
BELIKE JESUS



HPUMC SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM



WE SAY IT ALL THE TIME: OUR MISSION AS A LOCAL CHURCH IS TO “HELP PEOPLE BECOME DEEPLY DEVOTED FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST.”

But have you ever stopped to wonder what that means? What is a deeply devoted follower of Jesus? And how do we get there?

Over the next eight weeks, your group will uncover what it means to know what Jesus knows and do what Jesus did so you can become like Jesus. You’ll explore the true purpose of discipleship and how to reshape your thoughts, habits, and relationships through the power of the Holy Spirit to experience the kind of abundant life God desires for you.

This kind of journey is not a solo endeavor. As you grow in your understanding of who Jesus calls you to be, we pray this new group will be a source of encouragement and life-giving conversation. We pray that these would be people with whom you can laugh, celebrate, and carry one another’s burdens when necessary. All we ask is that you keep an open mind and commit to being present both physically and mentally.

Together, we hope this will be a journey that leads you to build your life around Jesus rather than building Jesus into an already busy life.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

READ AHEAD.

Before your group meets, read the short teaching for each week. Jot down any questions or thoughts that come to mind.

FOR YOU.

Here you'll find a thought exercise or practice designed to relate the week's material to you.

FOR Y'ALL.

You will spend the bulk of your time here when your group meets each week. You'll find exercises and questions that will get your group talking. Use these as a guide and allow the conversation to go where it goes.

PRAY.

We encourage you to end each week by praying for and with one another.

TIPS FOR THE JOURNEY

SHOW UP.

Your presence and participation matter. For the next eight weeks, we hope you'll commit to intentionally carving out time for this group.

LISTEN.

During group discussions, listen without planning your own remarks. Use discussion times as opportunities to get to know your fellow group members.

RESPECT OTHERS.

We all come from different backgrounds and experiences. Keep an open mind and demonstrate respect, humility, and curiosity.

OBSERVE CONFIDENTIALITY.

Groups are designed to be a safe environment where we can be vulnerable and real with each other. Anything shared within the group should stay within the group and not be repeated elsewhere.

Note: the exception to confidentiality is any threat of or realized harm to self or others, in which case you should contact HPUMC's Group Coordinator, Amy Berry, berrya@hpumc.org.

EXPECT GOD TO MOVE.

We believe that God honors time spent with one another in community. Expect God to do surprising and unexpected things as your group grows closer to one another and as you dive more deeply into your own faith journey.



WEEK ONE

“AS JESUS WAS WALKING BESIDE THE SEA OF GALILEE, HE SAW TWO BROTHERS, SIMON CALLED PETER AND HIS BROTHER ANDREW. THEY WERE CASTING A NET INTO THE LAKE, FOR THEY WERE FISHERMEN. ‘COME, FOLLOW ME,’ JESUS SAID, ‘AND I WILL SEND YOU OUT TO FISH FOR PEOPLE.’ AT ONCE THEY LEFT THEIR NETS AND FOLLOWED HIM.”

MATTHEW 4:18-20

DISCIPLESHIP IN JESUS' DAY

Of all the titles in the Bible used to describe Jesus, one of the most common was rabbi or teacher. In the first century, Jewish rabbis were spiritual leaders for their communities, highly trained and very well-respected. Rabbis were the keepers of Jewish law and tradition as it was laid out in the Hebrew Bible—what we call the Old Testament.

A rabbi's goal was to create disciples, or apprentices, to whom they imparted all of their wisdom, knowledge, beliefs, and traditions. Only the best of the best, the brightest male students in all of Israel, were given the opportunity to apprentice under a rabbi. And as disciples, their job would be to follow their rabbi everywhere; for 24 hours a day, seven days a week, they would shadow their rabbi because a disciple's whole desire was to know what their rabbi knew and do what their rabbi did, so they could become just like their rabbi. Their hope was to be indistinguishable from their teacher. And if their rabbi eventually decided they succeeded in that effort, he would turn to them and say something like, "Go and make disciples of your own," and the process would begin again.

That was how it was supposed to work. Only Jesus did things a little differently.

Instead of waiting for worthy students to approach him, Jesus sought his own disciples. And Jesus didn't choose the best of the best; he recruited apprentices from all educational and socioeconomic levels—from tax collectors to zealots to fishermen, men and women whose only credentials were an open heart and a recognized need for grace. His goal, however, was the same.

**JESUS INVITED HIS DISCIPLES TO KNOW WHAT HE KNEW AND DO WHAT HE DID,
SO THEY COULD BECOME LIKE HIM.**

When we accept the invitation to become a student of Jesus, we're agreeing to become like Jesus. This means knowing what Jesus knows and doing what Jesus does. In other words, it means committing to following a new way of living, the Way of Jesus. It means allowing Jesus to influence every aspect of who we are: our relationships, decisions, habits, desires, thoughts, you name it.

For this reason, following Jesus isn't something we can do on our own; it requires linking arms with other followers who are also committed to becoming like Jesus. In the Gospels, Jesus keeps his twelve core

disciples close. He eats with them, travels with them, prays with them, and experiences life's ups and downs with them; he does life with them. Like the early disciples, we do best when we are surrounded by people with whom we share the bond of trying to become more like Jesus.

