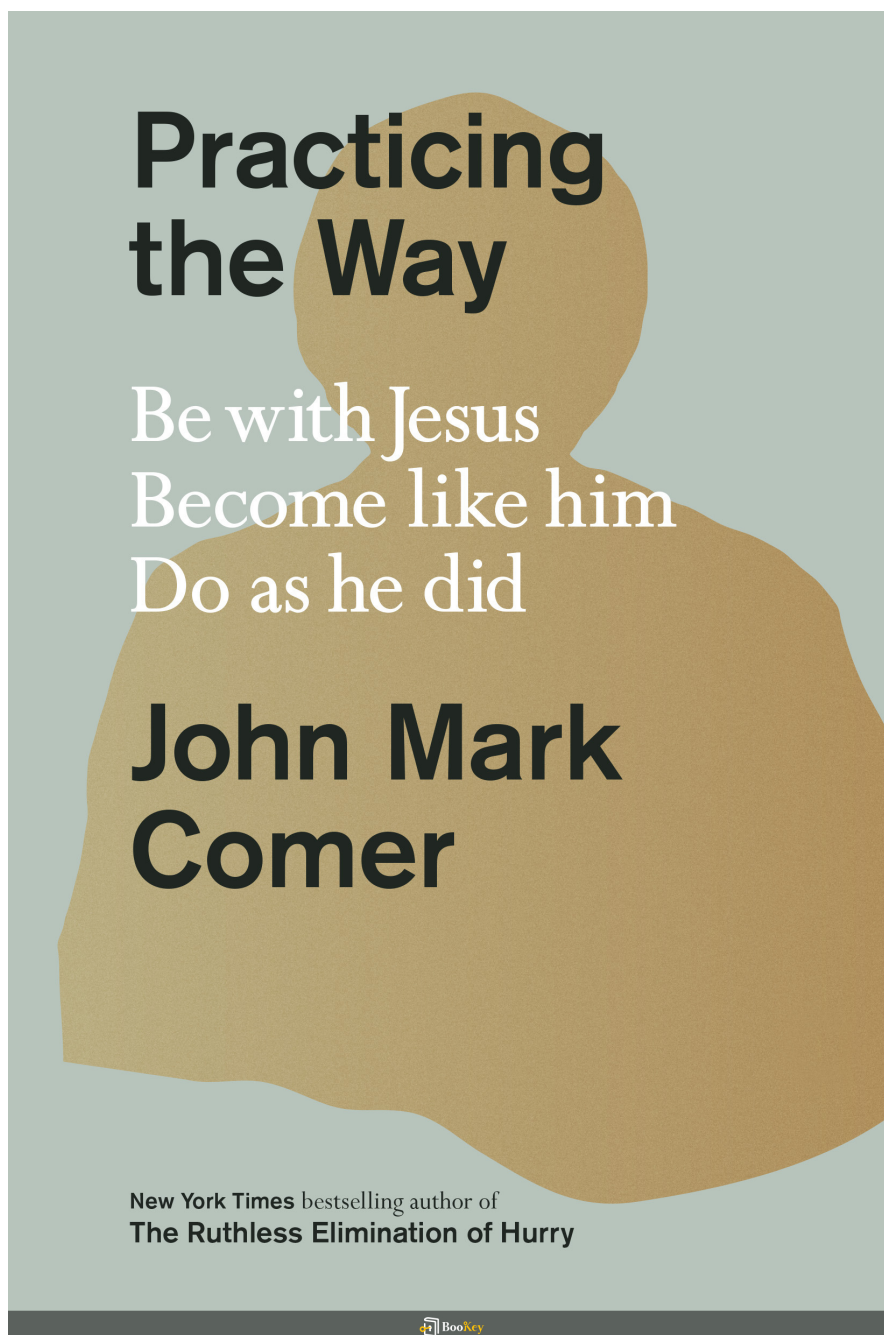


# Practicing The Way PDF (Limited Copy)

John Mark Comer



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## **Practicing The Way Summary**

"Embracing Ancient Rhythms for Modern Spiritual Transformation."

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## About the book

Amidst the relentless pace of modern life, where distractions abound and deeper fulfillment often seems elusive, "Practicing the Way" by John Mark Comer serves as a beacon of clarity and purpose. This thought-provoking book invites readers on a transformative journey to rediscover the essence of spiritual disciplines and their power to cultivate a meaningful life akin to the teachings of ancient traditions. With wisdom drawn from his own experiences and insightful reflections, Comer offers a nuanced exploration of how practicing intentional habits can lead to profound spiritual renewal. Whether you are seeking to anchor your faith, find peace in chaos, or simply connect more deeply with your true self, this compelling read promises to guide you towards a life of greater joy, simplicity, and kindness, imploring you to embark on a path where every step becomes a lesson and every moment, sacred.

