the favor you already possess!

See, most of us tend to view God as One who gave things like “spiritual disciplines” (think rhythms of church attendance, Scripture reading, prayer, fasting, and solitude) in order to help grow us in our obedience to Jesus. Oftentimes the thought-process is, *“The more we do, the better we get, and the more God moves on our behalf.”* It’s a kind of spiritualized version of Malcom Gladwell’s *Outlier’s* principle. And although the idea is popular, and these “disciplines” and “rhythms” are undeniably good in and of themselves, they aren’t things God has told us to aim at so as to progress in the Christian life. They are not things we are to rely on for our growth. Rather, they are things we walk in in order to enjoy the full righteousness that is already ours in Christ!

Take an act of obedience like reading the Bible for example. Many Christians believe that if they don’t read their Bible well enough or often enough, God won’t bless them. So you can imagine the fear, angst or just drudgery that can accompany Scripture reading, “having a quiet time,” etc. However, Jesus is not saying that reading your Bible is something that compels Him to bless and love you - as if we could compel the King of the universe - but that in reading your Bible, you are reminded of the love He already has for you! In begin reminded, you can then start thinking more in line with that love, which of course is bound to produce “fruit” like joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control and the like. So obeying God’s command to read the Bible is not something that merits you God’s love, but rather something that allows you to reflect on and be changed by the love He already has for you. As Dr. J.D. Greear says in his message, “The Way We Change,” it’s like electrical wires. *“Jesus’ commands are like wires that connect us to the power of the gospel. They don’t have power in themselves; but they connect us to the place from which the power flows.”*¹

Consequently, the challenge is not earning God’s love with your obedience, but living in constant awareness of God’s love for you. The hard work of Christianity is not making God love you; it’s believing that God’s love was given to you as a gift and as such is a love that will never let you go no matter how obedient or disobedient you are!

ACTIVITY VS ABIDING THEOLOGY

As we see, part of our human condition is an infatuation with progress and performance. We believe the problems in our lives stem from inactivity, and so we’re encouraged to charge ahead planning and doing more, while carefully manipulating an interlocking puzzle of Google calendar entries and/or spiritual disciplines. We’re like sharks; thinking that if we stop swimming, we’ll die. In other words, we implicitly believe in an “activity theology”; slower is never better, new is always good, and progress is preferred. Activity theology at its core! But not only is that “theology” an implicit rejection of the clear teaching of the Scriptures; it’s a “theology” that produces disastrous results; most notably making the focus of our Christian life...our life!...instead of Christ, who gave us life to invite us into HIS life in the first place. The result? Either pride and arrogance in your discipline and accomplishments, or burn-out and shame in your failures. A superiority complex when you’ve been successful, or an inferiority

¹ “The Way We Change”//*Gospel: The Revolutionary Power of the Christian Life*, #1 //John 15:1–17 - J.D. Greear

complex when you haven't. The reality is clear: **Activity = Boasting or Burnout NOT Change or Growth!**

But Jesus knew that in giving His life, He would not only replace our broken, foolish, flawed lives with His perfect, faithful, obedient one, but give us the opportunity to rest in His perfect, faithful, obedient life on our behalf. That's why the old Anglican Pastor Richard Hooker powerfully said, *"We are in the sight of God the Father, as is the very Son of God himself. Let it be counted as folly or frenzy or fury. This is our comfort. This is our wisdom. We care for no knowledge in the world but this: that I have sinned and God has suffered: that God has made himself my sin, and I am made His righteousness. What wonder, what mystery in this...shine. My breaches of the law are His, and His obedience mine."* Do you hear that? It's exactly as Jesus described - *"As the Father has loved me. So I have loved you. Abide in my love."*

When you receive the gift of Christ and become a follower of His, God the Father not only begins to look at you the same way as He looks at His Son Jesus - with an incredible amount of joy and pleasure - but you begin to look at yourself differently! You begin to want to change and desire to live in a manner that pleases the One who gave so much for you! You begin to want to love God and others because of how much God has first loved you in Christ (**1 John 4:19**). In other words, you now want to do for God in view of what God has done for you! The reality is clear: **Abiding = Worship, Change and Growth** which is perhaps why John Bunyan, author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, once said, *"Run run the law commands, but gives us neither feet nor hands. Far better news the Gospel brings: It bids us fly and gives us wings."*

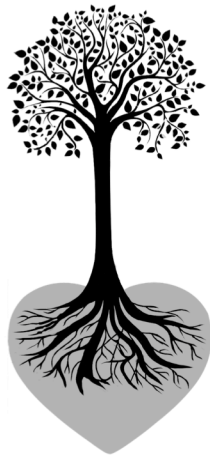
TALK ABOUT CHEAP GRACE

When we put this all together, here's what we can confidently say: ***Faith in the finished work of Christ is not only what brings us TO Jesus; it's also what allows us to live and grow IN Jesus.*** Contrary to "theologies" which say that faith is what brings us into relationship with Christ and activity/effort is what helps us grow in Christ, the truth is: faith in what Jesus has lovingly accomplished on your behalf is what, both, brings you to Christ and helps you grow and change in Christ. Or to say it another way, the way we grow as Christians is same way we became a Christian. We never outgrow our need for faith. Rather, we only ever grow in our faith. People who trust Jesus for salvation become people who keep trusting Jesus for sanctification, because, in short, God has invited us to live by faith - to be more convinced and confident in what He's said in the Scriptures than by what we think we can accomplish on our own. Some call this cheap grace. We think Steve Brown said it well, *"Cheap grace? Listen, if it weren't cheap, you and I couldn't afford it. If it cost us one thing - our commitment, our obedience, our religious actions, or anything else - it would remain in the store on the shelf."*

This is why we say that, the gospel is not just for unbelievers; it's for believers too. The gospel is not just how we begin in Christ, it is also how we continue in Christ. The message that Jesus lovingly died for your sins and now offers you salvation as a gift is not just the diving board into Christianity; it's also the deep end of the pool. It's not just the ABC's of Christianity; it is the A-

Z! And so we continue to trust in the finished work of Christ knowing that ***Faith in that is not only what brings us TO Jesus, but also what allows us to live, grow and change IN Jesus.***

HOW WE LIVE AND GROW WITH JESUS VISUALIZED



Faith in the finished work of Christ is not only what brings us TO Christ; it's also what allows us to live and grow IN Christ

HUB CHURCH

P R A X I S

5

C H U R C H A S

F A M I L Y

2021 EDITION

PRAXIS #5
CHURCH AS A FAMILY (FIELD JOURNAL)



MAIN IDEA :: *Church is not something we attend, but a people we are - A family that belongs to each other because of belonging to Jesus.*

THEMATIC WORD :: *Family*

SCRIPTURES¹

- Genesis 1:26-27; 3:1-7; 12:1-3
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- Acts 2:42-47
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- Ephesians 2:11-22
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- Ephesians 4:1-6
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- Colossians 3:12-17
 - Observations
 - Interpretation

¹ A proper understanding of Scripture always includes a methodical, orderly answering of questions which seek to get at what's called the authorial intent or originally intended meaning of a text within its context. The two most basic questions that need answering for any set of verses are: Observation and Interpretation.

- Observation means seeing what's in the verses and includes asking questions like, "What's the context in which the passage is found?; What's the literary form of the text?; What things are being emphasized, repeated, compared, contrasted, etc?; What things jump off the page to you or seem important?"

- Interpretation means understanding what's being said by the verses and includes asking questions like, "What does this passage tell me about who God is or what He has done in Christ?; What does it tell me about who I am and how I am created to live, etc?"

CHURCH AS FAMILY VISUALIZED



Church is not something we attend, but a people we are - A family that belongs to each other because of belonging to Jesus.

REFLECTION & APPLICATION QUESTIONS

What do you believe is a church? What do you believe others think is a church?

From these passages, what does Scripture say is a church?

Have you ever experienced the church as a family? Have you ever been burnt or wounded by the church?

For some people, based on their past, family has negative feelings. For others, it's a positive idea. How might being a son or daughter of God free you from patterns developed over past experiences?

How do you think your neighbors would react to the church being a family?

Is there anything you feel you need to believe, do and/or share with others in light of this week's passages and main idea?



MAIN IDEA :: *Church is not something we attend, but a people we are - A family that belongs to each other because of belonging to Jesus.*

THEMATIC WORD :: *Family*

PREVIOUSLY...

In "Praxis #4 - How We Live And Grow With Jesus," we saw that ***faith, not performance or effort, is not only what brings us TO Christ; it's also what allows us to live and grow IN Christ***

It's a powerful truth to be sure! And yet it's incomplete. Because if we stopped here, we might be tempted to think of Christianity and being a follower of Christ as merely a personal thing - what Jesus has done for you and me individually. However, the reality is, Scripture, even from its very first pages, tells us that God has not just been in the business of transforming lives, but forming and transforming a community. As author Steve Timmis says, "*God's purpose has always been to have a people for Himself - a people that He reveals His glory to, and displays His glory through*"...a people known as...the church!

MADE FOR COMMUNITY

The Scriptures tell us that before all things began there was only God, and they reveal this one God as a social being instead of a solitary one. Specifically, the biblical teaching on God is that of a Trinity, who embodies four essential affirmations:

1. There is one and only one true and living God.
2. This one God eternally exists in three persons - God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
3. These three persons are completely equal in their divine nature.
4. While each person is fully and completely God, the persons are not identical. God the Father is the Author of all that exists. It was in His mind, first, that creation took shape. God the Son is the Artisan or one who has brought into beautiful existence all that was formulated in the mind of the Father. God the Spirit is the Agent who presents the realities of life as God understands them to the minds and hearts of people for understanding.

Among the many implications of God as Trinity is the fact that God Himself is a community. The Father, Son, and Spirit form a perfect community - the first community. God is not a lonely being who learned how to love and relate through the creation of the world. Rather God has been experiencing, in Himself, love, service, deference, communication, unity, and joy throughout all eternity. As odd as it might sound to say, God is the perfect family!

Genesis tells us this communal God created us in His image and likeness. *"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them"* (**Genesis 1:26-27**).

In that statement, we learn that God's image cannot be represented by a single individual living in isolation, but by a diversity of men and women living together as a family. In fact, we see in Genesis 2:18 that the only thing in all of God's creation that wasn't good was that man was alone. So God created Eve to complete His intended design. To be fully human means to live in loving relationships. This is exactly what we had in the beginning - a sin-free world marked by an unhindered relationship with God and each another. And it's what we still long for and need today!

In his book *The Social Animal*, New York Times Columnist David Brooks talks about the objective importance of community. He says, *"To be sure, the happy may work hard, make money, and own a home. Poverty does not correspond to happiness; financial security brings some peace. But the truly content among us - whatever their net worth - take real, lasting joy in deep relationships."* Brooks cites one study that says marriage has the psychological effect of making \$100,000 annually. He then asks, *"Are you discontent due to a low income? Meet only one time per month with a group, and you'll receive the same measurable gain in happiness as doubling your salary...On the other hand, nothing is more closely associated with unhappiness than commuting. It breeds loneliness. In turn, loneliness leads to judgment, which leads to more loneliness, because no one wants to be around you."*

Perhaps this is why the commentator Matthew Henry once remarked, *"Two are better than one, and more happy jointly than either of them could be separately, more pleased in one another than they could be in themselves only, mutually serviceable to each other's welfare, and by a united strength more likely to do good to others."*

In creating you in His image, God made you for community - family! And that is exactly what we had in the beginning - a sin-free world marked by an unhindered relationship with God and one another...But it didn't stay that way for very long.

COMMUNITY LOST

As we follow the story in Genesis, we see how these first two humans, mirroring us all, eventually decided to live life on their own terms apart from the loving rule and reign of God. In their cosmic rebellion, they tried their hand at being God, an act that ended in separation and death, throwing everything into distortion and confusion. **Genesis 3:1-7** says,

"Genesis Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the

serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths."

Look throughout history. It doesn't take a whole lot of digging to discover the ramifications of this act. Every generation, every race, every continent has suffered from the actions rooted in humanity's attempt to live as independent beings. As C.S. Lewis once said, *"Human history...is the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy."*¹ And so it makes sense why, in every sociological segment of society, you would be hard pressed to find someone who hasn't been cut with the shrapnel of familial brokenness.

COMMUNITY RESTORED

Into a hell-bent, runaway planet, God sent his Son. Yet even before the arrival of Christ, God the Father had been hard at work seeding a cosmic family. Thousands of years before Jesus, God called to a little-known, son of an idol-maker named Abram (later Abraham) and through him promised to raise up a multi-ethnic family. **Genesis 12:1–3** says,

"Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'"

The rest of Old Testament history proved to be an out-working of that promise, as God formed, guided, disciplined, and blessed the nation of Israel, as His chosen family on earth, until sending Jesus to, all at once, restore what had been lost.

"For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." (Colossians 1:19-20).

Jesus' life demonstrated an emphasis on living within community on mission, as He called His twelve disciples together so that they might, both, *"be with him"* (family) and *"be sent out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons"* (mission).

"He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons." (Mark 3:14-15)

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Moreover, Jesus' death and resurrection ensures that no wrong has now gone unpunished or unforgiven, and no one has been left out of the opportunity to be reconciled to the family for which they were created.

A NEW WAY OF LIVING AND THRIVING

As the good news spread, and people awakened to the life God had ushered in through the death of His Son, the community of Jesus-believing sinners became known as the "church", the "body of Christ" Himself in the world (1 Corinthians 12:27). Individual Christ-followers recognized the need to obey Jesus's call to follow Him, but also recognized that they could not follow Him as individuals. They became bound together as family.

In **Ephesians 2:11-22** the Apostle Paul describes the communal identity and family-nature of the early church. He says:

"remember...at one time you...were...separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now, in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ...So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God."

What Paul is summarizing is the whole history of family lost and family restored, culminating in Jesus' church. In other words, Paul is showing us that **Church is not something we go to, but a people we are - It's not a social club, a building or...an option! It's the family that belongs to each other because of belonging to Jesus!** Megan Hill says it well:

"In biblical terms, the people in the pews around us are our family. Like the members of our biological family, we haven't chosen them for ourselves, but they have been chosen for us, and we are therefore inseparably bound to them. Because we belong to Christ, we belong to his family..."

