



SPIRITUAL RHYTHMS: A theological overview

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion?

Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest.

Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.

I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you.

Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

Matthew 11:28-30 (The Message)

Introduction

God created humankind to flourish by enjoying friendship and intimate communion with Him, and find our purpose by joyfully joining Him in maintaining order and spreading beauty in God’s created landscape. This is the “*why*” behind the creation of every man and woman (Genesis 2). The Bible teaches that, though this was God’s perfect design for humankind, in His love, He gave us the freedom to choose to live connected to Him and in His good purposes—or choose our own path. Painfully, humankind chose their own path over connection with God, and so we each bear in our human experience the separation of our original purpose, rhythms, and joy (Genesis 3; Romans 1:18-32).

The invitation of Jesus and biblical Christianity is to rediscover and restore all that was broken and lost. It is to reconcile people back to God and discover through Jesus, the fullness of life we were originally created for (John 10:10; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

At Crossroads Church, we long to see people meet Jesus, and flourish as a whole person by knowing and following Him. We believe this is the core ministry of the Church (Matthew 28:18-20), and we long for every person who considers Crossroads their home church, to enjoy this reality and to help others to discover the freedom and flourishing God offers us.

In John 15:1-17, Jesus paints a picture of the life of one who follows Him and flourishes. The picture is one of a vine and its branches. In beautiful imagery, Jesus states that the way to “bear fruit” is by simply, but purposefully, remaining attached to Him (the vine). This metaphor is simple, because an attached branch will naturally be nurtured by the main vine. The illustration is purposeful because, only by a deliberate choice (v.10) do we remain connected to Jesus, receive life from Him, and through this connection, bear the fruit for which we were created.

Discipleship is the term we use to describe our journey of faith and remaining connected to Jesus.

Mathētēs (μαθητής) is the greek word translated *disciple*, which generally means “*one who engages in learning through instruction from another. A pupil, or an apprentice.*” Apprenticeship to Jesus is a beautiful picture, as a disciple of Jesus is someone who purposely follows Christ. They learn to be with Jesus, to live the way Jesus lived, do the things Jesus taught, and love others the way Jesus loved. Nothing Jesus taught is optional for the apprentice, or disciple; we take everything He said seriously and seek to apply it to our values, motives, and lives. In fact, with joy, an apprentice embraces new opportunities

discovered through his or her mentor, and then experience, day after day, the transformation offered through a nurturing connection to Jesus.

Discipleship begins when we accept the truth of the Gospel—where we believe that Jesus is the son of God, that He died on the cross for the forgiveness of sins, and then rose three days later proving He is who He said He is. When we believe and call upon Him as Lord and Savior we are saved—that is, we enter into a personal saving relationship with Him. The great truth is that through the death and resurrection of Jesus, all of our sin becomes His, and all His righteousness becomes ours. We walk in the freedom of being given a clean slate with God. This reality is what is meant by claiming Jesus as Savior; a restoration of all that we lost in our spiritual rebellion.

Along with trusting Jesus as Savior is to trust Him as Lord. Biblically speaking, you cannot embrace one without the other (Matthew 7:21-23; Romans 10:9-10). Trusting Jesus as Lord means submitting to Christ as the loving authority in our lives. Though we will all do this imperfectly, it means that every day, our real faith in Jesus is shown by resting our hopes, dreams, aspirations, fears, weakness, trials, and tribulations - the entirety of our life – upon Him. We follow Him wherever He leads. We have surrendered *lordship* of our lives; we no longer set the agenda for the lives we live. Jesus does. It means cultivating a lifestyle of surrendering our control to God and experiencing God’s life and values “forming” in our lives. This is “our part” in the vine and branches imagery, as God calls us to *abide in His love* and *keep His commandments* (John 15:9-10). As we trust God in all aspects of our lives, He uses our joys and hardships to transform us. Nothing is wasted! This is the normative life for a follower of Jesus and this transformative experience is traditionally called *discipleship*.

*“And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves
but for him who died for them ...”* (1 Corinthians 5:15)

While the acceptance of the finished work of Jesus “saves” us, according to the New Testament authors, “salvation” is a beautiful ongoing activity. Interestingly, the greek verb for salvation is used throughout the New Testament in the past, present, and future tenses. Often these are presented as “stages” known as justification, sanctification, and glorification, but all three are aspects of the reality of salvation. A biblical view of salvation would be best stated as:

- I *was saved* when Jesus died on the cross, opening the gates of heaven.
- I *am being saved* each and every day as I take up my cross and follow Jesus.
- I *hope (with confident assurance) to be saved* after my own death when Christ comes again to judge the nations and bring the faithful to Himself.

Overview Questions

So, bottom line, what is a disciple?