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## About the author

John Mark Comer is a renowned pastor, author, and thought leader deeply committed to exploring and articulating the intersection of faith, culture, and personal transformation. Known for his approachable yet profound insights, Comer has spent years navigating the complexities of modern spirituality, helping individuals pursue a Christ-centered life in the midst of an increasingly fast-paced world. With his background as the former lead pastor of Bridgetown Church in Portland, Oregon, and as the founder of Practicing the Way, John Mark Comer invites readers to embark on a journey towards intentional discipleship, underpinned by the spiritual disciplines. His teaching emphasizes the importance of slowing down, simplifying life, and cultivating practices rooted in the ancient way of Jesus for flourishing in today's restless society.

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## Chapter 1 Summary: Jesus was a rabbi

In the context of first-century Judaism, Jesus of Nazareth was perceived as a rabbi, a revered teacher known for his profound grasp of spiritual and moral teachings. The term "rabbi" in Hebrew means "master," and it indicates one who is a spiritual guide and an expert interpreter of the Torah, the Jewish holy scriptures. Rabbis were esteemed not only for their knowledge but also for the exemplary, godly lives they led. Each rabbi was distinguished by his "yoke," a metaphor for his specific interpretations and teachings of the Torah, as well as his philosophy on how to lead a meaningful life in accordance with divine principles. It was common for rabbis to hail from diverse societal backgrounds—some were carpenters or farmers—and to train under other rabbis before starting their own itinerant ministries, gathering and teaching disciples along their journeys.

In the Gospels, Jesus is repeatedly referred to as "rabbi," but he was far from ordinary. His teachings consistently left witnesses astounded and filled with wonder because of the authority and wisdom with which he spoke. Jesus was said to possess unparalleled insight into human nature and spirituality, arguably rivaling the intellectual prowess of historical figures like Stephen Hawking or the Buddha. However, despite his profound teachings and their potential to elevate human flourishing, many people, including believers who identify as Christians, do not always regard Jesus as an intellectual authority on contemporary societal issues such as politics, racial justice, and



mental health.

Jesus' role and significance go beyond the typical definition of a rabbi. Historically, the Jewish people anticipated a new leader akin to Moses—referred to as the Messiah—who would deliver them from Roman oppression. There was a belief that this Messiah would emerge as a great teacher and spiritual guide, further establishing the Jewish cultural reverence for scholars of scripture. Christians, however, hold that Jesus was more than the Messiah; he claimed to be divine, a declaration seen as blasphemous by some and one that led to conflict with the religious authorities of his time. Such claims contributed to his crucifixion, underscoring the threat his teachings posed to the established power structures.

Ultimately, Jesus remains a figure of immense spiritual significance, revered not only for his wisdom and teachings but also for his conception by his followers as the Son of God. While some viewed him mainly as a revolutionary or a theoretical figurehead for certain religious doctrines, the deeper recognition of Jesus as a brilliant and provocative rabbi invites believers to revere and follow him not only as a divine figure but as an insightful teacher whose teachings still resonate with profound relevance today. Through his life and legacy, Jesus provides a pathway to understanding and thriving in what the scriptures call "our Father's world."

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## Chapter 2 Summary: Three goals of an apprentice

The concept of discipleship, though often associated with Jesus, was not a novel idea introduced by him. It was a prevalent practice in Jewish culture where rabbis mentored small groups of disciples. Renowned rabbis like Hillel and Akiva had disciples, forming an essential part of the Jewish educational system, analogous to modern-day graduate programs. To fully understand discipleship, one must grasp this educational system.

Jewish education began at age five at the "bet sefer" (house of the book), similar to elementary school, focusing on memorizing the Torah. By age twelve or thirteen, students typically finished this stage, but only the most capable advanced to "bet midrash" (house of learning) to study further until seventeen. Very few then pursued becoming apprentices under a rabbi, a highly selective process reminiscent of today's Ivy League admissions.

Becoming an apprentice to a rabbi was a prestigious achievement, requiring immense dedication. The process was about more than academic prowess; it involved committing to a lifestyle underpinned by three primary goals:

**1. To Be With Your Rabbi:** This emphasized constant companionship.

Apprentices would leave their previous lives to follow their rabbi continuously, absorbing his teachings through deep, immersive daily interactions.



