



God At Our Side

HOW THE LIVING GOD TRANSFORMS US

PART FOUR: RHYTHMS OF JESUS FOR BECOMING LIKE JESUS

By Pastor Ben Froese

Galatians 5:25; John 15:1-5; 1 John 2:6

Intro

We're all growing.

C.S. Lewis writes about how each of our lives is on a certain trajectory. Each of us is heading in a certain direction in terms of our character and moral and spiritual development. Some of us are increasingly becoming more 'heavenly.' Some of us are increasingly becoming more 'hellish.'¹

In Week 1, Pastor Dave pointed us to Galatians 4:19, where Paul describes the pain he's experiencing, "*....until Christ is formed in you...*" – is the language he uses – as he writes to these followers of Jesus in the province of Galatia.

What does it mean to grow spiritually?

Put really simply, to grow spiritually means to grow to become more like Jesus. Or, to put it just a little differently – and to echo what Paul states here – it's to have the life of Jesus, the character of Jesus, formed into us.

What are the marks of spiritual growth? Scripture uses the language of fruit.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,
forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness
and self-control.

Galatians 5:22-23

How do we open ourselves up to the work of the Spirit? What part do we play in our own spiritual growth and formation? Here's how Paul puts it just a couple verses later:

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step
with the Spirit.
Galatians 5:25

That's what we're talking about today. What it looks like to keep in step with the Spirit. The part that we play in our spiritual growth.

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I. Remaining in Jesus

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*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.
He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit,
while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so
that it will be even more fruitful.*

*³ You are already clean because of the word I
have spoken to you.*

*⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch
can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine.
Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*

*⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain
in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart
from me you can do nothing."*

John 15:1-5

This word 'remain' is the Greek word μένω (MEN-oh).
It's a word that can also be translated 'abide,' 'dwell,' or
'make your home in.'

The invitation here is to make your home in God. To
make Jesus the one that your whole self is centered
around. To make 'being with Jesus' this place that you
live out of.

When Jesus says, '*remain in me*,' He's probably saying
something similar to what the apostle Paul commands
us to do when he writes, 'pray continually' or 'pray
without ceasing.' (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

What could it look like, though, to remain in Jesus?

Maybe it looks like simply saying, 'Jesus I acknowledge
You are here,' each time you walk into a new setting or
situation.

Or when something good happens, taking a moment
either out loud or in your heart, just to say, 'thank you,
God.'

Or when in the middle of a difficult conversation, trying
to maintain a sense of God's presence and ask Him how
you should respond before speaking.

Or the next time you hear a siren or see that ambulance,
taking a moment to briefly pray for that person in need.

Remaining in Jesus – staying connected to Him through
prayer – will be key to growing spiritually and living lives
that bear fruit.

But I think there is a whole lot more that could be said
as well.

II. Living Like Jesus

“Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.”
1 John 2:6

What’s the first thing that Jesus says as He invites people to relationship with Him? Usually it’s these two words – Follow me (Matt. 4:19, Matt. 8:22, Matt. 9:9, etc.).

Yes, as Christian people we understand that Jesus is fully God – that He reveals to us what God is like. We need to pay attention to that. But more: Jesus is also fully human – and through His life He shows us what humanity is meant to be. He is the true human. He is a human fully alive.

To grow spiritually and bear fruit, we need to emulate Jesus’ way of life.

“We can become like Christ by doing one thing—by following him in the overall style of life he chose for himself. If we have faith in Christ, we must believe that he knew how to live. We can, through faith and grace, become like Christ by practicing the types of activities he engaged in, by arranging our whole lives around the activities he himself practiced in order to remain constantly at home in the fellowship of his Father.”²

What would it look like to live as Jesus did? This is where we get into talking about the spiritual disciplines or practices or habits or whatever you want to call them. The ‘rhythms of Jesus for becoming like Jesus,’ as I call them today.

III. The Purpose of the Spiritual Disciplines

First, what they’re not:

- a. *They are not a means of gaining spiritual merit.*

These things do nothing to ‘add’ to our salvation. They do nothing to make us more righteous in the sight of God. We’re not earning ‘points with God’ by engaging in the spiritual disciplines.

- b. *They are not a mark of spiritual maturity.*

What do the spiritually mature look like? Again, it’s the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, etc.

- c. *The disciplines themselves don’t change us.*

“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

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That word ‘transformed’ – note that it’s in the passive voice. It’s not ‘transform yourselves,’ but ‘be transformed.’ Meaning there is another agent involved in doing this – God Himself.

What is the purpose of the spiritual disciplines – the rhythms of Jesus?

They are an active response to God’s love.

“The disciplines are an invitation to an adventurous, wild romp with a God who is absolutely crazy in love with us. They are not an obligation, and are best practiced simply as an active response to God’s love.”³

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Romans 5:8

Our salvation is fully accomplished through the work of Jesus on our behalf.

We receive it as a gift. We receive it not by trying harder or doing more, but by trusting in Jesus and what He has done for us.

Our involvement in doing the things that Jesus invites us to do as we seek to emulate Him – it’s all done in response to the way He has loved us already. In response to the grace we’ve been given.

IV. Rhythms of Jesus for Becoming Like Jesus

a. Scripture

Jesus knew His Bible. He knew it really well.

In Matthew Chapter 4, Jesus is tempted by the devil in the wilderness. What does He do?

He quotes Scripture! Because He knows Scripture.

Pastor Ricky talked about Scripture in Week 2 of this series. Go check out that message if you missed it.⁴

Scripture is the one of the main things that the Spirit of God uses to transform us.

b. Prayer

Prayer is about speaking to God.