(Consider that) in John's account of the crucifixion, we read, 'When Jesus saw his mother and disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home" (John 19:26-27). At Christ's declaration, Mary and John became family to one another and demonstrated all the loyalty we would expect from a biological mother and son. Later, when Paul wanted the Roman church to welcome and help Phoebe, he called her "our sister" (Romans 16:1); when Peter wanted to commend Silvanus, he called him "a faithful brother" (1 Peter 5:12). When the apostolic writers wanted to address an entire congregation, they frequently called them "brothers" (or "brothers and sisters"). The people in the pews around us are, in fact, our family."²

² <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/church-is-family/>

EXPERIENCING CHURCH AS FAMILY

Fast forward 2,000 years. The word “church” has become mistakenly synonymous with rented auditoriums, organized programs, well-crafted sermons, and the leaders who champion them. This understanding (and the practices that flow from it) aren’t wrong, like committing an act of sin. Rather, it’s something that has simply robbed millions upon millions of people from seeing, and then experiencing the family that could be, in a world where most are uninterested with the church structures that’ve been created over the centuries.

For starters, the word church itself means “called out ones.” Think people, not a place. After all, when Jesus called His twelve Disciples - as those who would lay the groundwork for the church - to “*be with Him and be sent out (from Him) to preach and have authority to drive out demons*” (Mark 3:14-15), He was indicating that the people of God were being reconstituted from a nation (Israel) to a family on mission.

Consequently, we (the Church) are those who have been graciously called out of unbelief and death, into the life and reality of God’s radical acceptance of us, as His family, in Christ. By faith in Him, our Father has turned us from slaves to sons and daughters (Galatians 4:4-6) and made us family together (1 Corinthians 1:9; 1 John 1:3). Being “in Christ” then means you being in Christ with others who are also “in Christ.” You belong to God and you belong to others who belong to God.

Church then, is not something we go to, but a people we are - a family that belongs to each other because of belonging to Jesus - brothers and sisters together because we are no longer estranged from our Heavenly Father! Ephesians 4:1-6 summarizes it well:

“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call - one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

So while most groups, organizations, and clubs form based on commonality in gender, race, social status, or cause, the family Jesus forms transcends these commonalities and makes brothers and sisters out of natural enemies. The church itself is not made up of natural “friends.” It is made up of natural enemies! What binds us together is not common education, race, income level, politics, nationality, accents, jobs, or anything else of that sort. Christians come together...because they have all been saved by Jesus!

“In one of Scripture’s more striking statements, we read that Christ looks at the people of his church and “*is not ashamed to call them brothers*” (Hebrews 2:11) Unbelievable! Jesus Christ looks at the ordinary, weak, and sometimes difficult people of his family - you and me - and is not ashamed! He’s not ashamed because He is increasingly being formed in us, and He is

confident that one day - because of His work on our behalf - our transformation will be complete (Hebrews 2:10-18; Galatians 4:19). He willingly identifies with us because our identity is found in Him." (Megan Hill) This is why Rick Warren rightly proclaims that *"a follower of Jesus disconnected from a local church family is an orphan."*

Realizing the Church is who we are in Jesus - that there's only one in the world, and that this one family is made up of people scattered throughout the world and living in various local expressions of that family together³ - invites us not only into another way of living and thriving, but into the telling of a whole new story altogether. As Tim Keller says, *"The church is not simply an aggregation of saved people but a 'pilot plant' of what humanity could look like."* We're invited to tell an even better story of what is, what could be, and what will be together!

FUNCTIONING AS FAMILY

A quick glance at the New Testament shows how the finished work of Jesus brings shape to our identity as family and to how we walk out this new life together as, *"a random sampling of the broken, sinful, half-cocked world that God in Christ loves."* - Robert Capon

- By His Spirit... we greet one another (Romans 16:16), offer hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:9), and welcome one another because Christ has freely welcomed us (Romans 15:7).
- By His Spirit...we bear with one another (Colossians 3:13), are kind to one another, tenderhearted, and forgive one another because God in Christ forgave us (Ephesians 4:32).
- By His Spirit...we submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21) and show humility toward one another (Philippians 2:3), because Jesus submitted to the will of the Father and humbled Himself to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:8).
- By His Spirit...we serve one another (Galatians 5:13) because Christ came not to be served, but to serve (Mark 10:45).
- By His Spirit...we confess our own brokenness to one another and pray for one another (James 5:16) because Jesus is our righteousness, (2 Corinthians 5:21) and as our mediator and intercessor, Jesus' blood cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7), keeping us from needing to hide or posture.
- By His Spirit...we live in harmony (Romans 12:16) and peace (Mark 9:50) with one another because we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1).
- By His Spirit...we honor one another (Romans 12:10) and count others more significant than ourselves (Philippians 2:3) because Christ made Himself nothing (Philippians 2:7).

³ "Out of 114 times that the "church" is mentioned in the New Testament, at least ninety of them refer to specific local gatherings of believers who have banded together for fellowship and mission." - Chan, Francis; Beuving, Mark. *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (p. 53). David C. Cook. Kindle Edition.

- By the work of His Spirit...we love one another because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

Colossians 3:12-17 and **Acts 2:42-47** summarize these “one another” callings and the church as family atmosphere well:

Colossians 3:12-17: *“Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”*

Acts 2:42-47 *“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”*

As you ponder these verses, think about how Jesus created environments where these “one another” family-callings were put into practice. While He didn't prescribe a formula for how this would be done (i.e., “love one another through weekly meetings” or “only in small groups”), the New Testament is full of descriptions of how He, and later the Church, walked this out in personal, social and public spaces. Incidentally, this is why at Hub Church, we encourage you to actively participate in Sunday Gatherings (public space), Missional Family Meetings (social space) and DNA Groups (personal space).

LOTS OF GOOD NEWS

Putting all this together, there is a lot of good news for each of us.

- **First**, nowhere in the Bible do we see the church defined by buildings, leaders, or services. In fact, none of the churches we see addressed in the New Testament had a building to call their own. Rather, they seemed to meet in homes and around shared meals for communion. This means you are free to meet anywhere, at anytime with those who are hungry to follow Jesus as family together. You're free to help create or adapt personal, social and public environments where “one another” commands are learned through practice.

- **Second**, most of the churches seen in Scripture were led by everyday, and mostly unnamed people, which means your commitment to follow Jesus and help others do the same can have a profound impact.
- **Third**, the churches seen in Scripture were not just led by everyday, mostly unnamed people, but everyday, mostly unnamed people, who didn't have it all together and didn't pretend to. Faith in the finished work of Christ freed them from performance, posturing and pretending. The same can be true for you. You are free to follow Jesus and help others do the same without having to do it perfectly! You're free to admit your death, drop your mildewed performances and rest in Christ's performance for you with others hungry for the same!

In "Praxis 6 and 7 we'll share with you the timeless practice of the family of God. But suffice it to say, it's in the ancient, minimalist understanding of the church as a family that we not only see how to live in the way God created us, but see how we're free to spend less time on events and more time for authentic relationships; something desperately needed in our radically self-sufficient culture! Megan Hill again powerfully summarizes the beauty of these truths:

"Acknowledging the fact of our sibling relationship isn't an intellectual exercise; it's a profound truth that should stir deep emotions and overflow in tangible expression.

Because these people are family, we learn their names (3 John 15), and we find out their interests. We display "brotherly affection" (Romans 12:10) for all of them...In hundreds of ways, we seek to say: you are my brothers and sisters, and I love you.

Throughout the New Testament, God commands us to mutual care in the local church. The epistles, in particular, tell us what it means to be brothers and sisters and teach us "how one ought to behave in the household of God" (1 Timothy 3:15). With their various "one another" commands, these letters remind us that life in God's family will reorient our allegiance - not just on Sunday, but every hour of every day.

The church is not a man-made society that we can participate in - or opt-out of - according to our...level of comfort. The PTA, the neighborhood association, or the library booster club don't obligate us to personal sacrifice when things get tough. Family does.

Because God's people are our family, we will hold our own preferences and priorities loosely (Acts 4:32; Philippians 2:3-4). We will open our hearts and our doors; we will pull up another chair to the dinner table and add another name to our prayer list. We will give them our groceries and furniture and smiles. We will share their grief and trials and disappointments. We will look for ways to show love.

As a result, we will expect to have less money and less free time than we would have on our own. We will expect to have added sorrow. We will also expect to have great joy."⁴

⁴ Ibid

CHURCH AS A FAMILY VISUALIZED



VS



Church is not something we attend, but a people we are - A family that belongs to each other because of belonging to Jesus!

HUB CHURCH

P R A X I S

6

T I M E L E S S

F A M I L Y

P R A C T I C E

2021 EDITION

PRAXIS #6
TIMELESS FAMILY-PRACTICE (FIELD JOURNAL)



MAIN IDEA :: *The one mission Jesus gave His family, known as the church, is discipleship.*

THEMATIC WORD :: *Discipleship*

SCRIPTURES¹

- Matthew 28:19-20
 - Observations
 - Interpretation

- Acts 1:8
 - Observations
 - Interpretation

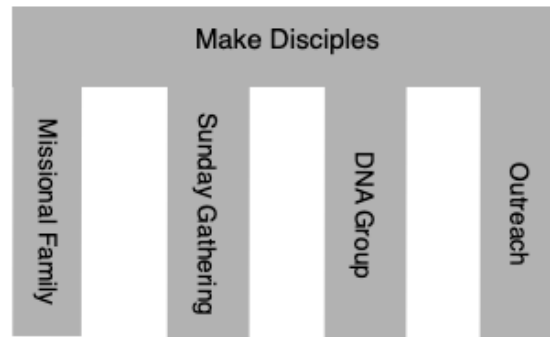
- 2 Corinthians 5:17-20
 - Observations
 - Interpretation

¹ A proper understanding of Scripture always includes a methodical, orderly answering of questions which seek to get at what's called the authorial intent or originally intended meaning of a text within it's context. The two most basic questions that need answering for any set of verses are: Observation and Interpretation.

- Observation means seeing what's in the verses and includes asking questions like, "What's the context in which the passage is found?; What's the literary form of the text?; What things are being emphasized, repeated, compared, contrasted, etc?; What things jump off the page to you or seem important?"

- Interpretation means understanding what's being said by the verses and includes asking questions like, "What does this passage tell me about who God is or what He has done in Christ?; What does it tell me about who I am and how I am created to live, etc?"

TIMELESS FAMILY-PRACTICES VISUALIZED



Discipleship is the one mission Jesus gave His family, known as the church! Everything the church does is to support this mission!

REFLECTION & APPLICATION QUESTIONS

When you think about what the church does or what practices constitute the church, what comes to mind?

What do the above passages seem to indicate constitute the main practice of a Christ-follower and subsequently a church family?

What was your previous understanding of the Great Commission in Matthew 28 if anything?

What has changed about your understanding of Great Commission in Matthew 28 if anything?

Is there anything you feel you need to believe, do and/or share with others in light of this week's passages and main idea?



MAIN IDEA :: *The one mission Jesus gave His family, known as the church, is discipleship.*

THEMATIC WORD :: *Discipleship*

PREVIOUSLY...

In "Praxis #5 - Church As A Family," we saw that ***church is not something we attend, but a people we are - a family that belongs to each other because of belonging to Jesus.*** As Ephesians 2:18-19 reminds us, *"(though we) once were far off, in Christ Jesus, (we) have been brought near by the blood of Christ...(made) saints and members of the household of God."*

OUR MISSION

So here's the question: as this new family, what are we to be about? Or said another way, how do we truly live as a healthy expression of God's family together?...The answer? Discipleship, which we're defining as: ***Learning and helping those around us learn to trust and obey Jesus in every area of life!*** - The Greek word for disciple (*mathetes*) literally means "learner," while the essential nature of the Gospel (not to mention breadth of Scripture) seems to indicate that God is chiefly concerned with, not only our obedience, but our faith. Consider the following:

- Jeremiah 17:7-8 = *"Blessed is the man who **trusts** (literally, "confidence") in the LORD, whose **trust** is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."* - God desires that we root ourselves in Him by way of trusting Him.
- John 3:16 = *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever **believes** in him should not perish but have eternal life."* - Trusting in Jesus means believing in Him for salvation
- John 8:31-32 = *"So Jesus said to the Jews who had **believed** him, 'If you **abide** (a word meaning to stake your life in/place your confidence in) in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'" - To trust in Jesus means, not merely, to believe Him for salvation, but to believe everything He said and trust His Word to be true.*
- John 14:1 = Jesus said, *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. **Trust** in God; **trust** also in me."* - The source of every one of our problems (ie: all our heart troubles), according to Jesus, is a function of not trusting God in Christ in some way.

Suffice it to say, God is after both our behaviors AND our beliefs, which again, is why we are saying that discipleship is: ***Learning and helping those around us learn to trust and obey Jesus in every area of life!***

Now to be sure, there's been a considerable amount of ink spilled on the topic of discipleship. If you've been in and around this conversation for any length of time, chances are you've had your fill of alliterated paradigms, clever language, and missional geometry. While a great deal of thinking on the topic of discipleship has been helpful, some has complicated matters. Even worse, some has added pressure and performance to something that should otherwise be a source of joy in our lives. After all, discipling people in the announcement that they are free in Christ is always best done by those who have experienced the joy of, themselves, being free in Christ. In other words, discipleship is not like a telemarketing job - cold calling people to sell services and products that you most likely don't use. It was always intended to be done naturally by those who have tasted the liberating power of Christ and His message of good news. Like a great drink, oceanside view, or an addictive new show - we naturally extend to others the things we enjoy, and the news of God's reckless love in Christ is no different!

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT OF MATTHEW 28

At the end of **Matthew 28**, we find what's famously known as the Great Commission. It is a kind of last will-and-testament from Jesus, who prior to ascending into Heaven, instructed His followers about discipleship. He says this in **vv.19-20**:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus' final words to His followers are an exhortation to be about the business of "discipleship," which again, is just a fancy word literally meaning, "learner." Jesus is authorizing His group of 12, rag-tag, witnesses, and by extension all of His followers, to place His Gospel message into the hands of everyone, so that everyone can learn to trust and obey Him in everything.

Now, it's important to understand the context of Jesus' words here. If you were to look at Jerusalem 2,000 years ago when Jesus uttered these famous words, what you would have found was a place plagued with the tyranny of religion, making the spread of a new religion or new religious message highly unlikely. And yet, that's exactly what happened. Within 300 years of Jesus' words, the message of Christ came to impact 65% of the Roman Empire simply because of two sifts that had occurred:

First, there was a shift in the message that was being communicated.