Over the next few weeks, we'll explore what it means to be a disciple and why living in community is such an integral part of our spiritual formation.

FOR YOU

A disciple is someone who knows what their teacher knows and does what their teacher does so they can become like their teacher. Who or what are you a student of? If you're not sure, think about these questions:

- Who or what do you spend the majority of your time with?
- Who influences your daily habits or routines?
- Who do you find yourself drawn to when it comes to their experience or expertise?

FOR Y'ALL

It's time to get to know one another a little bit more. In two minutes or less, share what you want your new group to know about you! If you have time after, use the questions below to guide your discussion.

- What are your hopes or expectations for this group?
- What are we committed to doing in order to make that happen?
- What stood out to you from this week's teaching on discipleship in Jesus' day?

As a group, we encourage you to review together the Tips for the Journey at the beginning of this guide. This is also a great time to share email addresses and create a group text if that is something your group is open to and comfortable with.

PRAY TOGETHER

Each week, we encourage you to pray with and for one another. Take a minute to share any prayer requests or gratitudes you want the group to know about. Write them down in the back of this book. You can nominate someone to pray or go around the circle taking turns.

LOOKING AHEAD

We are wired for change. And all of us are disciples of someone or something. Next week, we'll explore the reality of how we are being formed, whether we realize it or not.

NOTES:



WEEK TWO

“DO NOT CONFORM TO THE PATTERN OF THIS WORLD, BUT BE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND. THEN YOU WILL BE ABLE TO TEST AND APPROVE WHAT GOD’S WILL IS—HIS GOOD, PLEASING AND PERFECT WILL.”

ROMANS 12:2

ICE BREAKER

What two words would those who know you best use to describe you?

WHO ARE YOU BECOMING?

Human beings are wired for change. All we have to do is go about our daily life and, over time, we will become someone new. That's because, whether we realize it or not, we are all apprentices—or followers—of something or someone. The question is who or what are we students of, and who are we becoming as a result?

This idea is nothing new; In the United States alone, an estimated 15 thousand books are published each year on self-help or personal growth. Every December, we dream up resolutions for how to have a better year ahead than the one behind. Advertisers attempt to convince us they have what we need to become our best selves. Influencers make millions off their followers who want to live a similar lifestyle or desire to become just like them.

Transformation is part of who we are. Even if we do nothing intentionally, we will still be swept up in the current of change. Whether we realize it or not, we are being shaped by the stories we believe about ourselves and the world around us, our habits, our relationships, and the environment we find ourselves in.

STORIES WE BELIEVE.

Stories are the lens through which we see the world and how we make sense of our role in it—for example, “more money equals more power,” “the more I have the happier I will be,” or “I am the sum of what others believe me to be.” Right or wrong, these beliefs shape how we interact with others and make decisions about our lives.

HABITS.

The things we do, do something to us. How we spend our time determines the kind of person we are becoming. Think about it this way, we all know a good diet and exercise are good for us, but few people actually eat healthily and exercise regularly. Why? Because we don't want to. We love junk food and binge-watching a good TV show! It's what we do. And the more we do something, the more we want to do it, and the more we grow to love doing it. If we want to change who we are becoming, we have to examine our habits.

RELATIONSHIPS.

We become like the people we spend time with; our friends, family, and coworkers all play a role in who we are becoming. Often, our closest circle of friends are the ones with whom we have the most in common; we dress similarly, vote similarly, go to the same places and share similar habits. This isn't an accident! Over time, we become like the people we do life with. This is why disciples in Jesus' day spent as much time as possible with their rabbi. And it's why living in community with other followers of Jesus is an essential part of how we become like Jesus.

ENVIRONMENT.

The city we live in, the online world we curate for ourselves, and our culture at large influence who we are and who we are becoming. Who hasn't heard the famous Texas saying, go big or go home! It may seem like a silly motto, but it's based in truth. Texas is one of the largest states in sheer size, but also in personality; it thrives on larger-than-life characters, a culture of hyper-productivity, and fierce independence. These traits can become part of who we are too, simply because of where we live.

Taking into account all of these influences, if you look ahead to the next five, ten, or twenty years, who are you becoming? As students of Jesus, we're called to become like Jesus. But, if we're honest, we're not there yet; there's a gap between who we are called to be and who we actually are.

In the church, the long and gradual process of closing that gap is what we call spiritual formation, or discipleship. Spiritual formation takes intentionality; otherwise, we'll continue to be shaped solely by the people around us, our good and bad habits, the stories we believe about how the world works, and our environment. Next week, we'll look more closely at the process of spiritual formation and how we can intentionally become more like Jesus.

FOR YOU

Grab a journal and find a quiet place where you can spend at least 15 minutes in reflection. Think about the trajectory of your life presently, given the stories you believe, habits, relationships, and environment. Ask yourself the following questions:

- How have you changed or grown in the past year?
- What kind of person do you think you will be five years from now? What about 20 years from now?
- Is the person you are becoming someone you would enjoy being in a close relationship with?
- What area would you most like to grow in when it comes to following the way of Jesus—the stories you believe, your habits, or your relationships?