Someone who says, “yes” to this saving work of God in their life. Someone who is learning from Jesus how to live in the rhythms and lifestyle of remaining in His vine, and allowing the life of God to both nurture them and empower them toward transformational and fruitful living.

How might one know that they are growing as a disciple?

That is a tricky question, because we all begin the journey from different places and how God grows us is often unique and very personal. That being said, growing as a disciple means that our life begins to bear fruit from Jesus. Further in this document we will outline some general results of one remaining in the vine and bearing fruit as God’s life is living through us. As noted above, they bloom differently in each person, but there are general fruit to expect.

What if someone who professes belief in Jesus has no desire to participate, or grow in their faith?

The New Testament teaches us that, through true saving faith, God fills us with His Holy Spirit who both seals and empowers us with a desire to grow into fullness of faith and maturity (Ephesians 1:13; Romans 15:13; John 14:26). Clearly there will be seasons of doubt and struggle, but a baseline desire for God and transformation is an expected evidence of true faith. If one lacks desire they can, and should, pray for God to increase their hunger to know and follow Him. There are times when people need to ask God to set them free from deeply rooted sins or emotional barriers that make the discipleship journey seem unappealing.. If one simply has no desire for God, it could demonstrate a lack of surrender to God as Savior and Lord. A desire to know God and walk in obedience is not legalism, but rather a natural and loving response to an inner work of grace.

Why should we engage in spiritual practices in our discipleship?

To answer this, let's consider two analogies. Let's compare our pursuit of God to seeing the stars in the night sky. They are there, but often dimmed by the light of the cities we live in. To see them most profoundly, one would purposely go to a place far from the distraction of ambient city lights. There would be the sacrifice of time, travel, and intentionality in order to *position ourselves* to experience what is always present. It is the same with our encounter of God. God is constant, but we live in a world filled with noise, clutter, and distraction. Spiritual practices simply make space for us to hear, see, receive, and respond to God who is present to us (Psalm 46:10; Psalm 131).

The second is the analogy given by John Ortberg of the differences between a motor boat, which we control, and a sailboat, where God is in control. *"In a motor boat I'm in control. I start the engine, control the speed, and go wherever I want. Sailing is different. When I'm sailing, I'm not passive, I have a role to play - I hoist the sails and steer with the rudder - but I am utterly dependent on the wind. There's no room for believing I'm in control, because if the wind doesn't blow, I'm dead in the water. When the wind blows, on the other hand, amazing things can happen."* In both of these analogies, God is the constant or one who is always at work. Our participation is simply to position ourselves to experience Him, or join Him in what He is already doing. Spiritual practices are how we position ourselves and participate with God.

Spiritual Practices: Why?

The desire to know and grow in Christ is a gift from God (Romans 3:10-18), and this inner work, initiated by the Holy Spirit, is an ongoing expression of God's grace in our lives. This work is clearly a work of God (Philippians 1:6). However, we join God in the process, as Philippians 2:12-13 states; *"...Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."*

To specify, we do not "work *off*" our salvation, but rather "work *out*" our salvation *with God* through activities that connect us with God and His purposes. Spiritual practices are the "how" of *remaining in the vine* found in John 15. Interestingly, what Jesus described as "remaining" in the vine, the Apostle Paul, in actual application, employs the imagery of an athlete in training (1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Timothy 4:7; Colossians 1:29; 2 Timothy 2:4-6). Discipleship is not a passive reality, but an active one, requiring both our consent and intentionality. To live this way, Christians through the ages, have embraced spiritual practices to join God in the work He is accomplishing in and through us.

Some push back to the idea of spiritual practices or disciplines in fear that such an invitation encourages legalism—the exact opposite of what is communicated above. Ephesians 2:8, which says, *"For by grace you*

¹ John Ortberg is pastor of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in Menlo Park, California.

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.” Amen to that! This is the anchor of our hope in Christ. That passage actually goes on in verse 10 to state, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” The biblical teaching is clear and consistent that we participate with God in “walking out” His work of grace in and through our lives.

Spiritual Practices: What are they?

Spiritual practices have been employed by the church since the first days of the church in Acts Chapter 2. In v.42 we are told that believers *devoted themselves* to the practices of listening to teaching, fellowship, meals together, and to prayer. Early on, these flowed primarily from Jewish spiritual practices the first believers were familiar with. From that point on, Christians have embraced various practices to connect with God and His activity in our lives.

Rhythms of a Disciple

Many great theologians have written on the spiritual practices (or disciplines) and gifted the church with resources that clearly explain a variety of wonderful practices we might experiment with. Some of the best books are:

- *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster
- *The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard
- *The Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* by Adele Calhoun
- *Sacred Pathways* by Gary Thomas
- *Sacred Rhythms* by Ruth Haley Barton
- *Practicing the Way* by John Mark Comer

Though exploring the various disciplines available can be very helpful, at Crossroads Church we encourage each other to live into what we call the **Rhythms of a Disciple** and to cultivate them somehow into your own Rule of Life or way of living. This will look different for each of us based on temperament and lifestage, but, through the history of the church, these rhythms are always on the top of the list of core practices for spiritual transformation.