The cross of Christ wasn't the declaration of a new religion. Instead, it was the announcement that God had left the religious business altogether, and solved all the world's problems without anyone needing to complete a religious ceremony or task. As Robert Capon put it: "In Jesus,

God has put up a 'Gone Fishing' sign on the religion shop. He has done the whole job in Jesus once and for all and simply invited us to believe it." This message of freedom was a complete shift from everything the world had ever heard in the name of "God."

Second, there was a shift in the medium through which things were being done.

Because of a common experience of grace, those who believed in Jesus became family with God and each other. Together, these everyday people (known as the Church) became wrapped up in the joy of the announcement that God had reconciled the whole world to himself in and through Jesus (Colossians 1:20). As reconciled people, they simply began doing life together and sharing good news with those around them, as Jesus had told them to do in Matthew 28.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTENT OF MATTHEW 28

When you put all this together, it becomes clear that Jesus' exhortation to be about the business of discipleship is business He intends to be done within the parameters of everyday life - not in addition to it. You are intended to understand discipleship as a lifestyle, not an isolated activity. This is further affirmed in the command itself. At the risk of giving you a popsicle headache, Jesus says, *"Go, therefore."* Literally, He's saying, *"as you're going."* In the original Greek, Jesus is using a participle to describe an ongoing action. So we could translate it something like, *"as you're going...throughout your daily life and normal rhythms, routines, and responsibilities...make disciples..."*

In other words, the business of discipleship starts with simply having what we might call a "sent perspective" - the understanding that God has sent you into your life to partner with Jesus, by pointing people to Jesus! Jesus is, of course, the one who actually "makes disciples." He's the one who draws people to Himself, according to **John 6**; the one who opens our hearts to see our need for Him, according to **Ephesians 2**; and the one who ultimately saves according to **Acts 4**. Discipleship then, is simply about pointing people to Him, as we *"teach them to observe all that (He has) commanded,"* and *"baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit;"* literally immerse them in their created identity as children of God the Father, Beloved Servants of the Son and Spirit-empowered Missionaries.

In Praxis #7 - Timeless Doesn't Mean Tiresome," we'll talk about how, exactly, we do each of those things. But for now, we just want you to see that discipleship is not only the mission of the church on which everything else either rises or falls; it's intended to be a lifestyle rather than an addition to your life. We are to hear Jesus saying, *"as you are going throughout your daily life, disciple people, regardless of nationality or who they are, by pointing them to me - who they are in me and how they get to live because of me!"* With this reading, the pressure of a command is lifted and replaced with the natural organic flow of moving through life and looking for opportunities to disciple those around you. Quite simply the pressure of having to add discipleship and mission to your calendar is replaced with the intentionality of seeing all of life as mission. Discipleship and mission need no longer be rigidly compartmentalized alongside work, family, ministry and the like.

PUSHBACK

But if our mission is to "disciple," then what do we do with the work of evangelism?

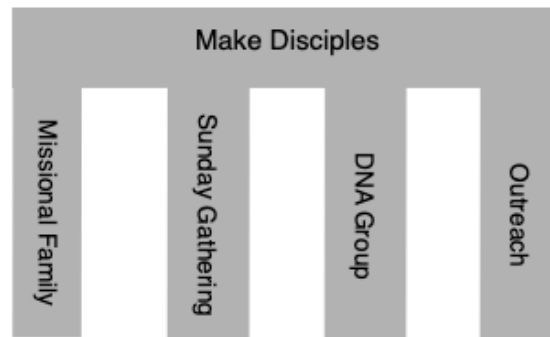
Neil Cole has pointed out that in the past the church has created an arbitrary separation in what it means to "disciple," labeling one camp "Evangelism" and the other "Discipleship" – often creating two different departments in the church, and subsequently, two different "departments" in people's minds. To correct this misunderstanding, we must note two things:

1. The Greek word evangelion, from which we get our word "evangelism," isn't an actual "ism." It's not something we do, but instead something we share, as the word simply means: "good news" or "gospel." In short, to evangelize is to proclaim the good news of Jesus, and this is something we do whether we're discipling someone TO Jesus (ie: not-yet-followers of Christ) or discipling someone IN Jesus (ie: fellow followers of Christ).
2. The evangelion or gospel is needed for all people because all people, Christian and not-yet-Christian, are effectively unbelievers. Pastor Jeff Vanderstelt says it well, *"(Romans 1 says) 'They knew God, but they exchanged the truth of God for a lie. And they exchanged the creator for the created.' Every time I read this I think, 'man those were stupid people. Why would you do that?' The spirit of God always says, 'that's you.' As I speak to our church I remind them over and over again that it's not the believers that are in here and the unbelievers who are out there, but everybody in here is an unbeliever. (We all have some area of life in which we are not believing Jesus). There's so many areas of your life where you're putting your faith and trust in yourself. And it's really bad news. And it's good news that God's saying, 'I hate that. I don't want you to trust in yourself.'"*¹

The beautiful (and freeing) thing about Jesus' exhortation to be about the business of discipleship is that it's not only an exhortation we all need; it's an exhortation that begins to fill our whole life with a kind of sparkle, flavor and grand purpose. When you are over-joyed with what Jesus has accomplished for you, you will naturally look to share it with others. And as you share it with others, it will begin to spread - the message of Christ being put into the hands of everyday people just like yourself....Discipleship! ***It's the one mission Jesus gave His family, known as the church!***

¹ <https://www.vergenetwork.org/2012/11/14/everyone-is-an-unbeliever-jeff-vanderstelt/>

TIMELESS FAMILY-PRACTICE VISUALIZED



Discipleship is the one mission Jesus gave His family, known as the church! Everything the church does is to support this mission.

HUB CHURCH

P R A X I S

7

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D O E S N ' T M E A N

T I R E S O M E

2021 EDITION

PRAXIS #7

TIMELESS DOESN'T MEAN TIRESOME (FIELD JOURNAL)



MAIN IDEA :: *The church's mission of discipleship is best expressed by the "4G's: Going, Gospel'ing, Growing, Gathering."*

THEMATIC WORD :: 4G's

SCRIPTURES¹

- Matthew 28:19-20
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- John 1:14
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- Romans 10:9-15
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- Galatians 6:10
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17
 - Observations
 - Interpretation

¹ A proper understanding of Scripture always includes a methodical, orderly answering of questions which seek to get at what's called the authorial intent or originally intended meaning of a text within its context. The two most basic questions that need answering for any set of verses are: Observation and Interpretation.

- Observation means seeing what's in the verses and includes asking questions like, "What's the context in which the passage is found?; What's the literary form of the text?; What things are being emphasized, repeated, compared, contrasted, etc?; What things jump off the page to you or seem important?"

- Interpretation means understanding what's being said by the verses and includes asking questions like, "What does this passage tell me about who God is or what He has done in Christ?; What does it tell me about who I am and how I am created to live, etc?"

TIMELESS DOESN'T MEAN TIRESOME VISUALIZED



GO = CONNECT



GOSPEL = SHARE



GROW = INVITE



GATHER = TEACH

The church's mission of discipleship is best expressed by the "4G's: Going, Gospel'ing, Growing, Gathering."

REFLECTION & APPLICATION QUESTIONS

What kinds of activities or practices would you assume would be integral to discipleship and disciple-making?

As you read the above passages, what kinds of discipleship practices do you see mentioned? Can you map them to the visualization above?

Which of these discipleship practice stood out most to you? Which ones are you comfortable in doing?

How do you think being intentional to practice the 4G's would change the way you interact with your neighbors and/or your ability to make disciples?

Is there anything you feel you need to believe, do and/or share with others in light of this week's passages and main idea?

PRAXIS #7

TIMELESS DOESN'T MEAN TIRESOME



MAIN IDEA :: *The church's mission of discipleship is best expressed by the "4G's: Going, Gospel'ing, Growing, Gathering."*

THEMATIC WORD :: 4G's

PREVIOUSLY...

In "Praxis #6 - Timeless Family Practice," we saw from Matthew 28, that ***the one mission Jesus gave His family, known as the church, is discipleship***, which we defined as: ***Learning and helping those around us learn to trust and obey Jesus in every area of life***. Consequently, like the legs of a table, everything the church does is to support the "table-top" of discipleship!

DISCIPLESHIP AS A LIFESTYLE RATHER THAN AN ACTIVITY

But let me ask you a question: When I say "discipleship," what do you really hear? What comes to mind? If you're like me, you probably hear activity don't you? More religious things you feel obligated or even pressured to do in order to be a good Christian right? In other words, you hear exhaustion don't you? I think we all do to some degree. But that's because we've failed to understand that in giving His Matthew 28 Great Commission, Jesus didn't just exhort us to be about discipleship, He also instructed us in how to do it in a natural, life-giving way. In other words, He never intended that this timeless family practice, be tiresome!

NATURAL DISCIPLESHIP PRACTICES

Let's take a look at **Matthew 28:19-20** again.

"As you're going, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Being the great teacher that He was, Jesus didn't simply command us to be about discipleship; He also instructed us in how to obey His command. We see four, natural and intentional practices at work within His command; practices, which if we're being honest, are not things we do to make the Gospel more of a reality, but ways we live in light of the reality of the Gospel. After all, Jesus begins His "Great Commission" stating that *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me"* (v.18). Jesus is reminding us that, we live by delegated authority, which is to say, we don't do anything to make the rule and reign of Christ more of a reality. We simply live so as to testify TO it's reality! Or said another way it is, ***The Gospel is not something we live. It's something we believe and announce, and by our living, help people understand and believe it along with us.*** Consequently, the prescribed practices practices at

work within Jesus' command here are more like ways of naturally and intentionally living in light of the Gospel rather than obligatory duties. At Hub, we call these practices the "4G's." They are:

- Going ("*As you're going...*") - CONNECT with the people in and around your life in order to show them they're loved.
- Gospel'ing ("*make disciples...*") - SHARE the person and promises of Jesus in the everyday stuff of people's lives.
- Growing ("*baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, Spirit...*") - INVITE people into spaces and opportunities in which they can see their need for Jesus, receive His work on their behalf, and grow in their new identity as a child of God the Father, beloved servant of God the Son, and ambassador in God the Spirit.
- Gathering ("*teaching them to obey all that I've commanded.*") - TEACH the Scriptures to people so that they can trust and obey Jesus in every area of life.

THE "4G'S" EXPLAINED

Going :: CONNECT ("*As you are going...*")

As we saw in "Praxis #6 - Timeless Family Practice," when Jesus says "*Go therefore,*" it's literally translated, "*as you're going,*" meaning as you're going throughout your daily rhythms and routines. The emphasis here is on having "a sent perspective" - an understanding that God has sent you into your life to point people to Jesus! As authors Francis Chan and Mark Beuving say in their book, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples*,

"Every person in your life is created in the image of God, and Jesus commands every one of them to follow Him. God has placed these people in your life so that you will do everything you can to influence them."

But the idea here is that there's nothing to add to your calendar in seeking to influence those around you. You're already GOING throughout life, so just see where you're going, and how you're going, as opportunities to CONNECT with people! In other words, be a person who is intentional about showing up for those around you!

Now, it might seem redundant to say that we should connect with and show up for people if we hope to disciple them, but it seems worth emphasizing. Intentionally connecting with those around us is an often overlooked component of discipleship. We all have a tendency to go through life with our heads down, earbuds in, and racing past those around us. Sadly, this has resulted in coming to believe that we can reach our neighbors without living among our neighbors. But that's just not how the Gospel of Jesus Christ works! The Gospel rides on the rails of relationships! **John 1:14** says that, "*(Jesus)/the word became flesh and dwelt among*

us.” In order to reach us, Jesus not only left heaven and came to earth, He “dwelt among us,” which is to say, He slowed down and connected with us - He sought relationship with us. Jesus demonstrated the incarnational and intentional love of God in coming to live, laugh, work, slow down, eat, and converse among us.

Because we live in Him (Galatians 2:20), we live as ambassadors of Him (2 Cor. 5:20) by incarnating this way of life among the people in our lives. We slow down, put our personal agendas and task lists on pause if need be, and allow ourselves to be accessible to those around us; being sure to listen to what they’re celebrating, what they’re struggling with, what they’re hoping in, etc. We connect with people as we’re coming and going. After all, it’s hard to really love others and show them that they’re loved when you’re racing by them.

Pro-Tip 1: Prioritize Availability

Christians seeking the time required to build connections and friendships among those needing to be discipled often face two hurdles: 1) Church demands and 2) Permission. In modern, program-centered churches, we often find a surplus of leaders tying service attendance, small group involvement, and volunteerism to obedience, personal growth, and maintaining God’s favor. As a result, church members have no time to simply connect with those around them. But remember, if the message of Jesus Christ is the freedom to exchange the religion of self-improvement for the self-forgetting life found in Jesus, then you are free to step away from the endless cycle of activity and BE the Church right where you are by simply making yourself available to those around you.

Pro-Tip 2: Think of “going” in terms of Intentionality vs Addition:

The beauty of “as you’re going...” is that it doesn’t require any more time or planning than you are already putting into things. It doesn’t require the addition of anything. It simply requires that you be intentional with the people already around you and the things you are already doing. So ask yourself, “What am I doing? Where am I normally going? Who do I run into? And how can I bring a level of intentionality to these rhythms and routines?”

Pro-Tip 3: Think of your “going” in terms of Norms & Networks:

Your norms are where your home is, the school you or your kids go to, the coffee shop you frequent, your workplace, gym, etc. Your networks are different. They are the spaces you intentionally go out of your way to enter: the non-profit you volunteer at, the park you frequent, the softball league you entered, the pier you fish at, the supper club you joined, the pub where you watch the game, etc. In both, is where you find your “neighbors” and those with whom God wants you to connect. So who are they?

Gospel’ing :: SHARE (“...make disciples...”)

Once you’ve connected with someone and better yet, once they’ve shared an aspect of their story with you, then you have the opportunity, not to preach at them, but to instead SHARE a part of your story that connects with theirs. You have an opportunity to share “grace and truth”

for their stories. It's here that people can see you're just like them. It's here that you can share what God has shown and taught you in light of the topics and issues at hand. And it's here that those who aren't ready for "meat" (ie: a look at the Scriptures, attending a Missional Family Meal, Sunday Gathering, etc) can be disciplined where they are with "milk" (ie: the person and promises of Jesus for the everyday stuff of their lives). Incidentally, seeing sharing as less about giving a perfectly crafted theological explanation for Jesus or the Gospel and more about simply sharing what you know of Christ and His promises removes the pressure of "having to say the right thing," or "not saying the wrong thing."