FOR Y'ALL

This week, get acquainted with any new members joining for the first time before getting started on your discussion time.

- What stood out to you from this week's teaching above?
- Who had the greatest impact on the person you are today? How have they shaped you as an individual?
- What three qualities or characteristics would you most like to be known for?
- We are shaped by the stories we believe, our habits, our relationships, and our environments. Of these four categories, which do you think has had the greatest influence on who you are right now, and why?

PRAY TOGETHER

Take a minute to share any prayer requests, gratitudes, or updates you want the group to know about. Write them down in the back of this book. You can nominate someone to pray or go around the circle taking turns.

LOOKING AHEAD

As Christians, we are called to become like Jesus. In the weeks ahead, we'll explore what it looks like for us to accept Jesus' invitation to follow him. We'll unpack how we can become an apprentice of Jesus and ultimately be shaped into his image.

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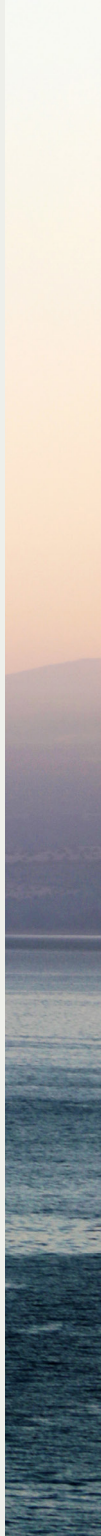
WEEK THREE

“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.”

MATTHEW 11:29

“THEREFORE, IF ANYONE IS IN CHRIST, HE IS A NEW
CREATION. THE OLD HAS PASSED AWAY; BEHOLD, THE
NEW HAS COME.”

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17



ICE BREAKER

If you could swap places with any human being throughout history, who would you trade with, and why?

BECOMING LIKE JESUS

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus invited people of all backgrounds and experiences to come and follow him, to become his apprentices, or disciples. As disciples, followers were expected to know what their teacher knew and do what their teacher did, all with the hope of becoming like their teacher. Today, we also are invited to take part in the process of becoming disciples of Jesus, a process commonly referred to as spiritual formation.

M. Robert Mulholland Jr. describes spiritual formation as "a process of being formed in the image of Christ for the sake of others." This definition reminds us of two realities: first, formation is a process, it takes time and intentionality. Second, our spiritual formation doesn't just impact us, but everyone around us! We are shaped into the image of Jesus not for our own benefit alone, but for the sake of others.

You see, spiritual formation is not simply behavior modification; it's not just about learning to live a virtuous life (though that is certainly part of it). At the heart of spiritual formation is becoming the kind of people we were created to be, the kind of people for whom the love of God and the love of others is second nature. Following Jesus is a way of life that, though it isn't always easy, leads to true satisfaction, fulfillment, freedom and authenticity, meaningful relationships, and ultimately, to restoration.

BUT HOW DO WE GET THERE?

Last week we unpacked how we are naturally formed as humans over time through the stories we believe, our habits, our relationships, and environment. To become like Jesus, we must offset each of these key areas of influence through the lens of our apprenticeship to Jesus. This is not something we can do by our own efforts if we just try really hard. Lasting transformation is only possible thanks to God's endless grace for us and through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

As we partner with God's Spirit, we are able to earnestly examine the lens through which we see the world and ourselves in light of the teachings of Jesus, reshape our routines around the practices of Jesus, and live in community with others who are following Jesus.

So how much of spiritual formation is ours to own and what role does the Spirit play? Christians have wrestled with this question for centuries. And next week, we'll do the same by exploring the Spirit's unique role in our formation as we seek to become more like Jesus.

FOR YOU

Grab your journal and find a quiet spot. The following exercise is designed to help you reflect on how you think about and relate to Jesus. Take 15 minutes to work through the following questions.

- What do you know to be true about Jesus?
- What qualities or characteristics do you most admire about Jesus?
- What do you find challenging to believe about Jesus or his teachings?
- Do you find yourself more often building Jesus into your life or building your life around Jesus? Why is that?

FOR Y'ALL

Each group is encouraged to serve together at least once during these eight weeks. Consider what this might look like for your group and appoint one or more group members to look into potential opportunities and report back next week. If you have questions about serving opportunities, let us know at info@hpumc.org.

- What stood out to you from the teaching above?
- What do you think makes Jesus a model worth following? What qualities of Jesus would you most like to adopt?
- How has following Jesus impacted your life up to this point?
- How can this group best support one another as you seek to become more like Jesus?

PRAY TOGETHER

Take a minute to share any prayer requests, gratitudes, or updates you want the group to know about. Write them down in the back of this book. You can nominate someone to pray or go around the circle taking turns.

LOOKING AHEAD

A disciple is someone who knows what their teacher knows and does what their teacher does, so they can become more like their teacher. In the weeks ahead, we'll explore how we can become like Jesus as we partner with the Holy Spirit to transform our minds, habits, and relationships.

