

A Trinitarian Discipleship

Genesis 1:26; Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 1:3-14

Friends, let me encourage you to read *The Disciplines as the Christ-Life* at the end of the sermon notes, CG questions and Daily Devotions.

And use the **Discipleship Wheel** after that to listen to the sermon and teach a CG.

Big Idea for this Sermon: Christian discipleship flows from the life of the Triune God:

- the Father is the source of discipleship,
- the Son is the model of discipleship,
- the Spirit is the power of discipleship.

Intro: Last year, our elders created the discipleship wheel as an illustration and the target for what discipleship means at Heritage.

Our mission is “*creating disciples here and around the world.*” But what does that mean? And how do we know if we are successful?

The Discipleship Wheel is the picture of success for us.

Picture of the Discipleship Wheel (located at the end of these sermon notes)

The Trinity is at the center of that wheel. Just like a bicycle wheel, the success of our mission is dependent on the center holding true. I want to explain why this is true for Christian discipleship.

First: Discipleship Begins with the Father

- a) The Father is the architect of our creation

Genesis 1:26 - *Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.*

(The Son is the agent, the voice of God in this text, but the Father is the architect).

- b) The Father is the source of our salvation

Ephesians 1:3-6 – *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace.*

c) The Father is the authority behind the Great Commission

Matthew 28:18 - *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*

When we are baptized, we are baptized into the Father’s household –

Matthew 28:19 - *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*

POINT: Discipleship does not begin with a human design nor is it exercised by human effort but by and with the Father’s eternal purpose.

This means discipleship is grounded in belonging, not striving. We are disciples because we are Christians. We don’t ‘disciple’ in order to be Christians.

Connection to the Wheel: So, discipleship is not something we created. It’s not something centered on our activity. Discipleship rests on a Christian identity received from the Father.

You can look at the wheel two ways:

- 1 – Inward to outward, the disciplines flow from our relationship to the Trinity.
- 2 – Outward to inward, the disciplines are an invitation to participate in Trinitarian life.

WARNING: If the Father is not the source of our discipleship, then discipleship becomes too much pressure for us to bear. It becomes natural living, trying harder, and not supernatural living.

Second: Jesus is the Model for Discipleship

Matthew 28:20 - *...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”*

Discipleship is about living the life Jesus lived. It is not only representing God but re-presenting God. It is Christ, being formed in us.

Galatians 4:19 - *...I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!*

Jesus lived every discipline on the wheel.

- Community Groups — Jesus gathered disciples (Mark 3:14) to share life and reflect the fellowship of the Trinity.

- Evangelism — He came "to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10); His Spirit now sends us out to share the good news of the gospel (Matthew 28:18-20).

- Giving — Jesus became poor for our sake (2 Corinthians 8:9). Our generosity now flows from his example and Spirit.

- Mentoring — He trained others through teaching and modeling (John 13:14–15). We follow that same model in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

- Prayer — He sought time with the Father (Mark 1:35) and now, his Spirit relates to the Father in and through us (Romans 8:15).

- Scripture — He lived by God's Word (Matthew 4:4). We now hunger for it and are shaped by it as the foundation of our Christianity (1 Peter 1:23).

- Service — He came to serve (Mark 10:45). His life within us bends us outward in service to the world he created and loves (Galatians 5:13).

- Sunday Worship — He honored the Sabbath by regularly attending the synagogue. (Luke 4:16); His resurrection on the first day of the week calls us to gather together to celebrate his life (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2).

Note: Did Jesus do more than this? Yes. And people like Richard Foster and Donald Whitney have categorized other disciplines. But the list could be limitless. And our elders aren't saying this is a final, conclusive list for all disciples everywhere in all times. No. But for us, this is what we are aiming for when we say we are "making disciples here and around the world."

POINT: Discipleship is not self-created or self-improvement but conformity to the life of Jesus.

- Jesus does not say, "*Give them information.*"
- He says, "*Teach them to observe all that I have commanded you.*"
- The content of discipleship is a life, not a curriculum

The transformation is in the observation.
Observation creates transformation.

So, discipleship is simply and yet powerfully, participating in Christ's life. It is not imitation from a distance.

Connection to the Wheel: Every spoke reflects something Jesus Himself practiced.

WARNING: If the Son is not the model, then disciplines become just techniques for self-improvement.

Third: The Holy Spirit Enables Discipleship

Matthew 28:20 - *And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*

How is Jesus with us? By His Spirit.

John 14:15-17 – *If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.*

Discipleship is sustained by divine presence, not human effort.

Explanation

- The Spirit seals, guarantees, and applies salvation (Eph 1:13).
- The Spirit does not assist discipleship from the outside. He forms Christ within us.
- Jesus promises presence, not pressure: “*I am with you always.*”
- The Spirit is the living link between the risen Jesus and His people.

John 15:4-5 - *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.*

POINT: Discipleship, spiritual formation, occurs because God is at work in us, not because we are disciplined.

Connection to the Wheel: The disciplines are not engines of change. They are places of encounter where the Spirit works.

WARNING: If the Holy Spirit is not the enabler of spiritual formation, discipleship leads to pride, pressure and exhaustion.

Fourth: This is why the Trinity Must Be at the Center of Our Lives

- a) The Father gives us our new, grace-based identity.
- b) The Son defines the model for discipleship.
- c) The Spirit supplies the power for living the Christian life.

Remove any one of the Trinity and you have:

- No Father → anxiety. What if I fail?

- No Son → moralism. I'm a better person, (and better than you).
- No Spirit → burnout. I just can't keep up.

Perhaps you've heard it said:

- Sow a thought, reap an action.
- Sow an action, reap a habit.
- Sow a habit, reap a character.
- Sow a character, reap a destiny.

A Christian perspective might be:

- Love shapes your thoughts
- Thoughts shape your actions
- Actions form habits
- Habits shape character
- Character reflects who or what is at the center

IMP: The wheel does not orbit habits. The habits orbit God Himself.

POINT: Discipleship is not doing things *for* God. It is learning to live *from* God, *in* God, and *with* God.

Finally: Let's Make Room to be a Disciple

So, some of you look at the Discipleship Wheel and think, "*That feels like eight more things I have to fit into an already crowded life*". But the wheel is not meant to overload you. It's not about addition as much as it is subtraction by re-ordering your life.

The Discipleship Wheel is not asking you to do more. It is asking you to decide what belongs at the center. Whatever sits at the center of your life shapes everything else. Your schedule, your habits, your relationships, and your desires all organize themselves around what you love most. In real effect, you are what you love and what you love is revealed in what you are.