Since Scripture is clear (**Romans 10:9-15**, et al) that disciples are only ever made through hearing and believing the Gospel, we therefore, say that "Gospel'ing" is about sharing and applying the person and promises of Jesus in the everyday stuff of peoples lives. It's about helping people move from unbelief to belief in Jesus in every area of life. The more fluently you are able to do that, the more those around you have opportunity to connect with Jesus in ways relevant to their lives and God-willing hear, believe, be saved and grow!

Pro-Tip 1: Keep Your Heart-Cup Filled

In *A Practical Guide To Speaking The Truths of Jesus Into the Everyday Stuff of Life*, author Jeff Vanderstelt states:

"I have come to believe that the main reason people don't talk about Jesus isn't that they lack training. I am convinced it is that they lack love. People need heart change - not just once, but over and over again, because their love grows cold. Do you talk about Jesus? Has he captured your heart? Do you love him? When you come to know and experience the love God has for (you) in Jesus; when you realize that God loved you) so much that He was willing to suffer and die for (your) sins, even though you) were his enemies; when you meet Jesus and experience Him pouring out his Spirit into your heart, filling you with Himself and His love, you can't contain it. You have to talk about it! The gospel is incredible! The word gospel literally means "good news." Is it good news to you?

As human beings we can't help but talk about what we love. The more you prioritize seeing how much Jesus has loved you, the more you will come to love Him. As 1 John 4:19 says, *"We love because He first loved us."* The more you see how much Jesus loves you, the more you will love Jesus. And the more you love Jesus, the more you will naturally and organically want to share Jesus with others!

So read through the Gospels. Watch for Jesus' kindness and generosity toward people just like you. See how He serves and invites people to know and be close to Him. And most of all, see how He gave His life for you. The more you do, the more your heart-cup will be filled to the point of overflowing with a desire to share!

Pro-Tip 2: Relatability and Transparency

Right now, we live in a time where stories of failure are far more relevant than stories of success. People crave the realness that comes with acknowledging the darker side of the human struggle. Sure, people may be temporarily inspired when you share your successes with them, but rarely do they connect with you like when hearing about your failures. It's God's goodness that needs a spotlight, not our two-bit efforts to wrestle religion into submission. So remember, you stand whole in Christ not because of what you do, but because of what He's done for you! You are free from the need to hide your fears, failures, and frustrations, and instead, share how God has been faithful in spite of them. In doing so, you can find common ground with every broken person you meet; by the way, which is the only kind of person there is. After all, God's strength shines best in our struggles. Perhaps that's why real influence grows where self-preservation dies.

Pro-Tip 3: Share News, not Advice:

In *A Practical Guide To Speaking The Truths of Jesus Into the Everyday Stuff of Life*, authors Jeff Vanderstelt and Ben Connelly again state:

"Too often, when giving people answers to their questions or solutions to their problems, we give them something other than Jesus. If they are struggling with their finances, we give them the best budgeting plans we know of. If they are working through relational discord, we teach them communication techniques. If they are struggling with doubt, we challenge them to just believe, promising that all will get better if they do. But we fail if we don't give them Jesus."

Vanderstelt and Connelly are reminding us that our natural bend is to speak in the vernacular of advice and law, rather than grace. "Do this" and "Don't do that." That seems to be our native tongue. But remember, the gospel isn't a guide, a set of rules, best practices, or even a to-do list. It's news about who God is, what He's done in Christ, and who we are as a result. Religion is advice about what we can do in hopes of finding and keeping God's favor or simply bettering your life. But that's not the Gospel! The Gospel is about what Jesus has done in order to give us new life, which is why Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones says, *"the first test of whether what is being said or shared is Christian or Gospel, is if, in effect, it is actually good news or not."*¹

Pro-Tip 4: Don't Answer every Question:

The people with whom you are sharing will naturally have questions. It may seem like answering their questions is the best thing you can do. However, in doing so you can actually remove the tension needed for discipleship; the kind of tension Jesus never removed from those into whom He was pouring. So help them in their pursuit of the answers to their questions. Help them see things like: How Jesus is better than whatever it is they think they want or need - A better friend, better spouse, better hope,

¹ "The Kingdom of God" - Martyn Lloyd Jones - Sermon Podcast

better provision, and certainly a better savior. Help them see that Jesus is great, so they don't have to always be in control. Help them see that He's good, so that they do not need to fear. Help them see that He's gracious, so they do not need to earn or prove themselves. And Help them see that He's glorious, so they do not need anything other than Him for their happiness. Maybe even ask them to consider how their way of life apart from Christ is working for them. But in all of it, allow for tension. After all, discipleship happens in difficulty and dysfunction.

Pro-Tip 5: Use Inclusive Language:

People who feel threatened by "outsiders" develop an us-versus-them mentality. To include people in conversations who have not yet embraced Jesus requires that we use language that is normal and respectful. More importantly, it requires understanding that in God's economy there really is no "us" and "them." There is only "us" and "Him." - Those of us who need to trust Him to be saved and those of us who need to trust Him to be sanctified.

Growing :: INVITING ("...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...")

When Jesus says to "baptize (literally "immerse") people in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." He's obviously not calling us to run around squirting people with water guns and telling them that, "they've been baptized." Nor is He simply referring to a kind of formal church ceremony involving a dunk tank. No, He's inviting us to be established in and help others be established in their created identity. Jesus knew that we live differently when we know who we are because of His work on our behalf. This is what's going on in baptism: We are baptized in the name of the father, because, through Christ, we become the family of God. We're baptized in the name of the Son, because we're now beloved servants of King Jesus, sent to serve others as He served us. And we're baptized in the name of the Spirit, because we, just like Jesus was, are God's Spirit-empowered ambassadors sent to proclaim the good news of the Gospel in the world. In other words, baptism is a picture of who we are because of who Jesus is and what He has accomplished on our behalf. It's a picture of gaining a new identity because of identifying with and giving our allegiance to Jesus.

When someone hears the good news of Jesus, and how He has tangibly worked in your life, they often wonder about their next step. They often wonder how they can grow along the lines of what's been shared. Instead of shying away from that opportunity, help them process what they are feeling and what it means for them. Specifically, feel free to INVITE them into a space in which they can see their need for Jesus, receive His work on their behalf, and grow in their new identity as a child of God the Father, beloved servant of God the Son, and ambassador in God the Spirit. That could be a Missional Family Meal, the start of a DNA Group together, a Sunday Gathering or even just a BBQ in which they are able to meet other Christ-followers.

Regardless, and understanding that every situation needs to be treated on a case-by-case scenario, this is all about simply inviting people to connect at a more intentional level;

hopefully around Gospel truths and in Gospel environments that allow them to belong as they are exploring the implications of who God is, what He's done, who that makes them to be, and how they get to live. After all, Jesus was called "a friend of sinners," precisely because He loved inviting people like you and me to belong with Him, even before we believed in Him.

Pro-Tip: Practice Hospitality using the Gifts and Resources you have:

There's just a no better way to help people grow and show them that they are loved than to provide them with a place to belong on their way to belief. When you see yourself as a sibling in Jesus' family, empowered by the spirit to serve others as Jesus served you, you begin to see everyone else as possible brothers and sisters rather than projects. You have no need to fix anyone, or win them over. Instead, you get to just love and help them experience the freedom and family found in Jesus with the gifts and resources you have at your disposal (**Galatians 6:10**). Have a home into which people can be invited? Use it to practice hospitality! Have a gift or desire to cook? Use it to practice hospitality! Have a roof-deck on which to throw a party? Use it to practice hospitality! Have a gym membership, event pass, etc that others can use with you? Use it to practice hospitality! Have a car with which you can give people rides? Use it to practice hospitality! Enjoy getting groups of people together for trivia nights? Use that passion to practice hospitality! Enjoy starting new things? Use that entrepreneurial spirit to form a book club, running club, theology on tap night, etc. Know some not-yet Christian friends you think would connect well with your Christian friends? Plan to grab drinks together! The list goes on-and-on, as practicing hospitality is simply about, what we might call, "missional imagination" - being creative about leveraging the gifts and resources you have for the purpose of inviting people into spaces in which they can begin to see more of who God is, what He's done in Christ, who that makes them to be, and how they get to live when they trust Christ!

Gathering :: TEACHING ("...and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded.")

In commenting on the fact that Christians seem increasingly opposed to actually declaring (vs simply displaying) the good news of Christ, author Becky Pippert says,

"I wonder if the verbal aspect of evangelism has to be re-learned as an active choice and a sacrificial commitment...We must live out the gospel by who we are and what we do. But we must not assume that by seeing what I do, (others) are going to catch on."

Her point is that there comes a time when we must actually point people to and help them be TAUGHT the Scriptures. Jesus is very clear that if people - including ourselves - are going to learn to "obey all He's commanded" and walk in His ways, then it's going to require teaching and being taught from the Scriptures. Sometimes this means gathering one-on-one. Other times it means gathering for a worship service. But regardless, because Scripture is, as **2 Timothy 3:16-17** says, "breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness," our job is simply to open it up as we have opportunity, explain it's clear meaning, show people how to find Jesus in the text, and then let it do it's work!

Pro-Tip 1: Leverage the Teaching Environments in which you're already Gathering

Teaching the Scriptures does not mean you have to do all the teaching or yourself be a skilled teacher. The testimony of Scripture is that it is powerful enough to instruct people's hearts (Hebrews 4:12). It simply needs to be opened and read. So leverage the teaching environments you're already in by simply inviting those you're discipling to gather with you. That could mean inviting them to a Missional Family Meal, into a DNA Group or just to join you for a Sunday Gathering. It doesn't have to be complicated.

Pro-Tip 2: Trust the Process

We will talk more about this in "Praxis #11 - Experiencing The Bible For All It's Worth (Process)," but a simple, reproducible process for effectively engaging the Scriptures includes answering three basic questions: Observation, Interpretation, and Application. We call this the **"O.I.A. Process"**. Observation means seeing what's in the verses and asking questions like, *"What's the context in which the passage is found?; What's the literary form of the text?; What things are being emphasized, repeated, compared, contrasted, etc?; What things jump off the page or seem important?"* Interpretation means understanding what's being said by the verses and asking questions like, *"What does this passage tell me about who God is or what He has done in Christ?; What does it tell me about who I am and how I am created to live, etc?"* And finally, Application simply means asking, *"What do I need to believe, do or share in light of what this passage is saying?"* Working through that simple process can help the Scriptures come alive to you and those you're discipling.

UNDERSTANDING OUR SOCIETY AND THE NECESSITY OF THE 4G'S

As you may know, over the last 30 years, many strides have been taken, throughout the church, to see the gospel spread and lives changed, especially in areas such as music, design, teaching, architecture, literature, and the use of technology. We are grateful for the many faithful servants who have poured into these areas of ministry. However, after all of the countless hours spent on books, blogs, and conferences and the like, George Barna has reported that Christianity, especially among Millennials, is at an all time low in the U.S., and declining fast. In fact, the Ferguson brothers, in their book *Exponential*, have also provided us with further insight about the state of Church:

- Today, only 22% of Americans have a positive view of the body of Christ.
- 37% of those 15-30 years old have no interest in any form of spirituality at all
- Every week, 43,000 Americans are leaving the church.
- Half the churches in the United States did not add one person through conversion last year.

When we hear these statistics our hearts break. And although there are a number of initiatives in place to bring good news to these folks, Alan Hirsch and the Barna Research Group have both noted that 70% of those outside the faith aren't interested in attending a church service of any kind. With the worship service being such a huge part of the ministry efforts employed by

so many who hope to bridge the gap between what is and what could be, we must ask ourselves...*If more and more people are not interested in coming to our church services, how can we, as the church, go to them?*

These “4G’s” are by no means a silver bullet for solving the above issues. But they are a Biblically faithful and personally invigorating way forward for discipling anyone regardless of where they are in their journey with God, because they allow for three, seminal things:

1. ***The exercise of spiritual gifts*** - In Romans 12:4, 1 Corinthians 12:7 and Ephesians 4:7-11, we find what have often been referred to as “spiritual gift” lists. To be sure, the gifts listed in each of these sections of scriptures, as well as the lists themselves serve very different purposes. The gifts listed in Romans 12:4 seem to be associated with the practical activities carried out by the members of a church family; while those listed in 1 Corinthians 12:7 seem to be associated with activities carried out in the context of a gathering of the church; and still Ephesians 4:7-11 seem to be describing a list of ministry identities given to the church by Jesus, as opposed to simply gifts or tasks within the church. Regardless, each of these gifts/identities can not only contribute to, but enhance our “4G” practices. Or to say it another way, connecting, sharing, inviting and teaching are not separate spiritual gifts, but discipleship practices that become even more natural, life-giving and powerful when you deploy them according to the ways in which God has gifted you.
2. ***The freedom to offer belonging*** - As Jesus described in Matthew 13:47-50 when he talked about the Kingdom being like a net that indiscriminately grabbed people that He would separate as “in” or “out” in due time, we’re necessarily freed to offer any and everyone a place to belong on their way to belief. With such a space, people are truly able to be met where they are and given repeated opportunity to hear and see how the person and promises of Jesus apply to the everyday stuff of their life.
3. ***The formation of new church families*** - Sharing the Gospel through friendships can be both good and sufficient on its own, but only if these conversations lead to belonging with other friends in the faith. Because we are free to offer people a place to belong as they consider the person and promises of Jesus, the reality of new church families forming becomes greater. As people are given space to press into what it means to follow Jesus next to believers who can explain it, each community begins to exist for those outside of it and by nature has the possibility to multiplying into other communities.

It is not an exaggeration to say that a living out of the 4G’s together is a fulfillment of the Great Commission Jesus gave His followers: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* The only question is, will we heed the call? Will we live as disciple-making disciples or mere consumers!

TIMELESS DOESN'T MEAN TIRESOME VISUALIZED



GO = CONNECT



GOSPEL = SHARE



GROW = INVITE



GATHER = TEACH

The church's mission of discipleship is best expressed by the "4G's: Going, Gospel'ing, Growing, Gathering."