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WEEK FOUR

“BUT THE ADVOCATE, THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHOM THE FATHER WILL SEND IN MY NAME, WILL TEACH YOU ALL THINGS AND WILL REMIND YOU OF EVERYTHING I HAVE SAID TO YOU.”

JOHN 14:26

“IN THE SAME WAY, THE SPIRIT HELPS US IN OUR WEAKNESS. WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT WE OUGHT TO PRAY FOR, BUT THE SPIRIT HIMSELF INTERCEDES FOR US THROUGH WORDLESS GROANS.”

ROMANS 8:26



ICE BREAKER

If you could instantly form any new habit, what would you choose?

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND US

Think about the last time you tried to grow something. If you've ever tried your hand at gardening, then you know cultivating a plant is hard work.

First, you have to plant your seeds in good, nutrient-rich soil in a spot where they get just the right amount of sun. Then you have to water the new plant enough to keep it alive, but not too much that you drown it. If a new seedling does sprout, and that's a big if, you'll have to keep constant watch to defend against potential pests or predators and pull any weeds that threaten to steal nutrients and sunlight.

And even if you do all of these things right, at the end of the day, all you've done is created the right kind of environment for your plant to grow. Whether or not the plant actually does grow, what kind of plant it ends up being, and what kind of strengths or weaknesses it has are all outside of your control.

Our spiritual formation is a lot like a garden. We can create the right kind of conditions for a seed to grow and mature, but ultimately, we also depend on something outside of ourselves to help us. No amount of our own effort will get us there. Becoming like Jesus requires a partnership between us and the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is God's personal life-giving presence that lives within us. In the Bible, the Hebrew word for spirit is *ruakh*, and it literally means "breath" or "wind." In other words, God is as close to us as our own breath, or the wind between our fingers as we move our hands from side to side. The Spirit is what transforms us from the inside out, renewing our hearts and minds (Titus 3:5). God's Spirit is what speaks to us as we study the Bible; In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, we learn that the Scriptures are "God-breathed," which makes them useful for teaching, correction, and growing in maturity. Galatians 5:23 reminds us that love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are fruits of the Spirit, not human willpower.

Without the Spirit's work in our spiritual formation, our growth would never go beyond the limitations of our own motivation. And if you've ever tried to correct a bad habit or start a new diet, you know just how fickle human willpower can be.

This doesn't mean we don't have a role to play in our own formation; after all, the gardener still waters the seedling, pulls the weeds, fends off pests, and fertilizes the soil. But ultimately, our growth will never amount to much without a dependence on God's personal presence in our lives through the Holy Spirit.

FOR YOU

There's a well-known prayer in Christian tradition called, "Come Holy Spirit." For thousands of years, this simple prayer has been used by various faith traditions as a way to invite God's personal presence into their lives. This week, find a quiet, peaceful spot in your home or office. Take a few moments to slowly and deliberately echo the petition of countless before us:

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful

and enkindle in them the fire of your love.

Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.

And you shall renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit,

did instruct the hearts of the faithful,

grant us in the same Spirit to be truly wise

and ever to rejoice in His consolation.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

FOR Y'ALL

Now's the time to report back on anything you've learned about potential serving projects. Also, you may want to discuss whether your group would be interested in gathering for a meal, social event, or upcoming event at the church.

- What stood out to you from the teaching above?
- When is the last time you tried to start or stop doing something? How did it go for you?
- Why can't we simply become like Jesus using our own willpower or motivation alone?
- How would you describe your understanding of the Holy Spirit and its role in your formation?
- Are there any practical ways you've learned to invite God's Spirit into your daily rhythm and routine?

PRAY TOGETHER

Take a minute to share any prayer requests, gratitudes, or updates you want the group to know about. Write them down in the back of this book. You can nominate someone to pray or go around the circle taking turns.

LOOKING AHEAD

As we've learned, a disciple of Jesus is someone who knows what Jesus knows and does what Jesus does, so they can become like Jesus. Next week, we'll explore the first part of that statement by asking what it is exactly that Jesus knows.

WEEK FIVE

“ALL SCRIPTURE IS GOD-BREATHED AND IS USEFUL FOR TEACHING, REBUKING, CORRECTING AND TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, SO THAT THE SERVANT OF GOD MAY BE THOROUGHLY EQUIPPED FOR EVERY GOOD WORK.”

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

ICE BREAKER

What is a topic or idea you could talk about for hours?

KNOW WHAT JESUS KNEW

As we've learned, becoming a disciple was about knowing what your teacher knew and doing what they did so you could become more like them. As disciples of Jesus, this means we ought to know what Jesus knows. So what exactly does Jesus know?

THERE'S NO QUESTION, ONE THING JESUS KNOWS WELL IS THE BIBLE.

As a Jewish boy, Jesus would have memorized large portions of the Hebrew Bible, what we refer to as the Old Testament. His understanding of the Scriptures is evident, not just in how often he quotes these books, but in how much of his teachings are founded upon the Jewish worldview found in the Hebrew Bible. Jesus believed that the Bible was a story about how God planned to rescue and restore all people—and that story culminated in Jesus' own life, death, and resurrection. In fact, Jesus tells two disciples on the road to Emmaus that the Scriptures are actually one unified story that points to him (check out Luke 24:13-35). This means if we want to know what Jesus knows, we need to know our Bible.