Right now, many of us are too busy to be disciples. We have filled our lives with good but distracting things, and over time those things have taken the place that only God should occupy. That is why discipleship so often feels exhausting. We are trying to follow Jesus without making space for Him. And in the end, we look more like the world than Jesus because we are practicing the habits of the world more than we are Christian habits.

Think about the original 12 disciples. In order to follow Jesus, they had to reprioritize their lives and let go of some things. Peter stopped fishing. Matthew stopped collecting taxes. Simon Zealotes stopped killing people.

In the same way, the wheel is a call to subtraction before addition. It invites us to think honestly about what pulls us away from Christ so that our lives can begin to turn around Him.

So, the question the wheel asks is not, *“How can I add these disciplines to my life?”*

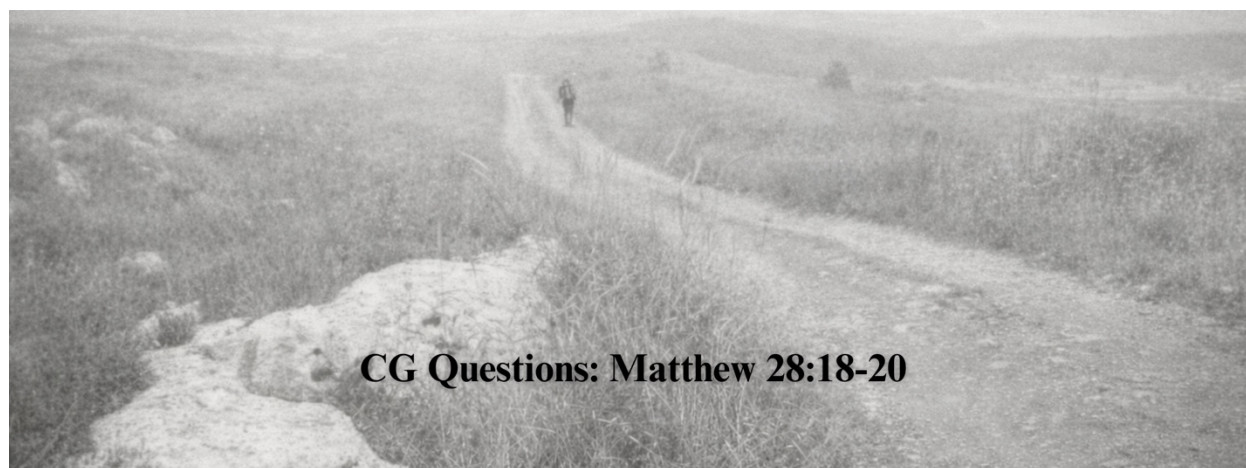
The question is, *“What is at the center of my life, and should it be there?”*

That is how discipleship becomes life-giving instead of overwhelming.

My hope is that the next nine weeks will afford you an opportunity to contemplate your place as a disciple of Jesus and how re-centering your life can effectively change your life.

Conclusion: The Trinity is not an advanced doctrine for mature believers; it is the living reality that makes discipleship possible at all, and for everyone.

When the Trinity moves to the center, the practices on the wheel are no longer burdens to carry. They become pathways that flow naturally into and from a God-centered life.



CG Questions: Matthew 28:18-20

OBSERVATION

(What does the text and sermon actually say?)

1. In Genesis 1:26, what do you notice about the language God uses when creating humanity?
2. What does that language suggest about God's nature?
3. In Matthew 28:18–20, what are the key actions Jesus commands, and what does he ground them in?
4. According to Ephesians 1:3–6, what actions does the Father take toward believers before they do anything themselves? What has the son done in v 7? What does the Spirit do in v 13? How does this perspective give you rest in living your Christianity?
5. In the Great Commission, how many times is the Trinity named or implied, and where do you see the Father, Son, and Spirit present?
6. What are the Trinitarian implications for you in the Great Commission?

INTERPRETATION

(What does this mean?)

5. A Trinitarian perspective on discipleship teaches us that discipleship begins with the Father's eternal purpose, not our human effort. Why is that distinction so important for your spiritual growth?
6. In the Great Commission, Jesus commands us to "teach them to observe," not merely to know. What does that reveal about the nature of discipleship?
7. The Great Commission text emphasizes Jesus' presence, not pressure on us to perform. How does the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence change the way you're your obedience works?
8. Why does removing any one person of the Trinity lead to anxiety, moralism, or burnout?

CORRELATION

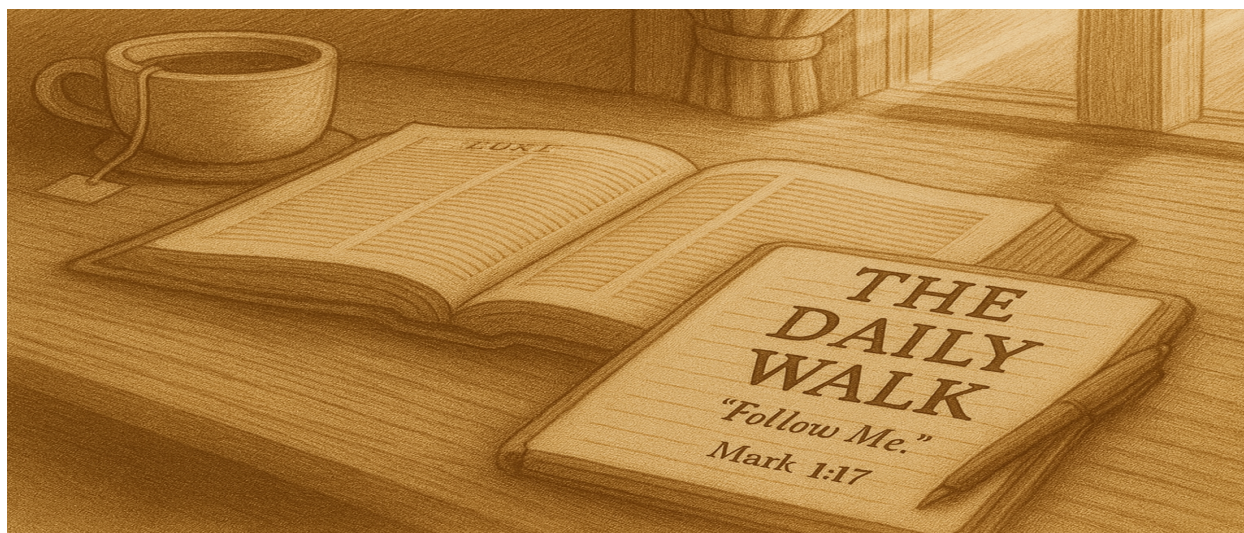
(How does this connect to the rest of Scripture and our lives?)