**2. To Become Like Your Rabbi:** The essence of apprenticeship was transformation. It wasn't just about learning teachings; it was about adopting the rabbi's behaviors, speech, and attitudes, aiming to mirror him in every aspect.

**3. To Do As Your Rabbi Did:** The ultimate goal was to become a rabbi oneself. Apprentices trained to eventually carry on their rabbi's work and teachings, embodying his lessons and approach.

This model of discipleship was exactly what Jesus offered to his followers. He invited them into a transformative relationship that went beyond mere learning to embodying his life and mission. Despite variations in interpretation over the centuries, the core of discipleship remains unchanged: to follow Jesus is to become his apprentice, shaping one's life around being with him, becoming like him, and doing his work. It is a holistic, lifelong journey aimed at replicating Jesus's actions and teachings in one's own life and spreading his influence further.

In essence, the term "disciple" signifies this profound form of apprenticeship, a commitment that extends beyond superficial understanding to a deep, transformative journey of living and operating as a reflection of Jesus's own life and mission.



## Chapter 3 Summary: Disciple is a noun, not a verb

The term "disciple," often used within church contexts, originates from the Hebrew "talmid," meaning a student or practitioner deeply engaged in the teachings and way of life of a master. An effective English translation of "talmid" is "apprentice," which implies a holistic and practical approach to learning, as opposed to the Western educational system's emphasis on data retention. In Jesus' time, an apprentice learned through close association with their teacher, absorbing wisdom and living out those teachings in daily life. The aim for Jesus' followers was not certification, but mastering the art of living in alignment with God's kingdom, akin to learning a skill through lived practice rather than theoretical study.

Importantly, "disciple" is a noun, not a verb. The misuse of "disciple" as a verb—such as asking, "Who are you discipling?"—is grammatically incorrect and semantically misleading. This verb usage falsely implies that spiritual growth is the responsibility of an external mentor or leader.

However, the process of becoming a disciple is a personal journey and commitment. While church leaders can guide and support, it is ultimately up to each individual to accept Jesus' invitation and actively engage in learning from his example.

To be a disciple, therefore, is to choose a life dedicated to being with Jesus, becoming like him, and doing as he did. Spiritual formation is a personal

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responsibility, where the individual must decide to live as a perpetual student of Jesus. This commitment transcends mere identification as a Christian, integrating one's entire existence toward the pursuit of embodying Jesus' teachings. Language matters, as framing "disciple" as a noun emphasizes the personal initiative and ongoing commitment required in this spiritual apprenticeship.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Spiritual formation is a personal responsibility

**Critical Interpretation:** Imagine waking up every day not just identifying as a Christian, but truly embracing the role of a disciple—an apprentice—determinedly pursuing the embodiment of Jesus' teachings. This personal commitment demands acknowledging that spiritual growth comes from within. While your church community and leaders provide invaluable support, the choice to integrate Jesus' teachings into every facet of your daily life lies solely with you. This realization ignites a shift from seeking external validation to nurturing an internal drive, empowering you to live purposefully, reflecting Jesus' love and wisdom in every interaction. This life, dedicated to learning and living as Jesus did, challenges you to actively engage, internalize lessons, and consistently align your actions with the essence of God's kingdom. Such a journey redefines your spiritual identity, fostering a profound, transformative growth that resonates beyond mere labels, ushering you into a lived faith that's both deeply personal and universally inspiring.

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## Chapter 4: Are you a Christian or an apprentice?

In this chapter, the author explores the disparity between the terms "Christian" and "apprentice" as they relate to followers of Jesus, arguing that the term "Christian" has veered from its original intent in modern Western culture. Historically, in the New Testament, "Christian" appears only thrice, while "disciple" or "apprentice" is referenced 269 times. This signifies that the texts were crafted by and for Jesus' apprentices, focusing on a life devoted to imitating Christ.

The word "Christian," meaning "little Christ" or "mini Messiah," was initially used derogatorily. Over time, however, followers embraced it to denote their devotion. Yet today, the term often suggests a mere cultural or intellectual affiliation with Christianity, rather than active discipleship or commitment to living like Jesus.

Through Michael Burkheimer's analysis of whether President Lincoln was a Christian, the chapter underscores the vagueness surrounding what truly defines a Christian. Burkheimer suggests that being a Christian involves belief in Jesus' divinity and his role in salvation, but points out that there's typically no mention of following Jesus' teachings. This oversight highlights the modern dilemma where identifying as a Christian does not necessarily mean practicing the faith as an apprentice.