The Bible we have today is a library of 66 books broken up into two main sections, the Old and New Testaments, which detail the history of the Jewish people and the early Christian movement. But more than that, the Bible contains wisdom and practical advice about what it means to be human, how we can love God and others well, and how we can find ultimate fulfillment and meaning in life.

Studying the Bible and the teachings of Jesus are what reshape our minds and imaginations. The Bible is what challenges the stories we believe about the world and how we operate in it, and helps us understand who we were created to be. We believe that, through the Holy Spirit, God continues to speak to us as we read and study the Bible, whether we read as individuals or together in community.

This is why we encourage you to practice habits like the First 15—spending the first 15 minutes of your day reading the Bible and praying, instead of scrolling social media or checking your email. It's why we gather on Sundays to open God's word together and unpack what it means for our lives. It's why we take classes that dive deeper into a particular book or theme from the Scriptures.

For thousands of years, Christians have read and studied the Bible in community, learning from one another and committing to following the Way of Jesus together. And we think they were onto something. Growing in our knowledge of the Bible, the wisdom it contains and how it calls us to live, is an essential part of how we can become more like Jesus.

FOR YOU

For the next week, spend the first 15 minutes of each day in Scripture and prayer. If you're not sure where to start, we recommend either Genesis or Matthew, the beginning of the Old and New Testaments. You can find resources for both books at hpumc.org/reading-plans. No matter where you begin, the important thing is that you make reading Scripture a regular part of your rhythm and routine.

FOR Y'ALL

This is a great week to check in with your group on how the meeting format and logistics are working for everyone before entering your time of discussion.

- What stood out to you this week from the teaching above?
- How would you describe your current relationship with the Bible? What do you love about it and what do you struggle with when it comes to the text?
- What are some of the benefits of studying the Bible today? What about potential challenges?
- Read 1 Corinthians 3:12-16 together. What does this suggest about how the Holy Spirit helps us understand God's word?

As your group continues to grow, we encourage you to make Bible study a key component of your time together. When your initial eight weeks come to an end, consider taking part in one of HPUMC's Bible Reading Plans. You can find more information about our current plan at hpumc.org/bible.

PRAY TOGETHER ---

Take a minute to share any prayer requests, gratitudes, or updates you want the group to know about. Write them down in the back of this book. You can nominate someone to pray or go around the circle taking turns.

LOOKING AHEAD ---

The things we do determine the kind of person we are becoming. Whether we realize it or not, our habits play a key role in our spiritual formation. Next week, we'll explore how we can partner with the Spirit in learning to do the kinds of things that Jesus does.

NOTES:

WEEK SIX

“THEREFORE EVERYONE WHO HEARS THESE WORDS OF MINE AND PUTS THEM INTO PRACTICE IS LIKE A WISE MAN WHO BUILT HIS HOUSE ON THE ROCK. THE RAIN CAME DOWN, THE STREAMS ROSE, AND THE WINDS BLEW AND BEAT AGAINST THAT HOUSE; YET IT DID NOT FALL, BECAUSE IT HAD ITS FOUNDATION ON THE ROCK.”

MATTHEW 7:24-25



ICE BREAKER

If money and time were no barrier, what hobby would you most want to adopt?

DO WHAT JESUS DID

When is the last time you stopped to think about the things you do? As we go through life and are influenced by our experiences, culture, and environment, we pick up new routines and rhythms. Over time, these daily patterns of behavior become deep-seated habits that end up shaping the person we're becoming.

**AS BESTSELLING AUTHOR AND PASTOR JOHN MARK COMER SAYS,
“THE THINGS WE DO, DO SOMETHING TO US.”**

Have you ever tried to break a bad habit? It's difficult. We can know that the right decision is to quit smoking, to not talk badly about a coworker, or not to order the next drink, but in the moment, going against our regularly ingrained habits is no easy task—and often, willpower isn't enough. Why is that? Because we love the things we do; and the more we do something, the more we grow to love it. The opposite is also true; if we do something less often, we'll most likely stop enjoying it as much.

Think about working out. If you've never lifted weights before, chances are you're going to hate it—especially the next day! But if you lift weights for a week, or even a month straight, your muscles will get stronger, you'll feel less sore, and you may even start to look forward to the gym. But what if you stop lifting, and spend your evenings binge-watching TV with a bowl of ice cream instead? Eventually, you'll ditch the barbells for Blue Bell altogether.

If we want to become like Jesus, therefore, we have to learn to love doing the kinds of things Jesus loved doing.

In Jesus' day, disciples followed their rabbi around all day, every day to get a better idea of how they lived their life. Disciples would study things like how their rabbi began their day, when and how they prayed, and how they conducted themselves around others. Particularly, zealous disciples might even go as far as to follow their rabbi to the bathroom to ensure they didn't miss an opportunity to learn from their teacher.