9. How does this Trinitarian vision of discipleship align with other passages you know about grace, identity, or sanctification?
10. Where have you seen discipleship reduced to techniques, moralism, habits, or programs rather than participation in God's life?
11. How does this Trinitarian perspective help explain why discipleship can feel exhausting even when we are doing "good things"?

APPLICATION

(How should this shape the way we live?)

12. A Trinitarian view of discipleship teaches us that the discipleship wheel is about re-centering and re-ordering, not adding more things to our lives.
13. What kind of things creep into our lives and take God out of the center?
14. What might you need to remove or reprioritize for Christ to be or remain at the center of your life?
15. Which spoke of the discipleship wheel feels like pressure to you right now?
16. How might viewing that discipline as a place of encounter with God change that?
17. What would it look like this week to live *from* God rather than *for* God?
18. How can your Community Group help one another move toward discipleship that is life-giving instead of exhausting?



Discipleship from a Trinitarian Center

MONDAY

Genesis 1:26; Ephesians 1:3–6

Think. Discipleship begins with the Father, not with your initiative. Before you chose Christ, the Father chose you. Before you pursued obedience, he gave you identity. You were created in the image of a relational God and redeemed according to his eternal purpose.

Reflect. Single life can quietly intensify striving. Without realizing it, you may feel the need to prove your faithfulness, usefulness, or spiritual maturity. But the Father does not disciple through pressure. He discipled through your sense of belonging to the family of God.

Apply. Name one way you measure your worth by spiritual performance. Release it to God today. Accept your identity as a beloved child, not a spiritual project.

Pray. Father, thank you that my life begins with your choosing love. Teach me to live as one who belongs, not one who strives. Amen.

TUESDAY

Matthew 28:18–19

Think. Jesus sends his disciples under authority already given him by the Father. Discipleship is not fragile or dependent on your skill, ability or confidence. It rests on Christ's authority, which flows from the Father.

Reflect. When life feels uncertain, discipleship can feel risky. But the Great Commission is not a gamble. It is grounded in divine authority, not personal stability.

Apply. Where are you hesitating to live as a disciple because you feel unqualified or unsure? Trust that obedience rests on Christ's authority, not your readiness. Depend on the Holy Spirit

Pray. Father, help me trust your authority when I feel unsure. Free me from fear and teach me to walk in faith. Amen.

WEDNESDAY

Matthew 28:20

Think. Jesus does not call you to collect information about him but to live a life shaped by him. Discipleship is participation in the Trinitarian life, not imitation from a distance.

Reflect. When discipleship becomes mechanical, it loses its power. Jesus invites you into his life, not merely his instructions.

Apply Choose one discipline this week as a place and time to relate to Jesus, not for self-improvement.

Pray. Jesus, form your life in me. Teach me to follow you in relationship to you and not out of obligation. Amen.

THURSDAY

John 14:15–17

Think. Jesus promises his presence, not pressure on you. He is with you by his Spirit, dwelling within you, sustaining your obedience from the inside out.

Reflect. Exhaustion often reveals reliance on effort rather than dependence on the Spirit.

Apply. Invite the Holy Spirit into an area where discipleship feels heavy or forced. Ask him to live a discipline through you and then depend on him to do it.

Pray. Spirit of God, work in me what I cannot produce. Shape my life from within. Amen.

FRIDAY

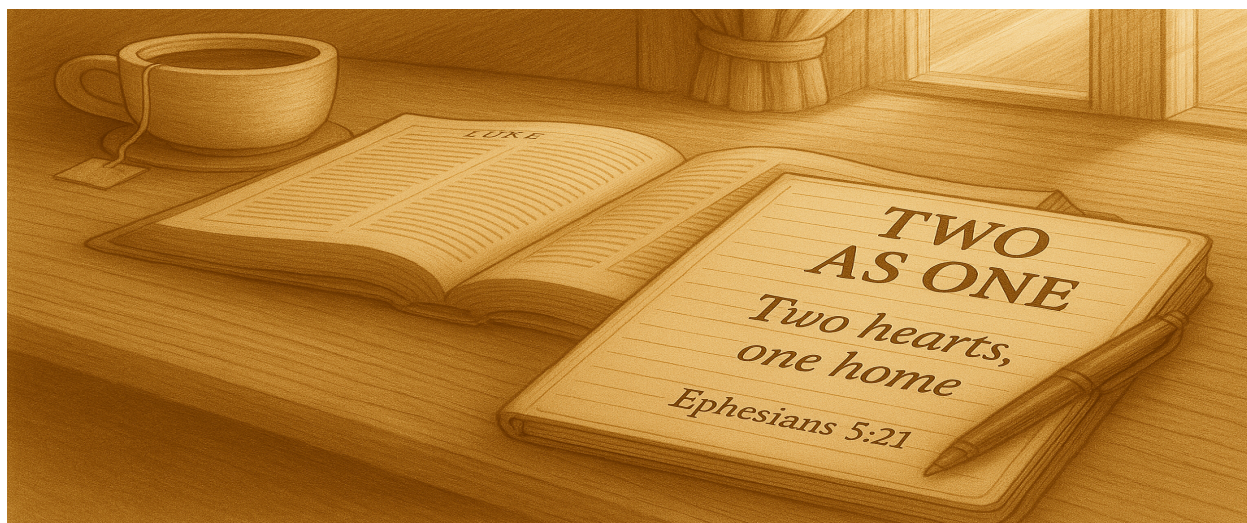
Matthew 6:33

Think. The discipleship wheel does not ask you to add more things to your life. It asks you what is and what should belong at the center of your life. Whatever sits at the center orders everything else.

Reflect. Even good things can quietly replace God at the center of life.

Apply. Name one competing center and surrender it to Christ today. Don't add anything in its place. For now, just see what space and time it creates for something (a discipline) to be added.

Pray. God, take your rightful place at the center of my life by reordering my loves. Amen.



A Shared Life Formed by the Trinity

MONDAY

Ephesians 1:3–6

Think. Your marriage rests on a grace that existed before you found each other. The Father's choosing love for each of you precedes your vows, efforts, and struggles in loving one another.

Reflect. When the pressure to perform enters your marriage, even discipleship can quietly become performance.

Apply. Talk together about where the pressure to perform for one another has replaced rest in the Lord and in each other. Then replace that pressure with your shared identity as God's accepted, loved children.

Pray. Father, thank you for adopting us. Teach us to live together and to love each other out of grace, not pressure. Amen.

TUESDAY

Matthew 28:18–19

Think. Your shared calling as disciples flows from Christ's authority, not your competence.

Reflect. Couples often carry burdens God never assigned. One of those burdens is what you expect from your spouse or from in-laws, extended family, etc.

Apply. You are only responsible for your obedience to live as a disciple. Release control over family or friend outcomes that God has not asked you to manage.