P R A X I S

8

E X P E R I E N C I N G
T H E B I B L E F O R
A L L I T ' S W O R T H
(P I C T U R E)

PRAXIS #8

EXPERIENCING THE BIBLE FOR ALL IT'S WORTH (PICTURE) (FIELD JOURNAL)



MAIN IDEA :: *Effectively engaging the Bible starts with having a picture of what it's all about.*

THEMATIC WORD :: *Picture*

SCRIPTURES¹

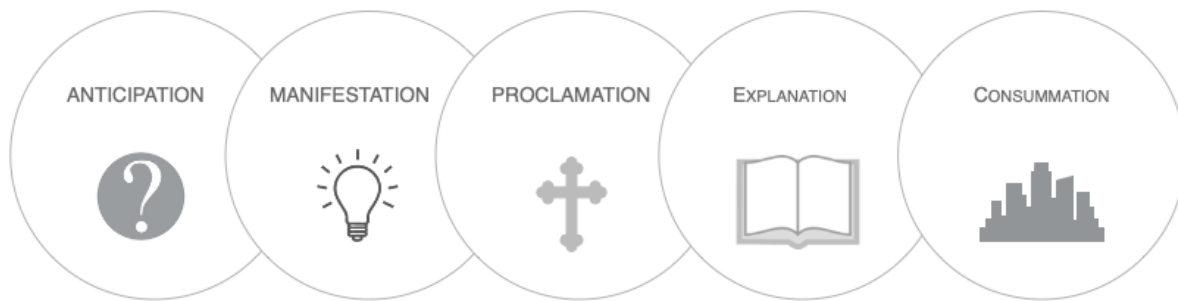
- Genesis 1-3
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- Matthew 1
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- Acts 1:8
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- Revelation 21:1-8
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- Luke 24:27, 44-48
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- John 5:39, 46
 - Observations
 - Interpretation

¹ A proper understanding of Scripture always includes a methodical, orderly answering of questions which seek to get at what's called the authorial intent or originally intended meaning of a text within its context. The two most basic questions that need answering for any set of verses are: Observation and Interpretation.

- Observation means seeing what's in the verses and includes asking questions like, "What's the context in which the passage is found?; What's the literary form of the text?; What things are being emphasized, repeated, compared, contrasted, etc?; What things jump off the page to you or seem important?"

- Interpretation means understanding what's being said by the verses and includes asking questions like, "What does this passage tell me about who God is or what He has done in Christ?; What does it tell me about who I am and how I am created to live, etc?"

EXPERIENCING THE BIBLE FOR ALL IT'S WORTH (PICTURE) VISUALIZED



Effectively engaging the Bible starts with having a picture of what it's all about.

REFLECTION & APPLICATION QUESTIONS

What has been your view of what the Bible is about?

What does the culture at-large say about what the Bible is about? What have you heard?

What is the main idea of the Biblical narrative?

How might seeing the Bible as a five-piece puzzle of anticipation, manifestation, proclamation, explanation and consummation, all pointing to Jesus, change the way you engage with it? How might it change the way you help others engage with it?

Is there anything you feel you need to believe, do and/or share with others in light of this week's passages and main idea?

PRAXIS #8

EXPERIENCING THE BIBLE FOR ALL IT'S WORTH (PICTURE)



MAIN IDEA :: *Effectively engaging the Bible starts with having a picture of what it's all about.*

THEMATIC WORD :: *Picture*

PREVIOUSLY...

In "Praxis #7 - Timeless Doesn't Mean Tiresome," we saw that ***the church's mission of discipleship is best expressed in what we call the "4G's" - Going (Connecting), Gospel'ing (Sharing), Growing (Inviting), Gathering (Teaching).***

WHERE WE'VE BEEN

At this point, it seems important to remind ourselves where we've been: In "Praxis #0 - What Is Praxis?" we were reminded that thinking correctly about God is of the utmost importance, especially when it comes to learning and helping others learn to trust and obey God in every area of life. As the following scholars have said:

- "What comes into (your) mind when (you) think about God is the most important thing about (you)!... There's scarcely an error...or a failure in (our lives), that cannot be traced...to imperfect (or just wrong) thoughts about God." - A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*
- "Very small errors in a person's understanding of the gospel seem to result in very big problems in that person's life." - C.J. Mahaney
- (Our culture's moral ideals about things like human rights, a universal concern for the vulnerable, human equality, sexual restraint, reverence for humility, and the notion of moral progress itself derive) "ultimately from claims made in the Bible: that humans are made in God's image; that his Son died equally for everyone; that there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. (Ironically,) *The West, increasingly empty though the pews may be, remains firmly moored to its Christian past.*"¹ - Tom Holland, *Dominion*

To summarize: Everything we've said regarding life, and certainly life as a follower of Christ (Praxis #1-4), as well as life as a family of Christ-followers (Praxis #5-7) is only as good as our understanding of Christ, as He is revealed in the Bible!

EXPERIENCING THE BIBLE FOR ALL IT'S WORTH

But is there a more controversial document in the entire world? Tears and blood have been shed over the Bible. Few words are as emotionally charged, and even fewer carry as much baggage. Yet, the Bible is where we must go if we ultimately want to encounter the person of

¹ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/unbelievers-christian/>

Christ. After all, Jesus Himself said that the whole Bible is ultimately about him; *"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me"* (**John 5:39**). Similarly, Sally Lloyd Jones, who authored the *Jesus Storybook Bible*, which is perhaps the most popular children's Bible of all time, says that, *"The Bible is not a book of rules, though there are rules in it. And it's not a book of heroes, though it certainly contains them. It's an adventure story about a young Hero who comes from a far country to win back his lost treasure. It's a love story about a brave Prince who leaves his palace, his throne - everything - to rescue the one he loves. It's like the most wonderful of fairy tales...but that's come true in real life!"*²...From beginning to end, the Bible is the story of the person and work of Jesus Christ! As the Reformer Martin Luther said, *"Scripture is the manger in which the Christ lies."* And so as a mother goes to the cradle to find her baby, so we go to the Bible to find Jesus!

Unfortunately, despite the proliferation of Bible copies,³ many find understanding and experiencing it a bit like going to a Shakespearean play. Clearly there's great value and meaning in Shakespeare's plays, otherwise they wouldn't still be performed 500 years later. But that doesn't mean we always understand what's going on in them or find them to be particularly relevant to our lives. The result is that few seem to feel confident to read, understand and apply what it says! Given that the Bible is all about Jesus, we can't imagine many things more tragic than not feeling equipped to read and ultimately encounter Jesus through it!

Not too long ago, men and women actually gave their lives to see this book translated from Latin into the language you speak today. The idea was this: *"We have to put this book into the hands of the people. For in it comes the greatest news the world has or ever will know - the opportunity to hear from God Himself!"* But slowly, over a few centuries, the Bible was taken out of the hands of the people and given to the spiritual "elite:" Pastors, Professors and Prophets, who were assumed to be the only ones capable of interpreting and understanding it. The result is that people lost confidence in their ability to understand what (or should we say "who") was leaping off the pages of Scripture.

All is not lost though! The truth is, experiencing the Bible for all it's worth doesn't require theological degrees. All it requires is having two things at your disposal:

1. A **Picture** of what the Bible is about.
2. A **Process** for practically and consistently engaging that Picture.

It's like putting together a puzzle. When you have the picture on the box and a process like "starting with the corner pieces," building the puzzle becomes effective and enjoyable.

² Jesus Story Book Bible, Sally Lloyd Jones - <http://www.lifeway.com/Product/the-story-of-gods-love-for-you-P005779675>

³ The Bible has more printed copies than any other book in the history of the world by quite a large margin. The average American has 3.6 Bibles of their own not counting Bible apps and software.

So let's start with a picture of what the Bible's about. (In "Praxis #9 - Experiencing the Bible for All It's Worth (Process)," we'll unpack a simple, reproducible process that you can use on a daily basis and teach those you're discipling to use as well.)

ONE OPTION

There's no shortage of literature attempting to deconstruct the Biblical narrative so as to understand it's overarching framework. One framework or picture that we find particularly helpful is that of "Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration." In this framework:

- Genesis 1-2 serves as Act 1: **Creation**, detailing from where we, as humans, came.
- Genesis 3 and it's New Testament counterpart, Romans 1:18-31 subsequently describe Act 2, what's known as "the **Fall**," and what went wrong within the human race, so as to produce the kind of pain, suffering and brokenness we see and experience today. From Genesis 3 to the end of the Old Testament, we are continually reminded that we are living in a fallen state.
- However, upon turning over to the New Testament; specifically the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, we are confronted with Act 3: **Redemption** and the reality that hope is possible, because Jesus Christ has arrived, died and risen from the dead for the sin of all mankind. The entirety of the New Testament, save the last book - the book of Revelation - is essentially a description of redemption in Christ and the implications of it for our lives. As Trevin Wax says in his book *Counterfeit Gospels*, "In the person of Jesus Christ, God Himself comes to renew the world and restore His people. The grand narrative of Scripture climaxes with the death and resurrection of Jesus."
- But just as the human story did not end with Jesus' resurrection, neither does the Biblical story. Rather, in Revelation 21 we see the final act; Act 4: **Restoration**, in which God has promised to renew the whole world in a kind of cosmopolitan and metropolitan way, by judging sin, and ushering in righteousness and peace, so that our material world is purged of all evil once and for all.

Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration!

What we find particularly helpful about this framework is, not only, how it makes sense of the entirety of Scripture, but how it makes sense of each person's life-story. Understanding that the Bible, as the grand story of God, is not just about "my" individual happiness, or God's plan for "my" life, but about God's creation, fall, redemption, restoration plan for the world, of which "I" am a part, subsequently makes sense of each person's life-story that we could say follows a similar four-act arc to that of the Bible. For example:

- **Creation** :: Everyone has a fundamental belief about their origin - who or what gave them their existence, made them who they are, or shaped them into the person they are today. Our "creation belief" is often indicated by who or what we credit or blame for who we are today or the situation in which we find ourselves.

- **Fall** :: Everyone has a central belief about the cause of brokenness in the world or just in their lives. We blame our parents, family, friends, boss, government, etc., and we want justice for what we perceive to be wrong with our lives and the world as a whole. Our “fall belief” is often indicated by why we think people and things are not the way they’re supposed to be and who’s to blame for that.
- **Redemption** :: Everyone has a solution they believe in; a remedy they look to; or a “savior” they trust in to redeem the brokenness in their life and the world. Many are looking to a philosophy; Others to a plan for self-improvement or personal growth; Still others believe some kind of reform in education or politics will ultimately change things.
- **Restoration** :: Everyone has a picture of a preferred future when everything is as it should be. Some see a utopia with humans all living at peace with one another. Others believe Mother Earth and humanity will be one. Still others see another world to which they’ll go. Some people’s future hope is to be married, have children, get a job, be rich, etc. Everyone wants something better - restoration of what we believe our lives and world should be like.

JESUS’ PICTURE

While the “Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration” picture is a helpful one, we find it to be lacking in one way - helping us to see Jesus at every point in the Biblical narrative! Jesus himself said that it was possible to study the Scriptures and in missing Him, miss the point of them all together (**John 5:39**). Moreover, it seems clear that the way Jesus understood the Scriptures was in light of Himself:

- **John 5:46** - *“For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.”*
- **Luke 24:27** - *“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”*
- **Luke 24:44-48** - *“Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.’”*

A MORE CHRIST-CENTERED OPTION

Consequently, we need a picture of Scripture that highlights the person and work of Jesus at every turn. This is why we see the Bible, in both it’s Testaments, as essentially made up of 5 parts - like a 5-piece puzzle:

1. The Old Testament
2. The Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
3. The Book of Acts
4. The Epistles or New Testament Letters between Acts and Revelation
5. The Book of Revelation

Each of these sections, in some way, reveals Jesus, and if you understand how, you can have a Christ-centered picture and understanding of the Scriptures. So let's take a look:

The Old Testament - Anticipation

All 39 books of the Old Testament **ANTICIPATE** Jesus! From the moment God brings Creation into existence in **Genesis 1-2**, and Adam and Eve make that fateful decision to disobey God and bring about the Fall in **Genesis 3**, humanity is looking forward to a redeemer! As **Genesis 3:15**, which is famously called the Proto-Evangelion or "First Gospel" says, *"(God) will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."* That is a promise about God, one day, restoring relationship with His rebellious creation, through a descendant, who would ultimately destroy sin, Satan, evil and death, by Himself being destroyed.

From Genesis 3:15 on, the Old Testament continues to anticipate this Redeemer. More specifically, the rest of Genesis and the books of Exodus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges - all the way through the book of Esther are essentially the story of God forming, multiplying, guiding and protecting a family through whom this redeemer would come. The books of Leviticus and Numbers anticipate the type of relationship this redeemer would afford us the ability to have with God. The books of Job, the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon - what's called the "Wisdom Literature" - remind us that meaning and understanding in life only come through faith in this redeemer. Finally, both the Major and Minor Prophets - all those books with funny names like Obadiah and Habakkuk - anticipate a redeemer, who will ultimately rid the world of sin and brokenness. Anticipation!

The Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - Manifestation

Matthew 1 begins with a genealogy leading up to Jesus. A transition between the Old and New Testaments has occurred. While the Old Testament anticipated Jesus, the Gospels now **MANIFEST** Him! The long-awaited redeemer is here!

Together the Gospels are like a four-sided diamond, in that they each recount the historical events surrounding the person and work of Christ, but from different facets or angles. Or to use another analogy, they're like four people looking out onto a different part of the Grand Canyon, and each writing to tell what they see. Each observer is writing from a different vantage point, which is why the details in each of the four Gospels don't contradict each other - they compliment each other and together provide a fully-faceted manifestation of Jesus!

The Book of Acts - Proclamation

Acts is, of course, the account of how the message of Christ went forth after the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. As Jesus said to His disciples in **Acts 1:8** (which many have taken to be the theme of the book) *"you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."* Acts is the account of the activity or "acts" of the Holy Spirit guiding the

disciples and Apostles to **PROCLAIM** the message of Jesus unto the forming of the early Christian Church! Proclamation!

The Epistles or New Testament Letters between Acts and Revelation - Explanation

After Acts we find a whole bunch of New Testament letters or Epistles - Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, all the way to the second-to-last book of the Bible, the book of Jude - each of these written by the Apostles, to various, local church families, that had sprung up as the Gospel was proclaimed throughout Acts. Each of these letters is an attempt to **EXPLAIN** the message of Jesus and it's implications for a specific people and context. Thus, we can think of these letters in the same way that we think of acorns and oak trees. In the Gospels, Jesus declared and displayed various acorns of truth that planted His message of freedom & family into the hearts and minds of people, who then proclaimed it throughout Acts. In the Epistles, the Apostles take these acorns and grow them up into theological oak trees, by giving comprehensive explanations of what it means to be in relationship with Jesus and a part of His family known as the church. Explanation!