In the U.S., while 63% identify as Christians, surveys suggest only about 4% actively follow Jesus as apprentices. This duality creates a cultural environment where being labeled a Christian does not inherently reflect deep spiritual devotion, akin to the distinction Catholicism makes between Catholics and practicing Catholics. This situation calls for a loving

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## Chapter 5 Summary: But what are we saved to?

In the discussion of the contemporary crisis in discipleship within the North American church, a troubling trend emerges as a significant number of millennials distance themselves from traditional faith practices. Among those raised in evangelical circles, a mere 10 percent continue as committed followers, or "resilient disciples," which poses a serious issue for the church. This issue is perhaps not an anomaly but a structural issue rooted in the way the gospel has been historically communicated.

Since World War II, a particular version of the gospel has become prevalent where accepting Christianity is portrayed as a simple transaction rather than an ongoing transformation. This version implies that one can attain salvation without necessarily becoming an apprentice of Jesus, leading to a perceived bait-and-switch situation for many converts. They expect the promise of eternal life but are then confronted with the demands of discipleship that were not part of the initial transaction.

The dichotomy between evangelism and discipleship presents a theological crisis. When one merely says "yes to Jesus," it doesn't necessarily lead to a life of apprenticeship. This raises broader questions about salvation's true nature: What are individuals saved to? This essential inquiry often goes unexplored in many church circles. An incomplete gospel, focused on minimal acceptance requirements rather than holistic spiritual formation,

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fails to capture the fullness of Jesus' teachings on salvation.

A common presentation of the gospel emphasizes individual sin and a need for belief in Jesus for post-mortem salvation, overlooking the call to form a deep, transformative relationship with God. This limited view projects salvation as escaping hell rather than the broader, intended transformation into a God-filled life. According to the teachings of Jesus, salvation is about embodying God's kingdom on earth, where love, justice, and peace prevail, accessible to anyone willing to engage deeply with Jesus' teachings.

Historically, Jesus describes a kingdom of God available now, inviting all to become part of this new reality. This inbreaking kingdom calls individuals not just to belief but to active transformation and participation in a life akin to that of Jesus. This understanding challenges the passive consumer Christianity that often results from the narrow version of the gospel focusing solely on grace without personal transformation.

Jesus' gospel advocates for effort in personal transformation, which does not equate to earning God's favor but aligns with receiving it. As echoed in the Sermon on the Mount, practicing Jesus' teachings is akin to building a sturdy foundation in one's spiritual life. The prevalent misunderstanding that salvation negates any personal spiritual effort results in followers consuming Jesus' merits without engaging as steadfast disciples. Thus, a revision of gospel understanding is crucial, emphasizing active discipleship as integral

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to the Christian faith.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Reimagining Discipleship as Active Participation

**Critical Interpretation:** In today's world, you may often find yourself caught in a simplified version of faith, where salvation is portrayed as a one-time decision rather than an ongoing journey of transformation. Chapter 5 of 'Practicing the Way' by John Mark Comer invites you to step beyond this reduced perspective and embrace a faith that is dynamic and immersive. Redefining discipleship as an active participation, rather than a passive acceptance, can profoundly inspire your life. By embodying the teachings of Jesus, you are not just believing in Him as a ticket out of hell, but are stepping into a vibrant, God-filled existence that resonates with love, justice, and peace. This shift encourages you not only to say 'yes to Jesus,' but to actively pursue a life of introspection and spiritual growth that aligns with His way. Let this notion of transformational discipleship inspire you to build a stronger foundation for your faith that weathers life's storms, leading to a rich and fulfilling spiritual journey.

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## Chapter 6 Summary: A way of life

The early followers of Jesus were known as "the Way," a term that captures more than just a spiritual or ethical doctrine. It refers to a holistic lifestyle, one that integrates beliefs, ethics, and a transformative journey akin to following a path. This notion is rooted in the Greek word "hodos," meaning "a road or path," which Jesus employed metaphorically to describe apprenticeship under him.

The invitation from Jesus to "follow me" can be understood as an invitation to embrace his way of life to experience the life he promises. This perspective is echoed by Eastern Orthodox bishop Kallistos Ware, who emphasizes that Christianity transcends mere theories or teachings; it's a dynamic path, a journey of life. In contrast, modern religious practices often focus on doctrines and moral rules, overshadowing the importance of a lifestyle aligned with God.