If you are interested in learning a whole bunch more just about prayer, we did a whole series on the Lord’s Prayer in the winter of last year. Go check that out if you’re interested.⁵

c. Solitude

A close companion to solitude is that of silence. Some have referred to this discipline as ‘silence and solitude.’

This obviously relates to prayer, but with the added emphasis on – this is time for just you and Jesus.

“...Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”
Luke 5:16

Jesus also told His followers:

“...*go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.*”
Matthew 6:6

If we’re going to grow to become more like Jesus – if we’re going to grow to become deeply connected to the Father – this is probably an important thing.

d. Community

Jesus lived in community.

During His three years of public ministry, He spent the vast majority of His time hanging out with twelve people – doing life with them.

Jesus was also deeply involved in the regular Jewish life of synagogue.

Community – last week Pastor Dave talked about this as the context where spiritual growth happens. I think it’s also appropriate to put it in its own category as a spiritual discipline, because it does take a bit of work to be involved in community. It takes time. It takes effort.

e. Sabbath

What’s Sabbath? Here’s how I’ll define it: one day off per week for worship, celebration and turning toward the people around me.

This rhythm of one day off for rest is rooted in God’s creation of the world in Genesis 1-2, and it is part of the Ten Commandments given to God’s people Israel in Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15.

Jesus, as a Jewish person, most definitely would have engaged in the rhythm of Sabbath.

Here’s one of the primary ways I’ve come to think about the Sabbath: it’s one day of choosing *not* to be productive.

f. Fasting

Jesus fasted.

Matthew 4, we see Jesus fasting for forty days in the wilderness.

The earliest Christians made fasting a regular rhythm of their lives as well.

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Here's a definition of fasting:

"Fasting is the voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity. The focus of biblical fasting is always on spiritual purposes.

The heart of one who is fasting is to seek God, most often privately and with no motive to gain approval from people. Fasting provides the opportunity to reveal those things that control us. It reminds us that we are sustained by every word of God and it restores balance in a believer's life regarding priorities and nonessentials."⁶

Another quick note on fasting - When early Christians fasted, they also fasted so that they had more funds to share with others.

g. Generosity

Jesus gave of Himself for the sake of others. That's generosity.

Parting with your money grows you! It changes your desires.

Something happens in you when you give.

h. Service

Jesus himself said it:

"...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Mark 10:45

When you look at the life of Jesus, serving others wasn't just a general way of life or an attitude of the heart - although it was those things too - serving others looked like concrete, specific actions that He engaged in.

John 13 - Jesus washes the disciples' feet. Doing something that no 'superior' would ever do in that ancient context; and He tells us to do the same.

i. Witness

Jesus preached the good news of the coming kingdom.

⁴³ But he said, *"I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent."*

Luke 4:43

One of the main ways that He did that - sitting around a table.

Enjoying a meal and a time of hanging out with others - at Levi the tax collector's house (Luke 5:29-32), and also at people like Simon the Pharisee's house (Luke 7:36-50).

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Jesus responded to invitations of others and entered into their worlds. In order to listen and love and speak into their lives as the Spirit led Him. Yes, He calls us to now live as His witnesses.

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 1:8

V. Integrating His Rhythms into Our Rhythms

Yes, Jesus engaged these rhythms, but how we do so will look a little different for each and every one of us in this room – because none of us are first century Jewish people walking the dusty streets of Galilee and Judea.

What does it look like for *me* to follow Jesus – to take up His way of life? Which of these rhythms do I need to incorporate and how? That’s the question.

“God has yet to bless anyone except where they actually are.”⁷

Which of these rhythms is the Spirit of God inviting you to incorporate into your rhythms? Perhaps it looks like starting *somewhere*.

Fasting – maybe you’re not going to be like Jesus and go without food for 40 days. But, maybe you can cut coffee for one day or cut social media for a week.

Prayer – maybe you don’t have 2 hours a day to pray, but do you have 15 minutes? 5 minutes? 3 minutes? Could you pray during those moments you’re alone in the vehicle?

Scripture – maybe you can’t read through the whole Bible in a year, but what could you do? Could you read a Psalm a day when you find a moment? Could you mull on one verse and try to memorize it?

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DISCUSSION

Open Up

When you hear the phrase ‘spiritual disciplines,’ what are the first feelings and thoughts that arise? Do these feel like they would be burdensome? Like an obligation? Like a relief? Discuss.

Dig In

1. **Read John 15:1-5.** The words, “...remain in me...” show up again and again throughout this passage. Why is ‘remaining in Him’ so important? What are some ways you are seeking to live this out in your own life? What are the moments and situations in your life where you find it most difficult to maintain a sense of ‘being with Jesus?’
2. In the message, we looked at nine different ‘rhythms of Jesus for becoming like Jesus’ – Scripture, Prayer, Solitude, Community, Sabbath, Fasting, Generosity, Service and Witness (see above). Which of these rhythms are currently well-incorporated into your life? Which of them seem almost impossible for you to engage in? Is there one of these in particular that you sense the Spirit prompting you to begin to prioritize in a new way?
3. In the message, we looked at how the spiritual disciplines – the rhythms of Jesus – are best practiced as an active response to God’s love. What do you think could be some of the dangers or pitfalls with engaging in these rhythms for other reasons? Have you ever seen the spiritual disciplines misused?
4. Throughout this series, we’ve seen that community is key to our spiritual growth. What can you do as a Life Group to help each other ‘put into practice’ some of these rhythms that were discussed today? How can you support each other with ‘next steps?’

Pray: Take some time to share prayer requests and pray for each other. Pray in particular that your Life Group would be a group of people who bear much fruit as you remain connected to Jesus and seek to emulate his way of life.