The Book of Revelation - Consummation

The Book (really letter) of Revelation is the final book in the New Testament and Bible. Through a vision given by God to the Apostle John, it tells of the **CONSUMMATION** of Jesus - the end of the story of human history as we know it, when Jesus will finally be revealed as *"the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the Lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world, the King of kings and the Lord of lords."* (**Revelation 21:6**) It's this "King of kings and Lord of lords," who upon returning to earth, will consummate His perfect and eternal Kingdom - the kingdom we've been waiting for ever since Genesis 3:15! Consummation!

JESUS IN EVERY BOOK

Effectively engaging the Bible starts with having a picture of what it's all about. This picture of Scripture, as essentially a five-piece puzzle consisting of anticipation, manifestation, proclamation, explanation and consummation, not only gives us an ability to locate where we are in the story at any point, but reminds us that the whole story is about Jesus! And not just the story, but the details of the story as well. Consider how every book of the Bible is in some way anticipating, manifesting, proclaiming, explaining or consummating Jesus:⁴

- **Genesis** is really the story of Jesus, as the Word of God, creating the Heavens and the Earth.
- **Exodus** is the story of Jesus as the truer Passover Lamb, whose blood is sprinkled on the doorposts of our heart so that we can be free from the slavery of sin and penalty of death.
- **Leviticus** shows Jesus as the truer temple, the holy place where we meet with God by faith.
- **Numbers** shows Jesus as your ever-present guide - pillar of cloud by day and fire by night.
- **Deuteronomy** shows Jesus was the prophet coming who was greater than Moses.

⁴ The below list is adapted and edited from sermon by J.D. Greear: "DPAC 2016, "Jesus is the Center" // The Whole Story finale, #46"

- **Joshua** shows Jesus as was the conquering warrior leading His people into the Promised Land.
- **Judges** shows Jesus as the truly broken Savior rising up to rescue you.
- **Ruth** shows Jesus as was our true kinsman-redeemer.
- **1&2 Samuel** shows Jesus as the true, shepherd king, who faced your giants alone.
- **1&2 Kings** shows Jesus as the truly righteous ruler.
- **1&2 Chronicles** shows Jesus as the true restorer of the kingdom.
- **Ezra** shows Jesus as the truly faithful scribe.
- **Nehemiah** shows Jesus as true rebuilders of the walls of our lives.
- **Esther** shows Jesus as our true advocate, risking His life to restore us to royalty.
- **Job** shows Jesus is our living Redeemer.
- **Psalms** shows Jesus as is the one who truly hears our cries.
- **Proverbs** shows Jesus as wisdom personified.
- **Ecclesiastes** shows Jesus as the meaning that lets us escape the madness of life.
- **Song of Solomon** shows Jesus as your true lover and bridegroom.
- **Isaiah** shows Jesus as the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, who was wounded for your transgressions and bruised for your iniquities.
- **Jeremiah** shows Jesus as the Spirit that writes God's laws on your heart.
- **Lamentations** shows Jesus as the true weeping prophet.
- **Ezekiel** shows Jesus was the real river of life bringing healing to the nations.
- **Daniel** shows Jesus as fourth man in the fire with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.
- **Hosea** shows that Jesus is the ever-faithful husband pursuing you and me, His unfaithful bride.
- **Joel** shows Jesus as the restorer of the years of life that the locusts have eaten.
- **Amos** shows Jesus is your burden bearer.
- **Obadiah** shows Jesus is the judge of all the earth.
- **Jonah** shows Jesus as the prophet who was truly cast out into the storm so that we could be brought in.
- **Micah** shows Jesus as the everlasting ruler born to us in Bethlehem.
- **Nahum** shows Jesus as the Avenger of God's elect.
- **Habakkuk** shows Jesus as your reason to rejoice even when the "fields of your life" are empty.
- **Zephaniah** shows Jesus as the true and greater Reformer.
- **Haggai** shows Jesus as the cleansing fountain.
- **Zechariah** shows Jesus as the truly pierced Son whom every eye on earth will one day behold.
- **Malachi** shows Jesus was the Sun of Righteousness rising with healing in His wings.

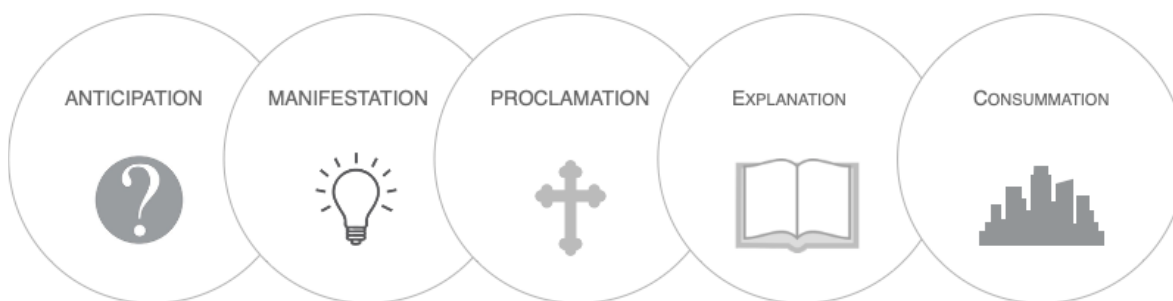
- **Matthew** reveals Jesus as the one who showed up as the King of the Jews.
- **Mark** shows Jesus as the Son of God.
- **Luke** shows Jesus as the Savior born to us in the city of David.
- **John** shows Jesus was the Word become flesh, dwelling among us.
- **Acts** shows Jesus as Christ the risen Lord, proclaiming salvation to the nations.

- **Romans** shows that Jesus is our Justifier.
- **1&2 Corinthians** shows that Jesus is the Spirit at work in the church.
- **Galatians** shows Jesus as the righteousness of God imputed to you by faith.
- **Ephesians** shows Jesus as your righteous armor.
- **Philippians** shows Jesus as the God who meets your every need.
- **Colossians** shows Jesus as the firstborn of all creation.
- **1&2 Thessalonians** shows Jesus descending from heaven, to meet us together in the clouds.
- **1&2 Timothy** shows Jesus is the one mediator between God and humanity.
- **Titus** shows Jesus is your truly faithful pastor, more than any human pastor.
- **Philemon** shows Jesus is your Redeemer, restoring you to His service.
- **Hebrews** shows Jesus is your great high priest.
- **James** shows Jesus is the life at work in your faith.
- **1&2 Peter** shows Jesus is your living cornerstone.
- **1, 2, and 3 John** shows Jesus is your advocate, pleading His righteousness in your place.
- **Jude** shows Jesus is God your Savior, the one who keeps you from stumbling and joyfully presents you blameless to the Father.
- **Revelation** shows Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world, the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

GOOD NEWS

Engaging the Bible means engaging God Himself, because the whole Bible is ultimately about who God is in Jesus! And as Tim Keller once said, *"This is exceedingly good news! Because if every theme and story of the Bible is not about Jesus, then every theme and story is not good news...but bad news because it's merely instructions for how to live, with no power to obey those instructions. It's just works righteousness."*

EXPERIENCING THE BIBLE FOR ALL IT'S WORTH (PICTURE) VISUALIZED



Effectively engaging the Bible starts with having a picture of what it's all about.

HUB CHURCH

P R A X I S

9

E X P E R I E N C I N G
T H E B I B L E F O R
A L L I T ' S W O R T H
(P R O C E S S)

2021 EDITION

PRAXIS #9

EXPERIENCING THE BIBLE FOR ALL IT'S WORTH (PROCESS) (FIELD JOURNAL)



MAIN IDEA :: *Effectively engaging the Bible continues with having a simple process for studying and implementing it's truths.*

THEMATIC WORD :: *Process*

PRACTICE

Take some time to work through the following Scripture passage, being sure to use your process of Observation, Interpretation, Application. Be prepared to present your learnings!

- Observation = What's There In The Passage?
- Interpretation = What's Being Said In The Passage?
- Application = What Do I Need To Do Given What This Passage Means?

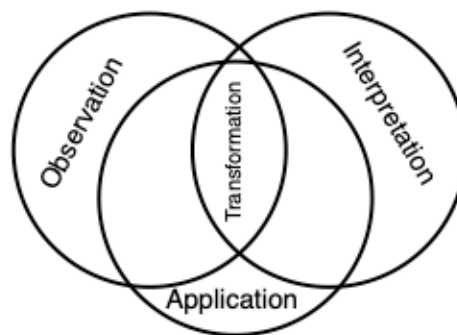
Galatians 4:1-7

• Observations =

• Interpretations =

• Applications =

EXPERIENCING THE BIBLE FOR ALL IT'S WORTH (PROCESS) VISUALIZED



Effectively engaging the Bible continues with having a simple process for studying and implementing it's truths.

PRAXIS #9
EXPERIENCING THE BIBLE FOR ALL IT'S WORTH (PROCESS)



MAIN IDEA :: *Effectively engaging the Bible continues with having a simple process for studying and implementing it's truths.*

THEMATIC WORD :: *Process*

PREVIOUSLY...

In their book *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples*, authors Francis Chan and Mark Beuving make the following statement:

*"Perhaps the strongest thing we can say about the Bible is that it is the "Word of God." But have you ever thought about what that means? That concept should blow our minds. When we talk about the Bible, we're actually talking about something that the all-powerful, all-knowing, transcendent God decided to write to us! What could be more important? Think of how you would respond to hearing a voice from heaven speaking directly to you. We should approach the Bible with the same reverence."*¹

In "Praxis #8 - Experiencing the Bible for All It's Worth (Picture)," we saw that engaging with the Bible means engaging with God Himself AND **effectively engaging with the Bible starts with having a picture of what it's all about.** It's like putting together a puzzle. When you have the picture on the box, things are far more seamless and enjoyable. At every turn the Bible fundamentally depicts the person and work of Jesus Christ; specifically, the anticipation, manifestation, proclamation and consummation of His rule and reign.

Now of course, building a puzzle is much more fun if you actually know how to put the pieces together. The same is true with reading the Bible. Understanding it at a 30,000 foot level is one thing, but engaging, enjoying and even being transformed by it at the ground level is quite another. Consequently, **effectively engaging the Bible continues with having a simple process for studying and implementing it's truths.**

A THREE QUESTION PROCESS

A simple, reproducible process can really be boiled down to three questions that if you get into a habit of prayerfully asking each time you're reading the Bible, you'll not only find your time in the Bible to be more meaningful, but find that your heart and mind begin to be filled up with Jesus - the one of whom the whole Bible is about. Moreover, these are three questions that you can pass along to help others engage and be transformed by Jesus and His word as well.

¹ Chan, Francis; Beuving, Mark. *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (p. 92). David C. Cook. Kindle Edition.

Question 1: Observation

The Question of Observation is simply about asking, *"What's There?"* In looking at a particular passage of Scripture, you're asking yourself things like, *"What do I see in the passage?"* Now understand, you're not yet asking, *"What does the passage mean?"* That will come. But before you can understand what something means, you have to see what's there - what is being said. So observation questions are things like:

- *"What is the context in which the passage is found?" - "Is it in the Old Testament or New Testament? Is it a part of the four Gospels, the Letters, or somewhere else?"*
- *"What is the literary form of the passage?" - "Is it poetry like in the Psalms, or history like in the book of Judges for example?"*
- *"What things are being emphasized, repeated, compared or contrasted?"*
- *"What things just jump off the page to you?"*
- *"What hints do you see in the passage about the Freedom and Family we have in Christ?"*

Question 2: Interpretation

Once you have a handle on *"What's There?"* you're now primed to ask, *"What's Being Said?"* It seems that in our *"gotcha, spin-culture,"* we increasingly want to make people and things say what we want them to say. Consequently, even when we come to something like the Bible, we find in ourselves a tendency to read into it things that just aren't there, or convolute it to make it say what we want it to say. But doing that is like reading a letter from someone and projecting your thoughts and opinions onto the writer's words. Not only is that insulting to the writer, but it does an injustice to you in terms of receiving and understanding the message of that writer to you. If people don't have the ability to communicate what they intend to communicate, independent of how we feel about it, then communication in general breaks down. This is even more true with God and His word.

Interpretation is all about discerning what's called the *"authorial intent"*; the intent of the Biblical authors when they wrote the words they wrote! So interpretation questions are things like:

- *"What does this passage tell me about who God is?" - "What does it tell me about His character, attributes or actions?"*
- *"What does this passage tell me about who I am?"*
- *"What does the passage mean?"*
- *"How does this passage find its truest meaning in the person and work of Jesus!"*

That last question is exceedingly important, since of course the entire Bible is either anticipating, manifesting, proclaiming, explaining or consummating the rule and reign of Jesus, such that, if you haven't gotten to Jesus in your understanding of a particular passage, you haven't gotten understanding of that particular passage.

Question 3: Application

Unfortunately, much of our Bible study (and learning in general) stops with information and cognition. But as every educator will tell you, true learning and ultimately life-change requires a combination of information and implementation. As authors Francis Chan and Mark Beuving again say, *"What is the value of truth if it doesn't change us?"*

Moreover and from a spiritual perspective, God is not merely concerned with what you know about Him. He is concerned with how you live with Him. This is why, throughout the Scriptures, Jesus saved some of His harshest rebukes for those who knew the most about Him - the Pharisees and Sadducees - but failed to apply what they knew. Jesus hates hypocrisy; specifically, people who are passionate about the truth, but don't seem to understand the concept of practicing what they preach. This is why application is so essential. "If you find yourself studying the Bible without applying what you're learning, then you're misusing the Bible. It's that simple."²

So application is about asking, *"What Do I Do Given What This Passage Means?"* Or better, *"What does God want me to do with this?"* Application questions are therefore things like:

- *"What does this passage tell me I need to start believing about myself, or God, or just the world around me? - Beliefs are the seeds of our soul. How we behave, for better or worse, is dictated by what we believe. So asking yourself, "what you need to start believing in light of the truths of a passage, is about "watering the seeds your soul."*
- *"What does this passage tell me I need to stop believing?" - perhaps because those beliefs have lead to destructive behaviors.*
- *"How can I be intentional about living into these new beliefs today, this week, this month, etc."*

BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND JOY

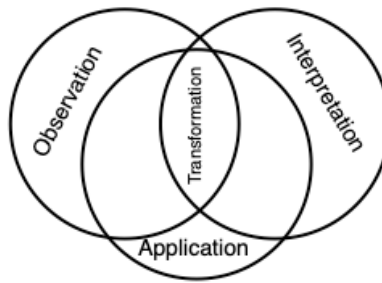
When my daughters were younger, puzzles were never an item with which they would choose to occupy their time. My wife and I soon realized that this was because they really didn't know how to engage a puzzle in an effective way. They would simply dump out all the pieces, throw the box to the side and start smashing things together hoping to find a fit. Needless to say, they quickly became frustrated. Only after we (mostly my wife) gave them the picture on the box, as an overview of what they were building and a process for putting pieces together; like "start with the corners," did they develop the confidence to build and ultimately enjoy building puzzles on their own. Just the other day, I found my 6 year old in her room confidently enjoying putting together a puzzle on her own!