Jesus' declaration, "I am the way and the truth and the life," has been misinterpreted as a judgment about salvation and damnation. However, it chiefly suggests that harmonizing his teachings (truth) with his way of living leads to the "with-God" life he offers. This notion is reinforced by Eugene Peterson, a Presbyterian pastor, who observed that Christians often emphasize Jesus as the truth, while neglecting his way of life, which is crucial for realizing Jesus' promise.



The way of life Jesus demonstrated is unparalleled and offers profound access to God's presence and power. Yet, it requires adherence to the path defined by Jesus. He taught that while many travel the "broad way," which is synonymous with following societal norms and personal desires, it often leads to destruction. This path is contrasted with the "narrow gate," representing a conscientious way of life that few undertake, but which leads to true life—both now and eternally.

This eternal life is not merely an extension of existence but a profound quality of life characterized by union with God, beginning in the present and continuing beyond death. Jesus promised abundant life to those who follow this narrow path. His life overflowed with purpose and connection, and he extends this invitation to everyone. Despite the fact that only a minority may accept this invitation, anyone can choose to be an apprentice of Jesus and partake in the life he offers.

Ultimately, the concept of "the Way" encourages a shift from mere belief or moral compliance to a dynamic, life-altering journey with Jesus at the helm, offering a remarkable opportunity for all who choose to follow.

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## Chapter 7 Summary: Whoever means whoever

In these chapters, the narrative focuses on the universal invitation Jesus extended to people to become his disciples, a radical and inclusive offer contrasting sharply with the selective nature of traditional rabbinical apprenticeships at that time. Traditionally, only the most elite students were chosen to study under a rabbi, akin to being accepted into a prestigious university today. However, Jesus broke this mold with his inclusive call, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

The term "whoever" was groundbreaking for Jesus' audience, encompassing all individuals regardless of their background—fishermen, zealots, tax collectors, religious zealots, or sinners alike. The chapter highlights how this open call meant that anyone, regardless of their social status or past actions, could aspire to follow Jesus and partake in the kingdom of God. This message remains relevant today, inviting everyone from all walks of life, whether they are oppressed or oppressors, educated or unschooled, to follow him.

The narrative draws a vivid comparison by likening this invitation to a modern scenario where an acclaimed professor offers a high school dropout the opportunity to become his student, providing an unprecedented chance to transform their life. This metaphor underscores Simon Peter's immediate



decision to follow Jesus, leaving behind his life as a fisherman, a career choice indicating he had not been selected for an apprenticeship under a rabbi.

This exploration reveals a critical dimension of Jesus' teachings: while followers are encouraged to believe in Jesus, it is equally significant to recognize that Jesus believes in them. He envisions them growing into individuals embodying the love, joy, peace, and kindness of God, suggesting that such transformation is attainable through committed discipleship. However, this transformation demands deliberate effort rather than occurring by chance, necessitating the reordering of one's priorities to place following Jesus above all else.

The chapters also delve into the process of discipleship, emphasizing that the foremost goal is to "be with Jesus." Drawing from scriptural narratives, it describes how Jesus began molding his disciples by simply inviting them to be in his presence. This approach demonstrates that the initial step in discipleship is to cultivate awareness of and attentiveness to Jesus' presence in one's life. This proximity gradually leads to becoming more like him, and eventually, performing deeds reflective of his teachings. The story of the original disciples illustrates this progression, as they first spent extended periods with Jesus before being sent out to teach and heal.

For contemporary followers of Jesus, being with him does not translate to a

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physical journey but manifests through spiritual practices that foster mindfulness of his presence. In a world where the literal act of walking behind Jesus is not possible, believers are encouraged to engage in prayer, meditation, and other spiritual disciplines as ways to remain close to him.

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## Chapter 8: Abide in me

The night before his crucifixion, Jesus made a significant promise to his disciples, stating that he would ask the Father to send "another advocate" to be with them forever. This advocate is identified as the Holy Spirit, who would continue the work of Jesus by being an ever-present helper and intercessor. The term "another advocate" in Greek implies "another of the same kind," suggesting the continuation of Jesus' presence among his followers through the Holy Spirit.

In Christian theology, the Holy Spirit isn't a vague, impersonal force but a person, integral to the divine community of love that is the Trinity, alongside the Father and the Son. This triune relationship is foundational to understanding the nature of God as a community of self-giving love. For Jesus' followers, being with the Spirit is synonymous with being in communion with Jesus and the Father, participating in this divine flow of love.

Jesus not only made a promise but also provided his disciples with a practice—an instruction to “abide” in him using the metaphor of a vine and branches. He explained that just as branches must stay connected to the vine to bear fruit, his disciples must remain connected to him to flourish spiritually. The Greek word "menē," meaning to remain, underscores the necessity of making one's home in Jesus' presence through



the Holy Spirit. This instruction is not confined to the monastic life but is applicable to everyone, regardless of their life circumstances.