We might not be able to follow Jesus around today like the original disciples, but thankfully we get a snapshot of his life from the four Gospel accounts. So what did Jesus spend his time doing? Jesus' rhythm of life included things like prayer, worship, solitude, Bible study, hospitality, serving others, simplicity, seeking justice and calling out corruption, generosity, practicing the Sabbath, and fasting. Over time, these core habits have come to be known in Christian tradition as spiritual practices.

As students of Jesus, we are also called to adopt these spiritual practices into our rhythm of life.

Now, we need to be clear. The spiritual practices are not a way for us to earn God's love or goodwill. They are not something we do out of a sense of obligation or because we think it will make Jesus happy.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES ARE SIMPLY THE VEHICLE THROUGH WHICH WE INVITE GOD TO SPEAK INTO OUR LIVES, REWIRE OUR HEART, AND REFOCUS OUR DESIRES.

In his book, "You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit," James K.A. Smith writes, "The orientation of the heart happens from the bottom up, through the formation of our habits of desire. Learning to love (God) takes practice." In other words, the things we do, do something to us.

If we want to become more like Jesus, it isn't enough just to know what Jesus knows; we also have to do what Jesus did. This is why early Christians were called followers of The Way. They knew discipleship to Jesus was a pattern of living that influenced every aspect of their day-to-day habits and routines.

As James K.A. Smith says, Jesus "isn't content to simply deposit new ideas into your mind; he is after nothing less than your wants, your loves, your longings." How does Jesus change our wants, loves, and longings? By introducing us to new habits that change the desires and orientations of our heart.

FOR YOU

The most commonly recognized spiritual practices are prayer, worship, solitude, Bible study, hospitality, serving others, simplicity, seeking justice, calling out corruption, generosity, Sabbath, and fasting. For the next week, pick one of these habits to work into your regular rhythm. Start small and be reasonable. Don't commit to praying for an hour every day. Try 10 minutes. Turn on worship music during your commute or seek out 30 minutes where you can shut off your phone, and sit by yourself in silence and solitude. Remember, it won't feel comfortable at first and you might not enjoy it yet. It's like lifting weights, the more you do it, the stronger you'll grow and the more you'll grow to love the habit.

FOR Y'ALL

There are only two weeks left with this curriculum! That means it's time to consider what your group might like to do next. Think about future leadership for your group and discuss ideas for what you'd like to study together.

- What stood out to you from the teaching for this week?
- Which of your habits or routines is shaping you the most right now? Why is that?
- What is the most meaningful way you regularly connect with or experience God? Why do you think that is?
- Think about your habits and the things you spend your time with. What do these things tell you about what you live for and value most?
- Read Ephesians 4:20-22 together as a group. What do you think Paul means when he tells his readers to put off their old self and put on the new self? How does this passage speak to us today when it comes to our spiritual formation?

PRAY TOGETHER

Take a minute to share any prayer requests, gratitudes, or updates you want the group to know about. Write them down in the back of this book. You can nominate someone to pray or go around the circle taking turns.

LOOKING AHEAD

Following Jesus is not a solo endeavor, it requires doing life with others who are also committed to the Way of Jesus. Next week, we'll explore how we're formed by our relationships and what it means to live in Christian community.

WEEK SEVEN

“THEY DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO THE APOSTLES’ TEACHING AND TO FELLOWSHIP, TO THE BREAKING OF BREAD AND TO PRAYER. EVERYONE WAS FILLED WITH AWE AT THE MANY WONDERS AND SIGNS PERFORMED BY THE APOSTLES. ALL THE BELIEVERS WERE TOGETHER AND HAD EVERYTHING IN COMMON. THEY SOLD PROPERTY AND POSSESSIONS TO GIVE TO ANYONE WHO HAD NEED. EVERY DAY THEY CONTINUED TO MEET TOGETHER IN THE TEMPLE COURTS. THEY BROKE BREAD IN THEIR HOMES AND ATE TOGETHER WITH GLAD AND SINCERE HEARTS, PRAISING GOD AND ENJOYING THE FAVOR OF ALL THE PEOPLE. AND THE LORD ADDED TO THEIR NUMBER DAILY THOSE WHO WERE BEING SAVED.”

ICE BREAKER

What's the strangest or most random club or group you've ever been a part of?

LIVING IN COMMUNITY

We live in a world that is more connected than ever before. Yet, studies show our culture is becoming characterized more and more by loneliness and isolation. We crave relationships, but we've lost the art of doing life with one another—of living in community.

We were created for community. In the beginning, God looked at Adam and declared that it was not good for man to be alone. And so, God created another human to be with him. Loneliness and isolation are not part of God's ideal. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another." 1 Peter 4:8 describes the community of God as a group of people who love one another deeply, practices hospitality, and joyfully serves each other. And when asked to boil down the entire Jewish law, Jesus said it came down to the love of God and the love of others. In other words, loving the people around us, those inside and outside of our various communities, is as vital to our spiritual formation as the love we have for God the Father.

It is no surprise that when the early Christians first started practicing their new faith, they did so in groups. As they learned to follow the way of Jesus, they relied on letters from other Jesus followers who instructed them on how they could best follow Jesus together. These letters (i.e., most of the New Testament) mention the phrase "one another" more than 50 times. Unity instead of division, selfless service of others, and radical generosity are all themes the New Testament authors rely on heavily when talking about the kind of community we ought to strive for.