Experiencing the Bible for all it's worth is really no different. Apart from a picture of what it's about and a simple, reproducible process for engaging that picture, we can too easily become frustrated in reading and studying it. But by simply employing these three questions of ***Observation, Interpretation, and Application we learn to effectively engage, enjoy and***

² Francis Chan and Mark Beuving

ultimately be transformed by the Bible. After all, the Bible isn't merely an inanimate object that we study and pull information from. It's a book that has a life of its own. It has the ability to read us, pierce the deepest parts of our being, and discern our motivations. It has the ability to transform us (Hebrews 4:12). Will you let it transform you?

EXPERIENCING THE BIBLE FOR ALL IT'S WORTH (PROCESS) VISUALIZED



Effectively engaging the Bible continues with having a simple process for studying and implementing it's truths.

HUB CHURCH

P R A X I S

10

E N J O Y I N G G O D

(P R A Y E R)

2021 EDITION

PRAXIS #10
ENJOYING GOD (PRAYER) (FIELD JOURNAL)



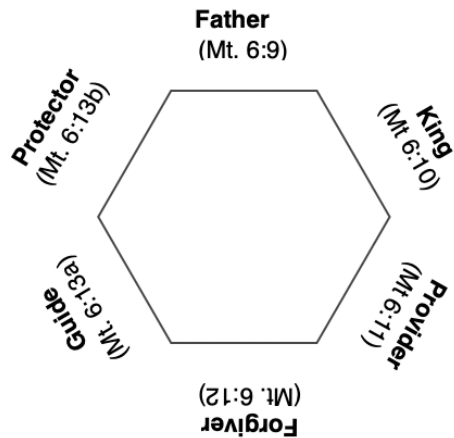
MAIN IDEA :: *Prayer is about experiencing and ultimately enjoying God.*

THEMATIC WORD :: *Prayer*

SCRIPTURES¹

- Matthew 6:5-13
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- Luke 11:1-4
 - Observations
 - Interpretation

ENJOYING GOD - THE LORD'S PRAYER VISUALIZED



Prayer is about experiencing and ultimately enjoying God.

¹ A proper understanding of Scripture always includes a methodical, orderly answering of questions which seek to get at what's called the authorial intent or originally intended meaning of a text within its context. The two most basic questions that need answering for any set of verses are: Observation and Interpretation.

- **Observation** means seeing what's in the verses and includes asking questions like, "What's the context in which the passage is found?; What's the literary form of the text?; What things are being emphasized, repeated, compared, contrasted, etc?; What things jump off the page to you or seem important?"

- **Interpretation** means understanding what's being said by the verses and includes asking questions like, "What does this passage tell me about who God is or what He has done in Christ?; What does it tell me about who I am and how I am created to live, etc?"

REFLECTION & APPLICATION QUESTIONS

What has been your understanding of prayer - It's purpose and practice in your life?

What does the culture at-large say about prayer? What have you heard?

What is the main idea behind why Jesus is teaching the Lord's Prayer?

What do you learn about God's character from the Lord's Prayer? What qualities are listed and stick out for you?

How might seeing the Lord's Prayer as a framework by which to understand who God is change the way you think about and even practice prayer?

Is there anything you feel you need to believe, do and/or share with others in light of this week's passages and main idea?



MAIN IDEA :: *Prayer is about experiencing and ultimately enjoying God.*

THEMATIC WORD :: *Prayer*

PREVIOUSLY...

In "Praxis #8 & 9 - Experiencing the Bible for All It's Worth (Picture & Process)," we saw that ***effectively engaging the Bible is about having a picture of what the Bible is all about and a simple process for engaging that picture.*** The necessity for both is rooted in the fact that when you're engaging with the Bible, you're ultimately engaging with God Himself. As Pastor Garrett Kell says,

"God reveals himself through his Word. When he speaks, he teaches us what he is like, how he acts, and how he desires us to respond. As a whole, the Bible is about God. It's about God the Father displaying his glory through God the Son by the power of God the Holy Spirit."

A DEEP LONGING

Tim Keller once noted that with the so-called "progress" made by evolutionary naturalism (which is a worldview that says that you and I have no inherent worth or purpose apart from survival of the fittest) the more we've become starved for something transcendent. No matter how you identify; religious, irreligious, a-religious or the like, it seems that we're all longing to have a deep soul experience.¹ That, along with the study of the Bible, is what makes the gift of prayer so essential. At its core, prayer is about enflaming the wonder of God in you. So it is no wonder Jesus specifically taught us how to pray.

THE FAMOUS LORD'S PRAYER

In **Matthew 6:5-13**, we find Jesus' famous teaching on prayer - what's been called "the Lord's Prayer." It is a prayer which you have, no doubt, probably prayed or at least heard prayed more than once. But before you let familiarity breed contempt, consider that the Reformer Martin Luther said in his *Smaller Catechism* that you could pray through this prayer 1000 times and there would always be something new, something rich, and that the great tragedy is that most people do pray this prayer 1000 times in their lives, but seem to miss the incredible things that are going on inside of it! So let's walk through it together...

¹ Adapted from Tim Keller, "Lord's Prayer: How to Pray" sermon

The first thing to notice about Jesus' teaching here is that it is set within a very specific context; namely, how NOT to pray! In **vv.5-8**, Jesus says,

"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

With surgical precision, Jesus identifies two methods of praying, which not ironically, end up keeping us from really enjoying and having the wonder of God enflamed in us. They are what you might call the religious and the irreligious modes of praying.

The Religious Mode of Praying

When Jesus talks about "hypocrites" who pray "that they may be seen by others," He's describing people who view prayer as a means of getting God to do what they want. In other words, prayer is a tool for using God. Naturally, Jesus calls this mode of praying "hypocritical."

Unfortunately, this is exactly how many religious folks treat prayer. We see prayer not as an opportunity to be with and enjoy God, but as a means of impressing Him and others, in hopes of receiving a blessing. That's what Jesus means when He says, "they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. (But) Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward."

Surprisingly, we could say that Jesus actually agrees here with people like Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl Marx, who asserted that religion is often a means of gaining power by getting respect, feeling superior to, or just being able to look down on others. Too often this is what religious people do. We pray (and do other Christian things) as a way of getting both God and others to admire and ultimately be indebted to us.

Now obviously God doesn't like to be used. As J.D. Greear says, "the only really genuine motivation to pray or serve God is not to get something from Him, but to get more of Him. It's the difference between a business model and a lover model. The former finds God useful. The latter finds Him beautiful."² Which tends to describe your approach to God?

A Religious Acid Test

² Sermon "Matthew 6:5-15: 'omg, how should I pray?'" - J.D. Greear

To help you answer that question, Jesus gives you an acid test - prayer in secret! He says, *"But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."*

Prayer in secret is the one thing that you would do only to get more of God. Everything else you do for God could be done for some other reason - to be seen by others, to fit in with your friends and family, to bolster your reputation, etc. But not prayer in secret. That is something you only do if you want more of God!

The Irreligious Mode of Praying

Fortunately or unfortunately, Jesus is an equal opportunity offender, because after critiquing religious folks, He does the same with those we might consider "irreligious" - "Gentiles" or non-Jews. In Jesus' time, the Jews were considered the chosen people of God, and therefore the standard bearers of religion. The Gentiles, by contrast, were those who did not possess the Law of God and were therefore on the outside looking in on the promises of God. To be sure, a "gentile" could be spiritual. They just likely wouldn't have been religious in the way Jews were.

To these folks, Jesus says, *"when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."* Notice what He's saying! He's saying for irreligious folks prayer is often a mystical thing. We're not always sure how it works or even why we should be doing it. We just feel that if we aren't, things won't go well for us. And so our prayers are laced with confusion, concern and wordiness! Has that ever been what your prayers looked like? You think, *"if I'm not praying, God won't be happy with me. He won't bless me. So I hope I'm praying the right words, praying long enough, etc."* The word "heap up empty phrases" there literally means "babbling." It means that when you pray, you keep repeating yourself, maybe start sweating and screaming, trying to wax elephants with God, because you think that by your repetition and intensity He will eventually hear you. Does that describe how you approach God?

An Irreligious Corrective

If so, Jesus says to you very simply, *"Do not be like (that), for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."* What He's doing is attempting to replace your fear with God's Fatherhood! One of the things that separates Christianity from every other religion or form of spirituality in the world is a level of intimacy between God and His children that almost seems irreverent. Jesus is reminding you that becoming a follower of Christ mean you no longer have to worry if God hears you. He's your Dad and as such welcomes you to approach him without being put together, articulate or the like.

The Christian Mode of Praying

Putting all this together, the context of the Lord's Prayer reminds us that whether you consider yourself religious, irreligious, spiritual, a-spiritual or the like, we are all longing for a deep soul experience, and yet all struggling to find it. This is why, starting in **v.9**, Jesus says, *"Pray like*

this..." and proceeds NOT to give a format for how to pray - ie: words you have say every time you pray - but rather a framework by which to understand who God is - 6 essential qualities about Him, so that you can enjoy simply being with Him.

Quality 1: God Is Your Father

In saying, "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,*" Jesus is, almost scandalously, leading with the fact that God is a Father, who invites you to treasure Him. And I say scandalously, because in no other religion is the Creator God of the universe conceived of in such intimate terms. John Calvin once said, "*With what confidence would anyone address God as 'Father'...unless we had been adopted as children of grace, in Christ?*"³

If you have received Jesus' gift of life, then that is exactly who God is to you: A father, who loving you with the utmost love, invites you to commune with and adore Him. Jesus, the true Son, went to the Cross, and gave up His status as God's child, in order for you - a spiritual orphan - to be adopted as God's child!

Quality 2: God Is Your King

After leading with God being Father, Jesus next invites you to pray, "*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*" Here Jesus is reminding you that God is not merely your father; He is also your king - He's a Father who reigns over a kingdom. This is why, traditionally, the God of the Bible is referred to as our "Heavenly Father!" Jesus is reminding us that God is a Kingly-Dad and a Fatherly-King.

So on the one hand, we can approach and trust Him because, as our Father, we know He has our best interest in mind. But on the other, we can rest in His presence, because we know that He can and will bring our best interest to pass within His Kingdom reign. The measure of this truth is, of course, the fact that Jesus, the true King, paid our sin-ransom, so that we, who were once rebels of the King - choosing to live for ourselves - could be brought back into His royal presence and under His royal care!

Quality 3: God Is Your Provider

Perhaps one of the more famous lines of the Lord's Prayer is here when Jesus invites you to pray, "*Give us this day our daily bread.*" "Daily bread" simply means "daily needs" or provision. Jesus is teaching you to see God as your provider. Quite literally, He is saying, if God is your Father who has the willingness to care for you AND your King, who has the ability to care for you, then He is necessarily your perfect provider. You are, therefore, afforded the privilege of coming to God for your daily provision and trusting that He'll supply it.

After all, Jesus, the true Provider, became as Scripture said, our bread of life, which never goes bad or gets depleted. Through Christ, we go from being exceedingly needy and having to

³ John Calvin, Institutes, 3.20.36-37

carry the burden of caring for ourselves to profoundly blessed because of having God as our Provider!

Quality 3: God Is Your Forgiver

Part of our daily struggle as humans is that we never feel “enough” - smart enough, beautiful enough, accomplished enough, godly enough, etc. It’s a function of having sinned against and broken relationship with God. We’ve, in a sense, accrued a negative spiritual tally that not even our best efforts or greatest successes can erase. When Jesus invites you to pray, *“and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors,”* He’s reminding you that God is your true forgiver. He is the one who has the ability to make you clean and acceptable not because you’ve earned it, but because Jesus, the true forgiver, absorbed all your condemnation by becoming sin on your behalf. In Christ, your negative spiritual tally is completely and forever erased, which incidentally, frees you to be forgiving toward others!

Qualities 4 & 5: God Is Your Guide & Protector

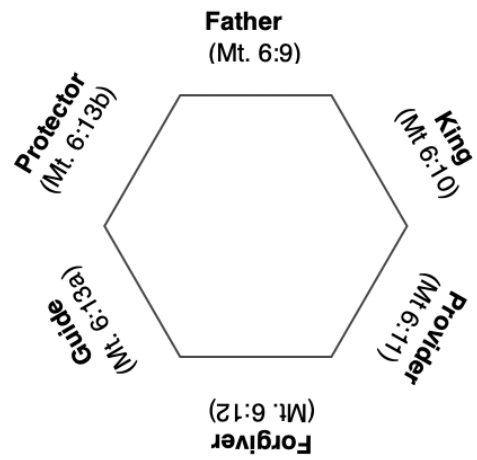
Finally, Jesus invites you to pray, *“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,”* which in it’s totality is a proclamation of self-dependency rather than self-sufficiency. It’s a vote of no confidence in your ability, because Jesus is reminding you that you need not bear the weight of having to direct your own life. God is more than capable of being your guide & protector. When you ask God to *“lead (you) not into temptation but to deliver (you) from evil,”* you’re saying, *“God I need you to be my guide and protector in life,”* because, no matter how smart, accomplished, or competent I think I am, I’m not fit to play your role. After all, if you were, Jesus would have never needed to go to the Cross. And yet He did! He warred against sin in order to protect you from death, and then rose from the grave in order to guide you into new life!

THE BEAUTY OF LORD’S PRAYER

As amazing as both the context and content of the Lord’s Prayer is; what’s even more remarkable is that when Jesus died, He actually prayed this prayer for you! In the Garden of Gethsemanee, He prayed that the Father’s will, not His, would be done on earth as it is in heaven (Luke 22:44). And on the Cross, He prayed *“Father, forgive them. They know not what they do”* (Luke 23:34)...and then He died!

Because of that, you can be forgiven by your forgiver! You can now have the Kingdom of the King come into your life! You can be assured that, as your provider, He will meet all your needs! And because He was forsaken by the Father and killed by evil, you can be guided back to the Father and protected from evil ever winning out! Because He did all that you can not only pray this prayer, you can simply be with and enjoy God!