Below are the seven core practices that Crossroads Church invites you to live into as our rhythms of a disciple. These are simply an invitation. However, we believe that by living in these, a follower of Christ will find a deeply nourishing and fruitful connection with Jesus, as He invites us to experience in John 15.

These **seven rhythms** are:

1. **Simplicity** - *Cultivating a lifestyle of detachment from the world’s values of accumulation and busyness to live in contentment with God.* (Matthew 6:21; Hebrews 13:5-6; 1 Timothy 6:6-8; Romans 8:5-6)
2. **Community** - *Walking life with others for encouragement, support, and accountability towards personal and collective human flourishing.* (Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:24-25)
3. **Solitude, Silence, and Prayer** - *Pursuing time to connect with God through silence, limiting distractions, and conversational interaction with God to be refreshed.* (Mat 6:5-13, Psalm 46:10)
4. **Scripture** - *A continual commitment to engaging the Bible in study, meditation, and reflection to renew our minds and hearts.* (John 15:1-8; Romans 12:1-2)
5. **Sabbath** - *Living within the peace (shalom) of God through purposely preserving weekly time for rest, joy, wonder, and worship.* (Exodus 20:8-11)

6. **Examination and Confession** - *Living in joy, peace, and freedom through openly examining and confessing our faults to ourselves, to God, and, if necessary, someone you trust, in order to live freely in the grace and mercy of God.* (1 John 1:9; James 5:16)
7. **Fasting** - *A willing abstinence from food for a period of time to cultivate whole body hunger and awareness of our need for God's presence and provision.* (Mark 2:18-20; Matthew 6:16-18)

Flowing out of these seven rhythms, we believe that certain **results** will intentionally grow out of our lives. These results are the byproduct of the life of Jesus flowing through us. These results will likely be experienced first as an inner transformation of our desires or values, then manifest as joyful deliberate choices in our lives.

- **Affection & Obedience** - *Intentionally drawing near to God will cultivate a hunger in our hearts for more of God and a desire to please Him in our lives. As we enjoy friendship with God we will long for more of Him and for "His will to be done" in and through our lives.* (James 4:8; Jeremiah 29:12-14; Matthew 6:9-10)
- **Fruit of the Spirit** - *As we remain in Jesus, the life of God will bloom in our lives. Specifically love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.* (Galatians 5:22-23) These God given fruit will contrast the life fruit we knew before Jesus and those common in our world. (Galatians 5:16-21)
- **Celebration** - *In response to experiencing God's goodness, we will long to set aside time to personally and publicly celebrate the grace, mercy, and goodness of God through worship.* (Romans 12:1-2)
- **Serving** - *In response to God's radical love towards us, we will joyfully seek opportunities to serve the church and the world through the giving of our time and skills to bless others.* (Galatians 5:13-14)
- **Generosity** - *Flowing from God's provision in our lives, we will enjoy being intentionally generous with our time, money and resources as a tangible way of trusting God and loving others.* (1 Timothy 6:17-19)
- **Transformative Suffering** - *Suffering and hardships are a part of our experience in a broken world. Through growing closer to Jesus we are able to experience God's transformative presence in and through life's difficult seasons.* (Luke 22:42; Philippians 3:10-11; 1 Peter 4:12-13; Matthew 7:24-25).
- **Witness** - *As God renews our lives, we freely share our transformational story appropriately with those around us and curiously listen to the searching stories of non-Christians. When we tell our faith story we tell the story of our God who is active in the world today.* (1 Peter 3:15; Romans 10:14-15)

As we lay out and encourage our church to live into these rhythms, we want to be careful to not indirectly encourage a pitfall in thinking or practice. Author Richard Foster stated, "A pitfall is to view the disciplines as virtuous in themselves. In and of themselves, the disciplines have absolutely no virtue whatsoever. They will not make us righteous. They will not give us any brownie points with God. They do absolutely nothing except place us before God. This was the central truth the Pharisees failed to see. They thought their disciplines could somehow make them righteous. So fasting, for instance, could become the key. It is this mistake that causes people to turn the disciplines into a legalism. When we embrace a system, we have a hoop we can hold out for other people to jump through. But once we see that the disciplines do not make us righteous, then we are free from all such systems. The function of the disciplines is simply to place us before God. With that they reach the end of their usefulness. The righteousness of the Kingdom of God is

*then a gift which comes to us.*² We affirm this caution at Crossroads Church. We long to be people marked by mercy, grace, and love as those who simply spend time with Jesus, not as people marked by white knuckle resolution to obey rules or rote disciplines.