Everyone 'abides' in something, whether it's social media, entertainment, or other pursuits, which shape us in various ways. Jesus posed a challenge: to evaluate where one's emotional and spiritual home resides. By choosing to make a home in God, one begins to develop the "fruit of the Spirit," which includes love, joy, peace, and other virtues. This daily practice transforms one's life into a temple, a point of meeting between heaven and earth, embodying the final vision of a united cosmos when heaven and earth are one.

Historically, this concept of "abiding" has been expressed in various terms by spiritual figures. The Apostle Paul referred to it as unceasing prayer, while Saint John of the Cross called it "silent love." Madame Guyon described it as a "continuous inner act of abiding," and Quakers spoke of "centering down" in fundamental reality. These diverse expressions highlight the universal call across history to cultivate the practice of being in God's presence continuously.

Brother Lawrence, a monk known for his deep spiritual insights, captured this beautifully by calling it "the practice of the presence of God." He acknowledged that while the idea of being with Jesus is appealing, it requires deliberate practice. Abiding is more than a passive experience; it is

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an active skill that demands ongoing cultivation. Through this practice, believers are invited into life's most extraordinary opportunity: transforming their own lives into a dwelling place of divine love and presence.

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## Chapter 9 Summary: Turning God into a habit

The chapter explores the idea of integrating spirituality into daily life by making God a habitual focus of the mind. It begins by questioning where our thoughts naturally gravitate throughout the day—upon waking, during mundane tasks, and before sleeping. For many, the mind often strays towards worldly concerns or negative rumination, a phenomenon identified by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi as "psychic entropy." However, both ancient Christian spirituality and modern neuroscience agree that the mind is malleable and can be retrained through deliberate practice to focus on God instead of chaos.

The concept is illustrated through the practice of "the presence of God," popularized by a 17th-century monk named Brother Lawrence. Working amidst the noise of a Parisian monastery kitchen, Brother Lawrence learned to experience God in every moment, viewing all of life as a unified spiritual experience. This idea of integrating God into daily life is echoed by Quaker writer Thomas Kelly, who emphasizes the creation of mental habits that continuously orient the mind towards God.

Dallas Willard extends this concept by urging the continual focus on God as a fundamental aspect of soul care. Although life's distractions make this challenging, Willard suggests that God can become a habitual mental orientation, much like a compass always pointing north. This discipline



aligns with neuroscientific principles like "Hebb's rule," which suggests that repeated thoughts or actions can rewire the brain.

The chapter also addresses the cultural bias against habits in spiritual experience, arguing that our habits reveal our true passions and ultimately shape who we become. By consciously redirecting our thoughts to God, even briefly throughout the day, we can reshape our mental landscape. Over time, this practice can create new neural pathways, easing the mind's natural return to God and fostering a deep, spiritual reflex.

While turning God into a habit may initially prove challenging and humbling due to constant forgetfulness and distractions, it offers profound joy and alignment with our innate longing for divine connection. It is an attainable practice that reorients the mind and soul towards God, inviting transformative change. The chapter concludes by encouraging readers to practice directing their thoughts to Jesus, nurturing a constant awareness of His love and presence in their lives.

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## Chapter 10 Summary: “I look at Him, He looks at me, and we are happy”

The chapter opens with a simple yet profound story shared by Marjorie Thompson, a retreat leader and spiritual director. In it, an eighteenth-century priest asks an elderly peasant, who spends long hours in quiet reflection at church, what he is doing. The man replies, "I look at Him, He looks at me, and we are happy." This exchange encapsulates the essence of Christian spirituality, where the relationship with God is described as "Love loving" by Saint Ignatius of Loyola. It signifies that true joy is found in the contemplative practice of being in the presence of God, echoing the sentiment of Eastern Orthodox writer Kallistos Katafygiotis, who emphasized that the most important connection between God and humans is one of love.

The chapter challenges readers to reconsider the process of "abiding" in Christianity as more than just a mental exercise for emotional wellness. It describes it as a deep relational connection with Jesus that extends beyond thoughts and feelings to an experience of divine love. The practice of “contemplation” is introduced, rooted in biblical tradition, as a powerful means to transform believers into the image of Jesus through regular, loving reflection on God's presence.