ENJOYING GOD - THE LORD'S PRAYER VISUALIZED



Prayer is about experiencing and ultimately enjoying God.

HUB CHURCH

P R A X I S

I I

E N J O Y I N G G O D
(C O N T E M P L A T I O N)

2021 EDITION

PRAXIS #11
ENJOYING GOD (CONTEMPLATION) (FIELD JOURNAL)



MAIN IDEA :: *Contemplation is about being aware of your desires, taking them to God and letting Him reorder them in order to enjoy more of God.*

THEMATIC WORD :: *Curious Compassion*

SCRIPTURES¹

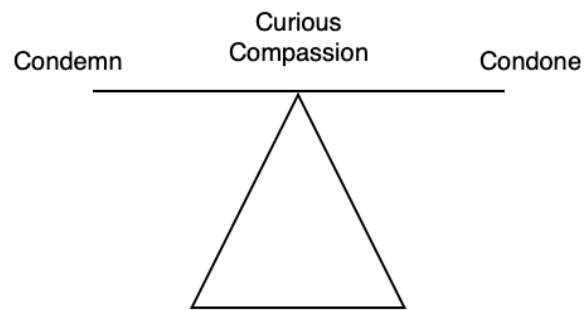
- Psalm 73
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- John 3:16
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- Romans 5:8
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- Romans 8:1, 34-39
 - Observations
 - Interpretation
- 1 Peter 2:24
 - Observations
 - Interpretation

¹ A proper understanding of Scripture always includes a methodical, orderly answering of questions which seek to get at what's called the authorial intent or originally intended meaning of a text within its context. The two most basic questions that need answering for any set of verses are: Observation and Interpretation.

- Observation means seeing what's in the verses and includes asking questions like, "What's the context in which the passage is found?; What's the literary form of the text?; What things are being emphasized, repeated, compared, contrasted, etc?; What things jump off the page to you or seem important?"

- Interpretation means understanding what's being said by the verses and includes asking questions like, "What does this passage tell me about who God is or what He has done in Christ?; What does it tell me about who I am and how I am created to live, etc?"

ENJOYING GOD - CONTEMPLATION VISUALIZED



Contemplation is about being aware of your desires, taking them to God and letting Him reorder them in order to enjoy more of God.

REFLECTION & APPLICATION QUESTIONS

What kind of role do your feelings and desires - especially painful ones - play in your life?

How do you typically seek to deal with painful feelings or desires? How do you find that those around you deal with them?

What is the main idea of Psalm 73 about how we are to deal with our pain?

How might understanding the Gospel empower you to exercise curious compassion in your pain?

Is there anything you feel you need to believe, do and/or share with others in light of this week's passages and main idea?

PRAXIS #11
ENJOYING GOD (CONTEMPLATION)



MAIN IDEA :: *Contemplation is the practice of being aware of your feelings and sufferings, taking them to God, and then letting Him re-order them for your joy.*

THEMATIC WORD :: *Curious Compassion*

PREVIOUSLY...

In "Praxis #10 - Enjoying God (Prayer)," we saw that ***prayer is about experiencing and ultimately enjoying God.*** Through His teaching of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus showed us that when you see God as your Father, King, Provider, Forgiver, Guide & Protector, you're able to begin truly enjoying being with Him.

YEAH BUT...

At this point, and here at the end of Praxis, we need to acknowledge something: While God has graciously sent His Son Jesus to die so that we might receive life (Praxis #1 & 2); given us life as a gift to be received and enjoyed by faith (Praxis 3 & 4); gloriously made us a part of His church family (Praxis #5); radically entrusted us with the mission of discipleship (Praxis #6 & 7); and even blessed us with wonderful resources like the Bible (Praxis #8 & 9) and prayer (Praxis #10), the reality is: you and I still struggle, hurt, and at times suffer don't we? Even as gracious as God has been to us - and He has! - we're not immune to pain and suffering, and nor should we expect to be. One of the longest books in the entire Bible, the book of Psalms, is largely about how to deal with our suffering and tears. Even more, the Scriptures remind us that the most perfect and holy person who ever lived, Jesus Christ, was Himself, *"a man acquainted with sorrow."* (Isaiah 53:3) Suffering is to be expected, perhaps especially for Christ-followers. The question is, how will we deal with suffering; understanding that there is, perhaps, nothing more powerful than pain to either destroy or lead you into greater levels of joy!

This is why the ancient practice of contemplation is so essential! ***Contemplation is simply the practice of being aware of your feelings and sufferings - no matter how painful they might be - taking them to God, and then letting Him re-order them for your joy!***

A PICTURE OF CONTEMPLATION:

In ***Psalms 73***, we find a beautifully instructive picture about how to practice contemplation. The Psalmist indicates that he's experiencing a deep inner conflict resulting from a number of competing desires; namely, the desire to trust God's goodness and justice, coupled with immense bitterness at what he perceives to be wickedness prospering around him. He says,

"Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had

almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.” - Psalm 73:1-3

Part of the beauty of the Bible is that it never diminishes the human struggle by painting a fanciful picture. We all wrestle with these kinds of feelings don't we? We all struggle to balance truth and experience. The Psalmist here is no different. In **vv.4-14**, he continues...

“...For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind. Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment. Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth. Therefore his people turn back to them, and find no fault in them. And they say, ‘How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?’ Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches. All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning

Have you ever felt like that? Bitter? Cynical? Or just doubting God's ways and character? In every deep struggle there's always a struggle-behind-the struggle. For the Psalmist, it's that He feels like trusting-in and following God is pointless, given that those who are opposed to God seem to be prospering. He's thinking, *“what's the point of following God if it doesn't make my life better?”* Incidentally, this is the same struggle many of us face on a consistent basis: Single folks face in their singleness. Sure, you feel lonely, but worse is that your loneliness highlights feelings of not being lovable, worthy, etc. Married folks face when there's friction in their marriage. Sure, the friction is frustrating, but worse is that the friction highlights that your marriage is not as blissful as you had once hoped it would be. And the list goes on-and-on...

THE OPTIONS

So what does it look like to not just be aware of our feelings and sufferings, but to contemplate them in such a way as to have them re-ordered for joy?

Take a look at what the Psalmist says next in **vv.15-16**:

“...If I'd said, ‘I will speak thus,’ I would have betrayed the generation of your children. But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task...”

From his own experience, the Psalmist is reminding us that whenever you are struggling with conflicting feelings, emotions, desires or the like, you always always have two immediate options for how to deal: You can condemn or you can condone your feelings!

Option 1: Condemnation - Suppression :: The Conservative Religious Approach

When the Psalmist says, *"If I'd said, 'I will speak thus,' I would have betrayed the generation of your children,"* what he's essentially saying is, "I know I shouldn't feel cynical and bitter. I know I shouldn't be doubting God - Bad Christian!" In other words, he's faced with the option of immediately condemning his feelings in hopes of getting rid of or at least suppressing them. Like many, who lean more conservative and traditional, the assumption here is that bad or negative thoughts and feelings are just that...bad! Consequently, they ought to be pushed down and suppressed.

But the problem with that kind of perspective is that it, not only, leads you to hiding in your own skin, but amputates God's ability to speak to and ultimately re-order your feelings. It's like how a lot of my neighbors treat green spaces in the city. Given that urban green spaces are prone to developing weeds; instead of simply treating the weeds in order to preserve the green space, they will often tear up the green space all together and replace it with concrete or some kind of fake turf. So while they have removed the possibility of any weed ever sprouting again, they've also removed the possibility of ever enjoying a nice, lush plot of grass. When you immediately condemn or suppress your feelings because you've determined them to be bad and in some way irredeemable, it's akin to throwing concrete onto your heart! You destroy the negative feelings by pushing them down, but in the process eliminate any possibility of God cultivating a nice, lush heart.

Option 2: Condoning - Surrender :: The Liberal Secular Approach

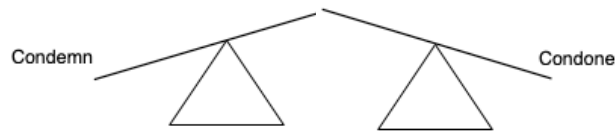
So if condemning and suppression isn't the solution, how about condoning? - Giving in and surrendering to negative feelings? The Psalmist knows that this is an option too. He says, *"when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task."* He's essentially saying, *"Since it's too tiring to parse through the complexities of all I'm feeling, I'd rather just not think about it. Or better yet, I'll just assume it's no big deal."* Like many, who lean more liberal or secular, the assumption here is that feelings are akin to fact. We believe that if we feel something it must be true, and therefore it ought to be affirmed or given-in-to. The problem with this kind of perspective is that it leads us to be tossed about by our fickle feelings and subsequently produces a kind of hollowness in us. We're like rootless tumbleweeds being blown about by every emotion and inkling of suffering.

Do you see the struggle the Psalmist is facing? Have you ever been here? - presented with the option of just stuffing your feelings down or surrendering to them all together? We all have, because that's the tension we always face: In assuming we have to immediately get rid of our doubts, negative feelings and pain, we can necessarily tilt toward condemning ourselves. Many conservative Christians do! After all, it's no fun feeling bad about feeling bad.

So in not wanting to feel bad in the first place, we can also tilt toward letting our feelings slide and essentially justifying and affirming them. We say things like, "it is what it is," "this is my truth," "it's how I feel, and I just want to be honest and authentic," etc. But in the process we

tilt the toward condoning and ultimately surrendering to our feelings - a kind of secular-liberal approach.

You could visualize the tension like this:



Both are obviously unhealthy and unbalanced. It's like if your doctor told you that you had cancer. The condemning route would be to get that news and immediately start thinking about all the things you did wrong to bring about the cancer. By contrast, the condoning route would look like getting the bad news and shrugging it off, thinking that eventually it'll go away. Unfortunately, neither position allows you to truly hear from your physician about how to correctly deal with what's going on inside of you. The same is true with God - our heavenly physician!

Option 3: Curious Compassion

In **v.17** the Psalmist says something that's easy to miss, but at the heart of transformative contemplation. He says, "...until I went into the sanctuary of God; THEN I discerned their end..." Notice, instead of letting himself go down the path of either condemnation or condoning, the Psalmist brought his raw desires, feelings, and pains to God! He contemplated them with, what we might call, curious compassion. In other words, he allowed himself to be aware of what he was feeling, without pre-judging or neglecting those feelings. Then he took those feelings to God in order for God speak into and ultimately re-order them. That's what curious compassion is! It's about having a kind of neutral and inquisitive posture that says, "God, what I'm dealing with might be ugly, sinful, and nasty, but if I don't bring it to you, to let you speak into it, I'll never be changed in it!"

THE OUTCOME

Powerfully, the rest of the psalm details the impact this curious compassion had. And it was nothing short of transformative. As God began to give him perspective on all that he was feeling and experiencing (**vv.18-27**), his dis-ordered feelings and desires, not ironically, began to be re-ordered in a healthy way. He didn't simply begin to feel better, he had a total change of heart, to the point that in **v.28** he confesses,

"But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all your works!"

Talk about breakthrough! This is a man who was hurting, doubting and embittered toward God and others, but in the span of just a few short verses, is now wanting nothing more than to be close to God and to share His goodness with others! - Total transformation!

THE GOSPEL-ENGINE

Now, let's be clear: This kind of transformation is not the result of the power of positive thinking or something. No! It's much deeper. It's the result of a deep, abiding understanding of the Gospel as the thing that drives true transformation!

The Gospel Eliminates Condemnation

When you understand that on the Cross Jesus Christ took all your condemnation, you begin to realize that there is now no room for you to condemn yourself. It's like a sponge that is totally saturated with water, such that it can no longer absorb a single drop. On the Cross, Jesus Christ absorbed every drop of your condemnation in order that you would be free from having to absorb a single drop. Consider the following verses:

- **Romans 8:1** - *"There is therefore now NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* - "No" means "no!" There's no wiggle room there. If you are in Christ Jesus, then no matter how you feel or what you're experiencing, it is not a product of condemnation!
- **Romans 8:34-39** - *"Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died - more than that, who was raised - who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?"* - Those are intentionally rhetorical questions there, all of which imply a "no" answer! There is no one to condemn you, not even you! There is nothing that can separate you from the love of Christ, not even your ugliest doubts and most disordered desires. Jesus Christ died and was raised, which is sufficient for eliminating all your condemnation. So there is no reason for you to keep condemning (or allowing yourself) to be condemned!

The Gospel eliminates condemnation because Jesus has been condemned in your place!

The Gospel Eliminates Condoning

But the Gospel also eliminates the prospect of condoning your disordered desires and feelings too. If your disordered desires and sin were no big deal, then Jesus Christ would have never needed to die! The Cross would have been extremely gratuitous if not asinine! But Jesus did die and we're explicitly told that He died because of the gravity of your sin and mine.

- **Romans 5:8** = *"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* - Jesus' death is the ultimate picture of the lengths to which God has gone to love you.
- **1 Peter 2:24** = *"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."* - Only by Jesus' death on the cross can you be healed from sin and its disastrous effects. Neither will power or positive thinking have that kind of power.

- **John 3:16** = “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” - Apart from the Father giving up His beloved and perfect Son, you and I stand to perish eternally.

When you understand that Jesus’ death is the only means by which you can be saved from your pain, disordered desires and sin, you subsequently realize that you no longer have the luxury of condoning those desires.

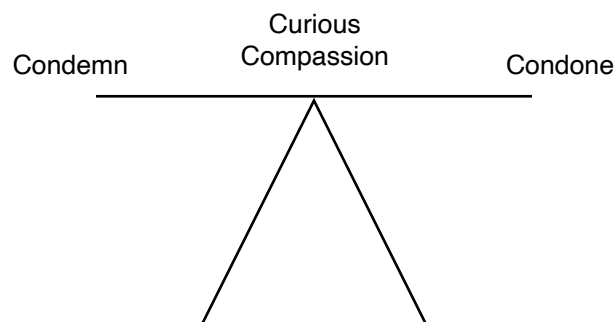
The Gospel eliminates condoning because Jesus had to be condemned in your place!

Free To Contemplate With Curious Compassion

Without the ability to be condemned or the luxury of condoning, you’re now free to, not only, be aware of your desires, but take them to God, knowing that He longs to speak into and ultimately reorder them for your joy! He is, after all, a perfect father. And we are, after all, His children!

The Gospel frees you to contemplate with curious compassion!

ENJOYING GOD - CONTEMPLATION VISUALIZED



Contemplation is the practice of being aware of your feelings and sufferings, taking them to God, and then letting Him re-order them for your joy.