Pray. Father, help us trust your authority together, that you will form us and those we love by your Spirit. Free us from the anxiety of living like we are the Holy Spirit. Amen.

WEDNESDAY

Matthew 28:20

Think. Discipleship shapes your marriage as each of you practice life together with Jesus.

Reflect. What you practice together forms what you become together. What disciplines are you practicing together to unify your marriage?

Apply. Create the space and time to choose one shared practice that centers your life in Christ. Begin practicing one of the disciplines together on a regular basis.

Pray. Jesus, shape our marriage by your life. Teach us to follow you together. Amen.

THURSDAY

John 14:16–17

Think. Faithfulness is something the Holy Spirit sustains in you. Recognize that only Jesus is ever-faithful. He has been and will be faithful to live in you as you depend on the Holy Spirit.

Reflect. Do you feel burned out in any place in your marriage. Burnout often reveals misplaced reliance on self and not on the Holy Spirit.

Apply. Confess this burnout to your husband or wife. Ask your spouse to pray for you. Pray together for the Spirit's grace and strength in each of you.

Pray. Spirit of God, be the power of our marriage. Form Christ in us as only you can do. Amen.

FRIDAY

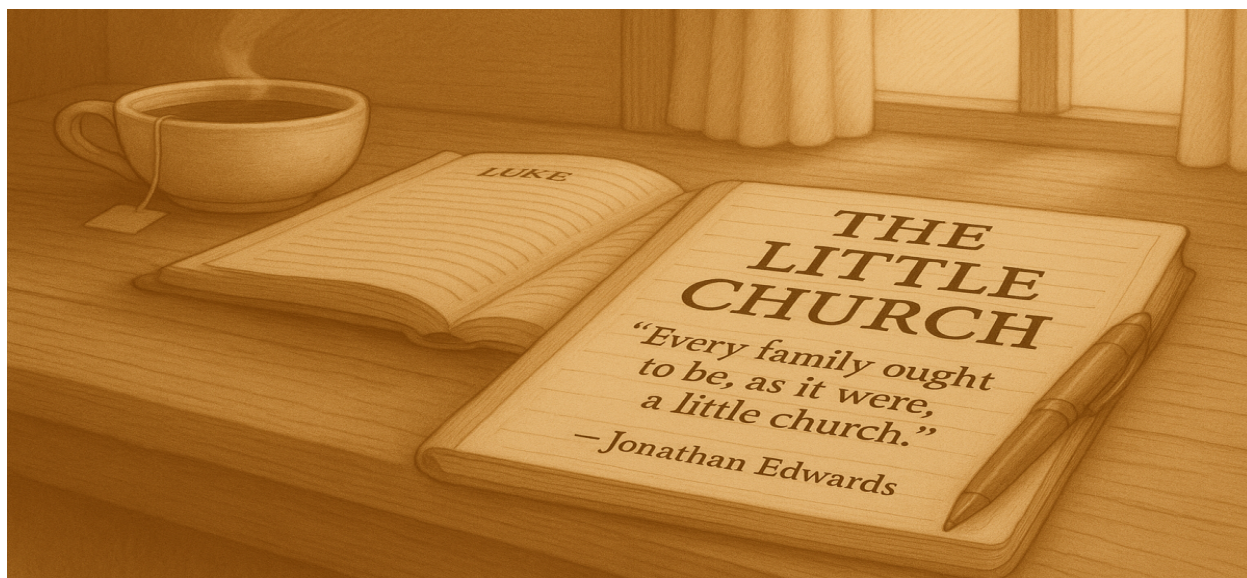
Luke 4:16

Think. A busy life can crowd out God so there is no room or space or time to live the life of a disciple of Jesus. But a reordered life creates space and time for God. That's what living from the center can do for you.

Reflect. Even good rhythms can crowd out the best.

Apply. Identify one adjustment that re-centers your shared life on God then subtract and add what needs to be present for you to live as a disciple of Jesus.

Pray. God, be the center of our marriage. Help us to define what takes you out of the center and help us order our life around you. Amen.



A Home Centered on Trinitarian Life

MONDAY

Genesis 1:26

Think. God reveals himself first as Father. This means that Christian discipleship begins with belonging.

Reflect. Children grow best when their identity is secure.

Apply. Remind your children today that they belong to your family and to God's family. This will never change. Their behavior can't change it. A friend's feelings about them can't change it. Nothing can change that they are God's child and your child. How does that make them feel? How does that help them resist temptation and sin? How does that give them confidence when someone belittles them?

Pray. Father, help our home reflect your love and care. Help us to help others know your love and care. Amen.

TUESDAY

Matthew 28:19

Think. When Jesus commands baptism, he is not starting with rules but with relationship. Baptism reminds us and tells others who we belong to before it teaches us how to live. It places a person inside God's family, marked by the Father's love, the Son's saving work, and the Spirit's presence.

Reflect. Children often think being a Christian means behaving well. But Jesus teaches that discipleship begins with belonging. Talk together about this question: *What makes someone a Christian?* Is it being good, or being loved and claimed by God? If your children have been

baptized, ask them what they remember and what they think baptism means. If they have not, talk about why baptism matters and what it points to.

Apply. Tell your children plainly that following Jesus does not earn God's love. It grows out of God's love. Reinforce that obedience flows from belonging, not fear.

Pray. God, thank you for calling us into your family. Help our home live from your grace and not from pressure. Teach us to follow Jesus because we belong to you. Amen.

WEDNESDAY

Matthew 28:20

Think. Jesus disciplined others by being present with them and modeling the Christian life for them.

Reflect. Children learn most by watching and you are the most watched person in their lives.

Apply. Ask your children which of the disciplines on the discipleship wheel they would like to practice as a family this week. Perhaps you could practice each discipline as a family each week one of the disciplines is preached.

Pray. Jesus, shape our family by the disciplines you lived. Amen.

THURSDAY

John 14:16–17

Think. The Spirit works faithfully in our families as we read the Bible, pray for the Spirit's enablement and trust God to do what only he can do.

Reflect. Children need to see dependence modeled.

Apply. When you demonstrate faith, trust and hope in God, it teaches your children that they need to do this also. Pray aloud together and, parents, name your need for God's help. Then give your children the opportunity to do the same.

Pray. Spirit of God, help us to remember you live in each of us. Fill our home with your presence this week. Amen.

FRIDAY

Matthew 6:33

Think. What sits at the center shapes everything else.

Reflect. Your family schedule is discipling your children's hearts.

Apply. Choose one change that puts God at the center of your family life and creates space for God to work in your family's life.

Pray. God, be the center of our home. Shape our life around you. Amen.