Instead, more often than not, we seek out relationships based solely on a few things we have in common, like age, socioeconomic level, marital status, whether or not we have kids, political views, lifestyle, limitations...you get the idea. And because we become like those we surround ourselves with, if we're not careful, we end up creating little echo chambers where we are never challenged to grow. Our desire is to be around people who are like us, or people we want to be like. And while that's not altogether bad, Jesus calls us to a deeper level of community.

Jesus didn't surround himself with people who thought or acted like himself. Just look at the twelve disciples—there's a tax collector and a fisherman, a doubter and a zealot. These are men who definitely

didn't see eye-to-eye and likely didn't have much in common, except for the shared bond of following Jesus. Jesus invited people of vastly different socioeconomic and religious backgrounds to become his disciples, both men and women. And, in doing so, he created a new kind of family.

Today, we are called to be part of the same kind of diverse and eclectic community, where the only requirement for commonality is the shared bond of following Jesus together. And a community isn't just one group of people you meet with weekly; it's a collection of people who fulfill different roles in your life.

At HPUMC, we believe there are five types of relationships you ought to have in your circle: God, a pastor, a group of friends, a mentor, and a counselor. Together, these relationships make up the foundation of your Christian community. But there are other layers of community, like your family, your Church community, Small Group, Bible study friends, and the list goes on.

**COMMUNITY IS WHERE WE'RE ABLE TO STRIP AWAY FORMALITIES
AND BE OUR AUTHENTIC SELVES, AS IMPERFECT AS WE MAY BE.
COMMUNITY IS WHERE WE FIND ENCOURAGEMENT, ACCOUNTABILITY, GRACE,
FORGIVENESS, AND CONNECTION. IT'S WHERE WE FEEL SEEN, KNOWN,
AND VALUED FOR WHO WE ARE AND FOR WHO WE ARE BECOMING.**

Our relationships have the power to shape who we are becoming. If we want to be spiritually formed into the image of Christ, then we'll need to surround ourselves with others who seek to become like Jesus.

FOR YOU

Hospitality is one of the core practices of Jesus. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus can be found eating and drinking with others who were not like him. Sharing a meal with someone is an easy way to build trust and camaraderie with someone. This week, invite someone to lunch or dinner that you don't know very well and would like to get to know better. Use your conversation as an opportunity to learn as much as you can about the other person. Don't just listen for your next chance to talk. As trust develops in your relationship, ask the other person, "How are you really?" Be prepared to answer yourself.

FOR Y'ALL

- Have you ever tried to “do Christianity” by yourself? How did that work out for you?
- What stops us from spiritually connecting with others?
- Read Acts 2:42-47 out loud together. What can we learn from this passage about the type of community we are called to be part of as followers of Jesus?
- Why do you think it is important for us to live in community with others? What role does our community play when it comes to our spiritual formation?

Over the last two months, you’ve gotten a taste of what community looks like through the lens of this group. This week would be a good opportunity to talk about whether you’d like to continue meeting beyond the initial eight-week cycle and what that could look like. We hope you have been blessed by this experience, and we encourage you to prayerfully consider next steps.

PRAY TOGETHER

Take a minute to share any prayer requests, gratitudes, or updates you want the group to know about. Write them down in the back of this book. You can nominate someone to pray or go around the circle taking turns.

LOOKING AHEAD

Our eight weeks together are nearly over! Next time, we’ll wrap up our discussion on spiritual formation by tying up a few loose ends and talking about where we go from here.

WEEK EIGHT

“THEREFORE, SINCE WE ARE SURROUNDED BY SUCH A GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES, LET US THROW OFF EVERYTHING THAT HINDERS AND THE SIN THAT SO EASILY ENTANGLES. AND LET US RUN WITH PERSEVERANCE THE RACE MARKED OUT FOR US, FIXING OUR EYES ON JESUS, THE PIONEER AND PERFECTER OF FAITH. FOR THE JOY SET BEFORE HIM HE ENDURED THE CROSS, SCORNING ITS SHAME, AND SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE THRONE OF GOD.”

HEBREWS 12:1-2

ICE BREAKER

If you could instantly become an expert in any one area, what would it be?

A LIFE-LONG JOURNEY

For the last two months, we've discussed what it means to become a disciple of Jesus. We've learned that a disciple of Christ is someone who knows what Jesus knows and does what Jesus does, all with the hope of becoming like Jesus.

But at the end of the day, is that an impossible dream? It's a nice idea, sure, but when the rubber hits the road, is it something we can actually ever hope to achieve?

John Mark Comer argues one of the great tragedies of our time is that we settle for a lesser vision of who we could become. We have no problem believing that we can become better versions of ourselves, but we scoff at the idea that we could ever measure up to the great saints like Mother Teresa or Francis of Assisi, or even the Apostles who penned the Gospel accounts and letters that make up our New Testament. That's simply too high a standard. So we settle for improving one area of our life, cutting out a bad habit or two, reconciling with a friend, praying more often, or trying to make better decisions (all of which are good things). But many times, that's where our expectations for transformation end. We settle for simply being better, but Jesus calls us to more. Leon Bloy, a French novelist and devout Catholic, says it this way, "The only real sadness, the only real failure, the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint."