Central to the discussion is the notion that spiritual transformation occurs



not merely by learning about love but by experiencing it directly. This theme is reinforced through a reference to the Apostle Paul's prayer for the Ephesians, highlighting that understanding God's love requires more than intellect; it demands an experiential connection. This transformation is possible when individuals engage in the contemplative tradition of prayer, characterized by focused attention on God's love, rather than simply using words.

The chapter contrasts contemplative prayer with other meditation practices, emphasizing its distinct goal: to be filled with God's presence and love. While other meditative practices focus on self-emptying or being present in the moment, contemplative prayer seeks to experience God more profoundly. This approach is underlined by the quote from theologian Karl Rahner, suggesting that future Christians must embrace a mystical approach to spirituality—a pursuit of experiencing theological truths personally and directly.

In summation, the chapter calls for a return to the contemplative roots of Christianity, pointing out the pitfalls of treating faith as a mere means to an end. Instead, it advocates for seeing Jesus as the ultimate goal of spiritual life, inviting followers to experience the immensity of God's love directly, which holds the transformative power to make them people of profound love and joy.



## Chapter 11 Summary: The reward for following Jesus is Jesus

The chapter explores the profound and personal journey of finding fulfillment and joy in a relationship with Jesus through prayer. The author begins each day with a ritual of quiet reflection, inspired by ancient Christian spiritual disciplines. This time is spent in a dedicated space, engaging in prayer, meditation on Scripture, and listening for God's voice. Despite the distractions and challenges of maintaining focus in a busy, digitally-driven world, the author values this quiet time as the highlight of their day, where they feel most connected to God.

In a culture that prioritizes productivity and material success, the practice of prayer may seem unproductive or even wasteful. Yet, those who experience a genuine connection with God through prayer understand it as the pinnacle of human existence. The act of praying becomes a means of deepening one's relationship with Jesus, where Jesus himself is seen as the ultimate reward. It's about cultivating a friendship with Jesus, akin to what Thomas à Kempis described as "familiar friendship with Jesus" in his work, *The Imitation of Christ*.

The text encourages readers to persevere in prayer, even when faced with distractions or challenging emotions. The key is to continually show up and engage in the process, maintaining faith that a genuine connection and





understanding will emerge over time. The reflection draws attention to the contrast between a life spent in worldly distractions and one focused on spiritual communion and suggests that true life is found in friendship with Jesus.

The chapter challenges the reader to reconsider what they prioritize in life and to ignite a desire for a deeper relationship with Jesus. It ends by inviting readers to seek out what Jesus referred to as "the secret place" — a personal space for quiet reflection and building a genuine friendship with Him. This place is where one can begin to take hold of "the life that is truly life," made possible by Jesus' sacrifice.

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## Chapter 12: Find your secret place

In this chapter, the emphasis is placed on the transformative power of finding a personal, distraction-free space for prayer, inspired by Jesus' teachings and practices. Jesus, in his wisdom, underscored the importance of the "where" in prayer, suggesting that one should retreat to a private, inner room—a concept rooted in the Greek term "tameion," akin to a secluded pantry or closet in a first-century Galilean home. This underscores the value of solitude in connecting with God, as Jesus himself frequently withdrew to such quiet places, termed "er mos" in Greek, to pray re-engaging with the world.

Drawing from his own experience, the author reflects on the necessity of a conducive environment to fully engage in spiritual practices. This principle mirrors the lifestyle that Jesus exemplified—a rhythmic cycle of retreating for solitary prayer and then returning to minister to others. These secluded spaces are not limited to a single form; they can range from a peaceful office in the woods to a bedroom corner or even a city park, as long as they offer a sanctuary for quiet reflection and communion with God.

The chapter suggests that finding a secret place is not merely about physical seclusion but also about cultivating a habit and rhythm of solitude, silence, and stillness—a practice essential to spiritual development for both introverts and extroverts alike. It argues against the misconception from



historical precedence that deep spiritual engagement is reserved only for monks or introverted individuals, advocating instead that this is a necessary practice for everyone seeking a profound relationship with Jesus.

This principle of solitude in prayer is illustrated not only through

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## Chapter 13 Summary: “You must ruthlessly eliminate hurfy from your life”

The text emphasizes the importance of slowing down and simplifying life to become an apprentice under Jesus. Unlike popular self-improvement methods that focus on doing more or "habit stacking," the call to follow Jesus is about doing less and saying no to excess. The idea is to align one's life with the three goals of an apprentice: being with Jesus, becoming like Him, and acting as He did. This required subtraction aims to make Jesus the central focus of one's life amidst the often overwhelming and busy schedules that people maintain today.