The Disciplines as the Christ Life. Why Spiritual Disciplines?

At Heritage, we are "*making disciples here and around the world.*" But what is a disciple? To answer that question, our elders have designed a wheel that defines discipleship for our congregation. In alphabetical order, those disciplines that create a disciple are:

- Community Groups
- Evangelism
- Giving
- Mentoring
- Prayer
- Scripture
- Service
- Sunday Worship

Each of these spiritually forming practices will be discussed in depth through eight sermons; however, first, let's explain why the disciplines are essential.

1. Everyone Is Being Formed

Every day of your life, something is shaping you, forming you, into something, into someone. It is happening whether you know it or not, whether you are paying or not, whether you like it or not. In *Desiring the Kingdom*, James K. A. Smith reminds us that we are shaped by patterns, habits, and the stories we inhabit. As human beings, we are defined not only by what we think, but also by the customs, routines, and practices that fill our lives and shape our loves. In short, we are what we love, and what we love is evidenced by how we live.

Smith observes that no place on earth is neutral. Every cultural institution tells and sells a story. The mall not only sells products; it narrates a vision of the good life. The classroom not only imparts information; it forms a worldview. The stadium not only hosts games; it enacts a drama of glory and belonging. The television not only entertains; it scripts values and normalizes behavior and desires. Streaming platforms do not only offer endless choice; they curate our attention and train our appetites. Social media not only connects friends; it crafts identities, fuels comparison, and directs our longing for approval.

Each of these settings functions as a cultural liturgy. They perform stories about what is ultimate, and they tug our hearts toward primary allegiances other than God. The more we

participate in them, the greater their shaping influence. Something is constantly forming us. The question is never whether we are being formed, but by what and into whom. The disciplines are intended to illustrate the life Jesus lived and help us follow him (Matthew 4:19).

2. This is why Christians Need God-Centered Disciplines

At Heritage, we view spiritual disciplines as sacred rhythms, God-given practices that are means of grace, tools that help shape us into the likeness of Jesus, teaching us what and how to live as He did. They are not laborious chores or morality boxes to check. We are fearfully and wonderfully made, but we're also fallen (Psalm 139:14). Like a shattered mirror, our lives often reflect a fragmented image, divided by lesser loves and distracted from our true purpose: loving God with all we are (Luke 10:27) and living by his kingdom-coming agenda.

Without this God-centeredness, we cannot be the people God created us to be. Nor can we inherit the resulting blessing of that life. Without God at the center, we run after things and people that repeatedly frustrate and disappoint us, creating distorted, imbalanced, unhappy, resentful, even angry lives.

The disciplines define Christ's life for us and help realign us to a God-focused life. They bring clarity where we've been confused. They return God to the center, where He belongs, not just for our sake, but so that His grace flows through us to those we love and blessing the ends of the earth (Genesis 12:1-3). The disciplines are habits that shape us into the people God created us to be and reflect God's kingdom (eco-system) in the world.

3. These Disciplines Are Means of Grace, Not Self-Salvation

But let's be honest. We can twist even good things. There is always the danger of turning the disciplines into another heartless, legalistic "to-do" list, something else to do that makes us busier and more anxious. To live as Christian disciples, we must evaluate the God-centeredness or world-centeredness of our lives. But we must never abuse the disciplines, making them all about us.

It is our natural tendency to create idols out of anything; in this case, we can treat disciplines as functional gods that we think will save us or serve as ladders to gain God's favor. We can even abuse them to make us feel better about ourselves by comparing ourselves to others. That is why we must guard against turning these practices into lifeless routines or ways to feel superior to others. Grace makes us all even, all sinners in need of saving and as grace-based disciplines, we not only make room for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, but we give room for the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of others as He sees fit. As Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 12:4-27, we are one body, with one head, but with many members and different functions. The goal is to be like Jesus.

And these disciplines certainly aren't behavior hacks for a better life. You may be tempted to think, "If I do these things, I'll have the 'good' life." But remember: the disciplines are not ends in themselves. They are means of grace, pointing us to the Lord and shaping us for life with and for God. They are never substitutes for Him. So, we know the goal, likeness to Jesus, but we

don't know the path God may choose to make us like Jesus. God's definition of 'good' may be vastly different than yours. But by faith, we know it's 'good' (Romans 8:28).

In effect, the disciplines are the expression of Christ's life in us, birthed by the Spirit, shaped by the gospel, and pointing us to the most beautiful human who ever lived: Jesus (Romans 8:29). He is the one the Father perfectly loves (Matthew 3:17; 17:5), and He now lives in us. So, the disciplines help us fulfil the Great commandment to love God first and most (Luke 10:27).

This also means these practices aren't and can't be self-improvement tools. Too many Christians have misinterpreted Christianity and transformed Jesus into a picture of worldly success which they hope he will share with them, if only they are sincere enough and try hard enough. It's bad enough that we try to make God in our image. It's even worse that we don't understand the difference and don't feel sorry for trying to do so. But the disciplines are not intended as steppingstones to worldly success. They are fruit of a new heart, a new order of living that is often very counter-cultural to the world's definition of success.

But we don't discipline ourselves into salvation. The disciplines are the outworking of our salvation. Salvation is God's work from beginning to end. The Father planned it (Ephesians 1:4–5), the Son accomplished it (Ephesians 1:7), and the Spirit applies it (Ephesians 1:13; Titus 3:5). In the end, Jesus, as the Bible presents him, the king of another world, very unlike this one, is the goal.

The story is told that Michealangelo was once asked how he created the statue of David and two answers are commonly shared. One is that he saw a man on the inside of the marble slab and simply set him free. The other is that he simply cut away everything on that slab that didn't look like David. Both of these answers define the Christ-life in us. God has placed Christ's Spirit in us and Christianity is Jesus living freely in and through us. And it's also true that God's sanctifying work cuts away everything about us that doesn't look like Jesus.

Because God is Triune, eternally living as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he doesn't just save us and leave us to ourselves. He invites us into the very life of the Trinity. He has made us into his image (Genesis 1:26) and though now fallen, God is remaking that image in us. That eternal life of Trinitarian love is now our home. That's why the Trinity forms the very center of the discipleship wheel. The Father plans for us to look like the Son, the Son is the goal of our transformation, and the Spirit forms us into the image of the Son.

So, while the disciplines are necessary, they are never ultimate. They are not the cause of salvation, but its consequence. They are not the foundation, but the fruit. They are not our work for God, but God's grace at work in us. The disciplines are an invitation to participate in the life of God. Looking like Jesus is the ultimate expression of the disciplines.

Our Christian life begins with God, is empowered by God, and leads to God's glory. And, by the way, God's glory and your best interests are always the same thing. When we talk about living to God's glory, we mean living in a way that is best for you because God created you and

knows best how your life should function for maximum blessing. The disciplines can help you accomplish that.