Though we have anchored our understanding of discipleship on John 15, the vine and the branches, the Scriptures as a whole clearly lays out this invitation. It is even in the founding verse of Crossroads Church, Jeremiah 6:16, which reads, “*Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.*” It is the resounding invitation of Jesus Himself to each and every one of us, as He cried out in Matthew 11:28-30, “*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*” Jesus invites us to a new way of living, *in Him*, that removes the weight and burden on broken humanity. Jesus is not calling us to carry a burden of religious obligation, but rather, in these new rhythms to find a separation from the world and a spiritual nourishment from Himself, the vine, that our human bodies, souls, and spirits long for. These *Rhythms of a Disciple* are invitational, and our goal is to become individuals and a community who live vitally attached to the vine of Jesus and flourish in every aspect of our being. The opportunity is ours. As pastor and author John Mark Comer said, “*If you want to experience the life of Jesus, you have to adopt the lifestyle of Jesus.*”

This is the adventure, or *experiment of faith* we are embracing together. This is life *with* Jesus. This is the invitation of Christian discipleship.

Discipleship in community

While we use the word *discipleship* to describe our own faith journey, it is not an expedition for loners and individualists. This journey will only be successful in the context of community. That is why Jesus, in nearly all of the Gospel accounts, affirms that true faith, or true discipleship, embraces a “love God” and “love others” reality. (Luke 10:27; Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-31). This ongoing experience often includes mentorship or interdependent relationships where the life of faith is exercised by loving others and allowing others to love us.

Being a disciple of Jesus is a life dedicated to helping others follow Jesus and allowing others to help you. It is a lifestyle of interdependence. This means deliberately helping others flourish so that they can grow into everything for which God created them, and allowing others to support you. It is living with humility and vulnerability and cultivating grace toward others and ourselves.

The type of lives we strive to cultivate at Crossroads are disciples that *gather to grow, and scattered to move the Gospel (that is, to disciple others)*.

Core beliefs of discipleship

Christian faith that transforms lives is based on core truth anchored in the Bible. The Bible was not written like a textbook, so these truths are scattered throughout the Scriptures. The first official collection of core beliefs was finalized in 381 AD and is known as the Nicene Creed. Within it is captured the basic “non-negotiables” of biblical Christianity. Below is the text of the Nicene Creed, with supporting biblical references.

We believe in one God (Deuteronomy 6: 4, Ephesians 4: 6),
the Father (Matthew 6: 9) almighty (Exodus 6: 3),

² *Celebration of Discipline Study Guide* published in 1983 by HarperCollins.

maker of heaven and earth (Genesis 1: 1),
of all things visible and invisible (Colossians 1: 15-16).

And in one Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 11: 17),
the only Son of God (Mathew 14: 33; 16: 16),
begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God (John 1: 18; 3: 16),
Light from Light (Psalm 27: 1; John 8: 12; Matthew 17: 2,5),
true God from true God (John 17: 1-5),
begotten, not made (John 1: 18);
of the same essence as the Father (John 10: 30).
Through him all things were made (Hebrews 1: 1-2).
For us and for our salvation (1 Timothy 2: 4-5)
he came down from heaven (John 6: 33,35);
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary (Luke 1: 35),
and was made human (John 1: 14).
He was crucified for us (Mark 15: 25; 1 Corinthians 15: 3) **under Pontius Pilate** (John 19: 6);
He suffered (Mark 8: 31) **and was buried** (Luke 23: 53; 1 Corinthians 15: 4).
The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures (Luke 24: 1 1 Corinthians 15: 4).
He ascended to heaven (Luke 24: 51; Acts 1: 10)
and is seated at the right hand of the Father (Mark 16: 19; Acts 7: 55).
He will come again with glory (Matthew 24: 27)
to judge the living and the dead (Acts 10: 42; 2 Timothy 4: 1).
His kingdom will never end (2 Peter 1: 11).

And we believe in the Holy Spirit (John 14: 26),
the Lord (Acts 5: 3-4), **the giver of life** (Genesis 1: 2).
He proceeds from the Father and the Son (John 15: 26),
and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified (Matthew 3: 16-17).
He spoke through the prophets (1 Samuel 19: 20; Ezekiel 11: 5,13).

We believe in one holy catholic [*one church/everywhere*] **and apostolic church** (Matthew 16: 18; 1 Peter 2: 5,9; Acts 2: 42; Ephesians 2: 19-22).

We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 4: 5; Acts 2: 38).

We look forward to the resurrection of the dead (John 11: 24; 1 Corinthians 15: 12-49; Hebrews 6: 2; Revelation 20: 5),

and to life in the world to come (Mark 10: 29-30). **Amen.**