In Matthew 5:48, Jesus tells his disciples, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." The Greek word translated as "perfect" is *teleios*, and it can mean "mature" or "complete." Jesus isn't saying we ought to be perfect in the sense that we never make mistakes or break any rules or end up disappointing someone. He's saying we ought to strive to become people whose level of maturity is like that of God the Father. In other words, he's calling us to become the men and women God created us to be; men and women for whom loving God and loving others is second nature, as easy and natural as breathing. John Wesley, the Founder of Methodism, referred to this idea as "Christian Perfection." He believed that while we would never be flawless, we could grow to love God and others perfectly, with all of our heart, strength, and mind.

This looks different for each of us because all of us are called to become like Jesus as expressed through our unique personality, God-given talents, and passions. We are called to wholeness; we strive to match the character traits, habits, and practices that shaped and influenced the life of Jesus. It doesn't mean we will always

get it right; certainly, we will make mistakes along the way. But we cannot allow ourselves to strive for anything less than Christ-likeness, or we will end up settling for something less than who God created us to be.

We ought to strive to be counted amongst the great saints of the faith, the ones whose names are recorded in history, but even more, those who will never be written about; the saints who remain anonymous, who live on only through the echoes of their prayers and steadfast love that quietly shaped generations. These are the ones whose steady devotion and relentless pursuit of Jesus go without fanfare or fame, but who exude a contagious and otherworldly peace, a deep and secure sense of the Father's presence.

This kind of transformation, the kind of deep character change that reaches the darkest parts of who we are, doesn't happen overnight. We don't become like Jesus in a week's time, or even a few months, or a few years. Becoming like Jesus is a journey that is undertaken over the course of a lifetime—decades of rewriting the stories we believe about who we are and who God calls us to be, of reshaping our habits and adopting the kinds of practices that shaped Jesus' rhythm of life, of living in community with other believers and allowing them to encourage and challenge us, and above all, relying on God's life-giving Spirit to guide us through it all.

The journey of spiritual formation is costly; it will require some sacrifices and even so, it won't guarantee you a life without trouble. But the cost of not following Jesus is higher.

**AS DALLAS WILLARD WRITES, NON-DISCIPLESHIP WILL COST YOU THE
“ABUNDANCE OF LIFE JESUS SAID HE CAME TO BRING.”**

Becoming like Jesus is the work of a lifetime. But the promise of God is that no matter where you are now, what you've done, what your life has been like, or what you believe, you, too, can experience the wholeness and fulfillment that comes through following the way of Jesus.

FOR YOU

For thousands of years, Christians have turned to the book of Psalms as a guidebook for their prayer life, allowing the words to encourage, inspire, challenge, or give words to their pain and grief. When we speak these inspired words back to God, it's like we join the prayers of countless others who came before us. This week, spend time praying Psalm 139. Here are a few tips to get you started:

- Read the psalm once from beginning to end.
- Read it a second time and think about how the words speak to you: What stands out to you? How does it make you feel? What circumstances or situations does it bring to mind? What does it mean to make this psalm your own today?
- Finish with a third read-through of the psalm, only this time, don't just read the words—pray them back to God! Change the language. Add your own thoughts. Summarize each verse as if you were talking directly with God.

Don't stop here! We encourage you to make the practice of praying the Psalms a regular part of your spiritual rhythm. The Psalms are a practical way for us to incorporate the full range of our emotions, both good and bad, into our conversations with God.

FOR Y'ALL

Take time today to discuss some of the ideas or practices you're taking away from this eight-week study. What themes stood out to you? What is challenging to you and what are you still wrestling with? How can this group continue to support one another on your journey toward spiritual formation?

Next, take some time to talk through what comes next. This is the time to nail down whether your group will officially continue meeting and what curriculum would be best for your group moving forward. Decide as a group how long you want to continue meeting, whether it's eight more weeks, three months, or more. At the next end date, you can have this discussion again and re-evaluate. Some group members may decide to take a break, while others take on new leadership roles and start new groups, and some groups may decide to stop meeting altogether and find a new group to join. This is all good—even if it is a little bittersweet. Overall, we pray that God would continue to bless your group as you continue the journey of becoming like Christ!

PRAY TOGETHER

Take a minute to share any prayer requests, gratitudes, or updates you want the group to know about. Write them down in the back of this book. You can nominate someone to pray or go around the circle taking turns.



WHERE TO NEXT?

Below are some resources we recommend if you would like to continue learning about Spiritual Formation and the Spiritual Practices of Jesus. We encourage you to read these on your own or with your group.

- Practicing The Way of Jesus | John Mark Comer
- You Are What You Love | James K.A. Smith
- The Great Omission | Dallas Willard
- Emotionally Healthy Spirituality | Pete Scazzero
- Invitation To A Journey | M. Robert Muholland Jr.
- Reading The Bible for a Change | Ray Lubeck
- Opening Israel's Scriptures | Ellen Davis



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