4. Growth Requires Movements of Habits

Spiritual growth is built into the very nature of discipleship. Early Christians were repeatedly called followers of the Way (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23:22; 22:4; 24:14, 22). This implies that we have not arrived but are moving toward an ultimate destination, in this case, conformity to Jesus.

To be "born again" (John 3:3) is to begin life anew, to expect and delight in growth. Peter built on this new birth concept when he told Christians they should, "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation..." (1 Peter 2:2). This passion for growth necessarily requires change and leads to maturity. Paul provides a direction and goal for that growth when he writes, "...we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." (Ephesians 4:15).

Salvation from God's wrath may be instantaneous, but sainthood is a lifetime pilgrimage of conscious endeavor. This means discipleship is not a snapshot but a video. We do not stand still; we walk, we grow, we deepen, like seedlings reaching toward the sun, or travelers pressing onward down the road of Christ until we are fully formed in Him.

Growth also requires habit. Charles Duhigg, in *The Power of Habit*, explains why habits have such formative power. He describes the "habit loop" of cue, routine, and reward. Our brains are wired to run these loops automatically, which means habits quietly become the architecture of our lives. Changing a habit can change a life.

What Duhigg describes neurologically, the Christian tradition has long known spiritually. Our habits are liturgical practices. They do not merely express what we love. They also train what we love. When we pray daily, when we open Scripture, when we give generously, when we confess our sins, when we gather in worship, we are not simply performing duties. We are rewiring the heart to be like Christ's heart.

Duhigg also notes that habits compound. Small practices accumulate into powerful change over time. Spiritually, this means that even the smallest disciplines matter. A whispered prayer at dawn, a pause of gratitude before a meal, a verse of Scripture recited on the walk to class, all of these shape the soul. Over time, they carve grooves in the heart where grace can freely and abundantly flow.

Duhigg also describes "keystone habits," practices that trigger transformation across multiple areas of life. For Christians, the spiritual disciplines function as keystone habits. Regular prayer not only deepens communion with God but also cultivates patience, humility, and compassion. Generous giving not only blesses others but also loosens the grip of greed in our own hearts. Weekly worship not only honors God but reframes our identity for the week ahead. Keystone habits of faith set off ripple effects that extend far beyond the single practice.

5. Our Hearts are the heart of the Disciplines

Christian growth requires not only movement and habit, but also heart. In Scripture, the "heart" is far more than our emotions. It is the deep control center of who we are, the place where mind, will, and affections converge and emerge. The heart is the control room of life: from it flow our thoughts, our choices, our loves, and our actions (Proverbs 4:23). It is the place that can be hardened in sin or softened by grace, polluted by idols or cleansed by God. This is why the Lord promises to give His people a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26).

This new heart doctrine implies that there are at least two heart orientations: one toward God and one away from God. It also suggests we can sometimes be one thing on the outside and another thing on the inside, double-minded and heart-divided. This is what God meant when he complained, "this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me..." (Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:8).

The goal of the disciplines is single-mindedness and single heartedness. This is what it means to live with integrity or wholeness. This is also why we are urged to love God with all our heart (Deut. 6:5). It is not our natural disposition. Spiritual formation, then, is first and foremost slow, ongoing, conscious, and intentional heart work. God reshapes us from the inside out, and our disciplines are ways of opening the heart to His transforming presence.

6. An Expulsive New, Life-Changing Power

At the center of Jesus' earthly life was love for the Father. As He said, "I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father" (John 14:31). Every word, every action, every breath of Jesus was filled with that love. So, if we are serious about following Him, love must be at the center of our lives too. To be Jesus' disciple is to love what He loved and to love the way He loved. That's why He said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). True discipleship isn't fueled by cold duty; it flows from a deep delight. Jesus' obedience sprang from affection, not obligation. And as we practice the disciplines of faith, His love can overflow in us, shaping us into people who live as He lived.

But let's be honest: there are times when we don't feel that overwhelming love for God, His people, or His mission. That happens to all of us. The good news is that there's a remedy. Thomas Chalmers, in his sermon *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*, explained it like this: the only way to love God as we should is to replace our love for the world with a stronger love, a love for Jesus.

Chalmers pointed out that simply telling people to stop loving the world won't work. It's not enough to swap out sinful habits for religious ones; for instance, watching less television so you can spend more time in prayer and Bible reading. Nor do guilt or threats actually change us; they only push sin underground, where it eventually returns with even greater force. Jesus Himself warned about this kind of temporary change (Luke 11:24–26).

What we really need is for our desires to change. But here's the problem: we can't change them on our own. The only way our hearts can shift is by being captured by something greater

than what already holds them. A greater love displaces a lesser one. That's why the most effective way to love what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise (Philippians 4:8) is to encounter the One who embodies all of those things; Jesus Christ Himself.

This is how God designed us. The human heart was never meant to be empty; it was made to be filled with love for God. If we remove something, something else will rush in to fill the void. Only love for Christ can truly drive out rival affections and permanently reorient our hearts toward God. Discipleship, then, isn't about suppressing desires; it's about redirecting them. It's not suppression but expression. It's not about loving something less but about loving Someone more. When we love Jesus as we ought, all competing loves lose their influence.

7. Depending on God to love God

Still, you may say, "But I don't feel that love for Jesus." You're not alone. David felt the same tension. In Psalm 119, he saw that his own heart leaned toward the world rather than toward God. He knew he couldn't change it himself. So, what did he do? He prayed. He asked God to teach him the value of His Word, to give him understanding, to lead him into obedience, to "incline" his heart toward God and away from selfishness, to turn his eyes from "worthless things" (vs. 32–37). He was doing two things simultaneously: asking God to change his heart while engaging in activities that could reorient his heart.

That is our path too. If you apply David's prayer to the disciplines, it means you practice them, not as empty rituals, because they aren't, but as opportunities for God to change your heart. As you pray, read, worship, and obey, you are asking God to use those practices to stir your affections for Him. Over time, His Spirit grows in you what you cannot grow yourself: a love strong enough to push out every rival and keep Christ at the center.

This is why Proverbs tells us to "keep your heart with all vigilance" (Proverbs 4:23). We need to guard our hearts because something will constantly fill them. For instance, your present life exposes what you love. The disciplines are the way to keep your heart filled with biblical practices that encourage your love for God. As we practice them, they align, or realign, our hearts with Jesus' heart, learning what He loved and how He lived. This is what it means to take His yoke on us and learn from Him (Matthew 11:29).

But here's the challenge: there is often a gap between what we know and how we live. That gap doesn't close by gaining more information. It is bridged by a relational knowledge of God that stirs love and drives obedience, much like David's prayer in Psalm 119. After all, Christianity is really all about relationships with God and his world. And the more we know God, the more we love Him. And the more we love Him, the more our lives begin to mirror His. The disciplines do this for us.

8. Disciplines Are Habits of Grace, but Busyness is an Obstacle

What Duhigg observes about human behavior becomes even more powerful when read through Scripture. Paul reminds us that we are being "transformed by the renewal of our minds"

(Romans 12:2). This renewal, however, does not occur in a single moment. It happens through practices that reshape us over a lifetime. The disciplines are not mechanical self-improvement projects. They are channels of grace. They open space for the Spirit to do his sanctifying work.

In the end, habits matter because they carry us somewhere. The cultural liturgies of mall, stadium, classroom, and screen bend us toward rival loves. The holy habits of Scripture, prayer, service, and worship draw us closer to God. Over time, those patterns become second nature, until love for and of God becomes our deepest, truest instinct. In this way, spiritual disciplines are not heavy burdens. They are habits of freedom, anchoring us in Christ and releasing his life through us.

But there are obstacles.

One of the most significant challenges to cultivating spiritual habits is the sheer speed of our lives. We are often too busy to practice the very disciplines that would bring rest and renewal. Instead, other habits fill our calendars. The demands of work, family, hobbies, screens, and endless other activities crowd out essential disciplines that can form us into the person of Jesus. We live distracted and overcommitted, and in doing so, we forfeit the fruit of the Spirit that comes naturally when we are walking with God (Galatians 5:22-23).

John Mark Comer describes our modern condition with clarity and insight. He notes that hurry is not just a chaotic schedule; it is a disordered heart. In *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, he argues that we become what we give our time and attention to. Our hurried pace of life, always rushing from one task to another, leaves little room to be with, hear, and follow God. The result is that we live more worldly lives than godly ones. We've become people who are anxious about everything because our habits keep us restless.

The irony is that we often assume busyness is a sign of importance, when in fact it is usually a sign of misplaced priorities. Comer warns that hurry and love are incompatible. Love requires presence, patience, and attention. Hurry allows for none of these. When our calendars are crammed, our souls cannot be still. The liturgies of consumerism and self-centeredness distract us from God and quietly replace the disciplines that train us in grace.

If we are to be spiritually formed into the image of Jesus, we must take inventory of our lives. We must ask hard questions about how we are investing our time. Are our daily practices drawing us deeper into Christ, or are they pulling us away? To live as kingdom people means eliminating what does not advance Christ's cause in us and intentionally adding what does. Discipleship is as much about subtraction as it is addition. As such, the disciplines are sacred invitations into the life of Jesus, to know Him, believe in Him, and follow Him. They create space for God to meet us and for his love to take root.

To walk with Jesus requires this kind of margin. It requires courage to say 'no' to cultural scripts that equate worth with productivity and 'yes' to practices that cultivate grace. The way of Jesus is not hurried. It is deliberate and present. To follow him, we must ruthlessly eliminate hurry, clear space for God, and embrace the disciplines that conform us to Christ. Jesus himself says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). To

live at his pace is to discover a healthy rhythm to life.

9. Jesus Presents the Model Rhythm

When Jesus walked this earth, He lived in a holy rhythm incorporating these disciplines. His Spirit now lives in us to replicate his life.

a) Community Groups – Jesus lived in committed community.

From the beginning of His ministry, Jesus “appointed twelve...so that they might be with him” (Mark 3:14). They traveled together, ate together, learned together, served together, and struggled together. This intentional, shared life mirrored the fellowship of the Trinity and became the primary environment where Jesus formed disciples. He did not disciple the crowds; He discipled a small group.

b) Evangelism – Jesus sought the lost.

His mission statement was clear: “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). Throughout the Gospels, Jesus moves toward sinners, outsiders, and the broken. He ate with tax collectors, spoke with Samaritans, healed lepers, and proclaimed good news to the poor. Evangelism was not a program He ran. It was the posture of His life.

c) Giving – Jesus embodied generous self-giving.

Though He owned nothing (Matt. 8:20), Jesus lived with open-handed generosity. He multiplied food for the hungry, provided wine for a wedding, and ultimately “became poor” so that we might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9). The cross stands as the supreme act of giving: His life offered freely for the life of the world.

d) Mentoring – Jesus trained others through word and example.

He taught the crowds, but He mentored the disciples. He explained parables privately (Mark 4:34), modeled humility by washing their feet (John 13:14–15), corrected their pride, strengthened their faith, and sent them out two by two to practice what they had learned. His entire ministry was a masterclass in Spirit-filled mentorship.

e) Prayer – Jesus lived in continual communion with the Father.

Prayer shaped His rhythm. He rose early to pray (Mark 1:35), withdrew to desolate places for fellowship with the Father (Luke 5:16), prayed before major decisions (Luke 6:12–13), and prayed in deep anguish in Gethsemane (Luke 22:39–46). Prayer was His lifeline and the engine of His obedience.

f) Scripture – Jesus lived by every word of God.

In the wilderness, He resisted temptation by quoting the Word (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). In the synagogue at Nazareth, He read Scripture publicly and applied it to Himself (Luke 4:16–21). He interpreted His mission through the lens of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms (Luke 24:27, 44). Scripture was His authority and nourishment.

g) Service – Jesus chose the downward path of love.

He healed the sick, touched the unclean, fed the hungry, and welcomed children. He declared that “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve” (Mark 10:45). His entire life, and especially His death, revealed greatness expressed through sacrificial service.

h) Sunday Worship (Sabbath gathering) – Jesus honored corporate worship.

Jesus regularly entered the synagogue “as was his custom” (Luke 4:16). In these weekly gatherings, He read Scripture, taught, sang psalms, and participated in the communal worship of Israel. His resurrection on the first day of the week established the pattern that the early church carried forward. Jesus showed that corporate worship is a weekly anchoring point for life with God.

And now, because His Spirit lives in us, that same cadence begins to pulse through our lives as well. Not as forced imitation, as though we are trying to copy His steps by memory, but as a Spirit-shaped rhythm, a (super) natural way of being. It is like breathing for the soul: unforced, life-giving, constant.

The disciplines, then, are not hollow rituals or religious motions. They are the ordinary ways the extraordinary life of Jesus shows itself in His people. Just as fruit on a tree is evidence of the life hidden within, so disciplines like prayer, Scripture, worship, and fellowship are signs that Christ is alive in us. These practices are the living echoes of His presence, shaping us into His likeness from the inside out.

And this is not for our benefit alone. The rhythm of Jesus in us becomes a testimony to the world around us. When His life takes root in our schedules, habits, and responses, people catch glimpses of Him: grace in the face of pressure, peace in the midst of chaos, and joy in the ordinary. It becomes, as Paul put it, “...no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). To embody His life is to radiate His presence, so that others might be drawn to the same grace that first reached us.

10. Disciplines Create Great Commandment & Great Commission Disciples

This makes perfect sense. God is love (1 John 4:8, 16), and we are made in His image. To be human is to love. The question isn't if we love, but what we love. And if we're not careful, we'll love all the wrong things. That's why Jesus calls us to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37). When we love Him first and most, we love everything else correctly. The disciplines train that love. They help us fix our eyes on what is most valuable and worthy, God Himself.

Think about your daily rhythms. Where do your thoughts drift when you're alone? How

do you spend your time, energy, and attention? Those habits already reveal your loves. Similarly, spiritual disciplines don't create your passion; they redirect it. They fan it into flame. That's what Jesus meant in Luke 14:26 when he said, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." He isn't calling us to despise our families but to order our affections properly, placing Him above every competing love. The goal of discipleship is to keep aiming our love at the right target. With Jesus as our divine source, love for God and our neighbor will naturally flow from us.

And so the disciplines create a life of Great Commandment and Great Commission, loving God and others. They are two sides of the same coin. One tells us what to love; the other tells us how to love. To be a disciple is to live in response to both: to love God with all our being, and to make Him known in all the world (Matthew 28:18-20). This is what makes a disciple, and the disciplines shape that kind of life, a life that loves God deeply and makes Him known widely.

11. A List of Disciplines (with Examples and Cautions)

At Heritage, we've gathered eight practices based on Jesus' life. They're not random, nor are they every discipline He practiced. But they are rooted in His example. As mentioned earlier, Jesus practiced each of these disciplines.

- Community Groups — Jesus gathered disciples (Mark 3:14) to share life and reflect the fellowship of the Trinity.

- Evangelism — He came "to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10); His Spirit now sends us out to share the good news of the gospel.

- Giving — Jesus became poor for our sake (2 Corinthians 8:9). Our generosity now flows from his example and Spirit.

- Mentoring — He trained others through teaching and modeling (John 13:14–15). We follow that same model in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

- Prayer — He sought time with the Father (Mark 1:35) and now, his Spirit prays in and through us (Romans 8:15).

- Scripture — He lived by God's Word (Matthew 4:4). We now hunger for it and are shaped by it as the foundation of our Christianity,

- Service — He came to serve (Mark 10:45). His life within us bends us outward in service to the world he created and loves.

- Sunday Worship — He honored the Sabbath (Luke 4:16); His resurrection on the first day of the week calls us to gather together to celebrate his life and return.

Of course, these aren't the only practices Jesus practiced. Nor are they the only possible

disciplines modern Christians can practice. Contemporary Christian authors Richard Foster and Donald Whitney list many others, like solitude, fasting, simplicity, journaling, and celebration. These are helpful, and no single list is exhaustive.

For example, confession is vital (1 John 1:9; James 5:16), but it naturally fits within practices such as prayer or mentoring. Or someone might ask, "Shouldn't holiness be a discipline?" But holiness is the result of practicing these disciplines, not the root of them. We live holy lives as the Holy Spirit forms Jesus in us. We are, as Paul writes, "...being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" by the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18). We don't produce holiness. It's the product of walking with Jesus.

12. Your Part in the Disciplines

The Holy Spirit supplies the power to live the life of a disciple, but we must choose to walk in step with Him. Remember that to follow Jesus, the disciples had to leave their vocations to make time and give energy to do so. Only we can make room for God. Only we can open our calendars, reorder our priorities, and carve out room for the practices that keep us moving forward on the Way.

Christianity is the Christ-life in us, but Paul never lets us think growth happens without our cooperation. After teaching that Christlikeness is the Spirit's work, he also exhorts believers to "cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). By and in the power of the Holy Spirit of Christ's life, death, resurrection and exaltation, we are to "to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24).

This walk is both a refusal and an offering. Salvation, Paul insists, is given so that "we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:1-2). In the disciplines, we make room for God and remove whatever seeks to steal our love for him. We choose not to let "sin reign in your mortal body; to make you obey its passions." How do we practically do this? We "Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness." Instead, through these disciplines, "present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness" (Rom. 6:12-13). By refusing to live as we once did and instead offering ourselves daily to God in spiritual disciplines, we discover the freedom of this promise: "sin will have no dominion over you" (Rom. 6:14).

Practically, this means reclaiming our time, energy, and affection from what pulls us off center from God and off course from following Jesus. It's choosing to love Jesus most. And, according to the Great Commandment, only as we love God first and most, can we love ourselves, others and the world, correctly (Matthew 22:37-38). But again, we cannot simply leave a space. If you create a vacuum, something will fill it. Into the space you've made, plant the disciplines like seeds in the good soil of your transformed heart and it will nourish spiritual growth. The journey is not passive. It is an active pilgrimage of intentionally cooperating with the Spirit, step by step, until our lives bear the shape of Jesus Himself.

13. Final Reminder: The Disciplines Point to Christ and His Kingdom

The elders chose these eight disciplines not because they're easy, but because they reflect the life Jesus lived. And our hope is simple: that as you practice them, you'll fall more in love with God and become more like His Son. We sincerely pray that His life in you would spill out into every area: your family, your workplace, your friendships, your community, your city, and even the nations.

Still, as important as the disciplines are, they aren't the end goal. Instead, they point us forward to something else, to Someone else. The Old Testament prophets Jeremiah and Habakkuk envisioned a day when every heart will know God personally (Jeremiah 31:34) and the world will be flooded with God's glory (Habakkuk 2:14).

Right now, we live as saved yet fallen people who conduct our lives in a fallen world God will one day remake it even better than Eden. Until then, the disciplines may not come naturally (but they will, supernaturally), and there are times they certainly won't be easy to practice. But this is what Jesus means by taking up our crosses and following him. To lose our lives for his sake is to literally save them in every way possible (Luke 9:23–24).

Until the day Jeremiah and Habakkuk foresaw actually comes to pass, we continue to practice the disciplines that possess the power to transform us and the world. We gather in large and small groups. We share the gospel. We give. We mentor. We pray. We read Scripture. We serve. Not because these things earn us anything, but because they reveal something: the life of Jesus, living again in and through us.

These are not hollow routines. They are small rivers of grace, flowing toward the ocean of God's coming kingdom. A kingdom that will one day flood the earth. But until that day, the disciplines help us fully become (in practice) who we already are (positionally) in Christ. They enable us to live abundantly now and, one day, eternally in God's triune love, which has been God's grand goal since the very beginning.