Dallas Willard described hurry as the greatest enemy of spiritual life, which prevents us from achieving emotional well-being and a spiritually vibrant existence. A key challenge in following Jesus is to eliminate hurry from our lives, which leads to a lack of rest, barriers to prayer, and a disconnect from spiritual growth. The comparison of our hurried lives to the destructive pace of modern living highlights that life with God gets pushed aside when our schedules are too full.

The analogy of the skull serves as a powerful reminder of mortality and the need to avoid wasting life on trivial matters. St. Benedict's practice of reflecting on mortality emphasized living a life focused on what truly matters, which aligns with the Christian monastic tradition of wearing black



robes and frequently encountering reminders of death. This conscious awareness encourages living for "eulogy virtues"—who we became as individuals through our relationships and character—over "résumé virtues," which focus on worldly accomplishments.

The "skull" symbolizes this readiness for eternity and the pursuit of a life well-lived by forming ourselves spiritually. Benedict, an apprentice of Jesus, considered life a training ground for becoming a person of love, reflecting Jesus' character. This aligns with the goal of an apprentice: not just to learn from a wise rabbi but to embody the life that the master lived. The training process, historically called "imitatio Christi" (the imitation of Christ) or what we today recognize as "spiritual formation," requires arranging our lives intentionally around the path of spiritual growth.

Ultimately, the text invites the reader to contemplate making Jesus the center of their existence, using his practices to slow life down and focus on spiritual development, with the promise that living this way could be more fulfilling than the hurried existence many lead. It encourages trying out this slower-paced, Jesus-centered life to experience a deeper connection with God and find satisfaction beyond the hustle of modern life.

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## Chapter 14 Summary: Spiritual formation isn't a Christian thing

Spiritual formation is not confined to Christianity; it is an intrinsic aspect of being human. From the moment we are born, and even before, we embark on continuous journeys of transformation. Our lives involve a process of growth, evolution, disintegration, and re-formation, whether or not we are aware of it. This ongoing change is encapsulated in the concept of spiritual formation, which is neither optional nor static.

The core question is not whether we are being formed, but rather what we are being formed into. This formation is influenced by a myriad of factors, including genetics, family upbringing, personal experiences, education, habits, relationships, and environment. Figures as diverse as Mother Teresa, Hitler, Gandhi, Chairman Mao, and modern personalities like Michelle Obama and Lady Gaga have all been shaped by these influences. It's a universal process that molds us into specific identities.

Regardless of whether we consciously engage in spiritual disciplines, such as meditation or reading spiritual texts, we are always being shaped—every thought, emotion, decision, and interaction contributes to this process. Spiritual formation can lead us toward becoming, as C.S. Lewis puts it, either "immortal horrors" or "everlasting splendours." In this context, individuals are in a constant state of transformation toward either the love



and grace of a figure like Jesus or the destructive forces of sin and death. As philosopher Dallas Willard suggested, our life's trajectory, whether toward life or death, becomes more pronounced over time and is cemented by our choices.

This process becomes particularly evident in the elderly. People over eighty often embody the extremes of human character; they are either some of the most compassionate and loving individuals or the most bitter and spiteful. This dichotomy results from decades of life experiences and choices shaping their spirits and characters. Thus, spiritual formation is a continuous, lifelong journey of becoming a person, influenced by all facets of life that transform us into who we are.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** The inevitability of spiritual formation

**Critical Interpretation:** Embracing the inevitability of spiritual formation means acknowledging the continual process of being shaped by everything we encounter in life, from our thoughts to our environment. By understanding that this transformative journey is unavoidable, you are inspired to become more intentional about the choices you make each day. This awareness encourages a conscious pursuit of those practices and relationships that will mold you into a being of compassion and character, steering your transformation toward positivity and growth rather than allowing the passive drift toward negativity and destructiveness.

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## Chapter 15 Summary: Formation defined

In the chapter "Formation Defined," the author explores the concept of spiritual formation in the Way of Jesus, explaining how it relates to becoming one's truest self as envisioned by God. The journey contrasts sharply with today's "be true to yourself" culture, which often results in sameness driven by base instincts such as greed and immorality. Unlike these worn paths, spiritual formation through Jesus is about evolving into one's original self, shaped by love.

Spiritual formation is a transformative process that occurs gradually over a lifetime rather than being a one-time event. It challenges the modern society's love for instant gratification, reminding us that the growth of the soul is a slow process. As James Houston, a Regent College professor, states, "Spiritual formation is the slowest of all human movements." This gradual change necessitates patience and perseverance, as transformation is about being shaped by God as we surrender to His transformative grace.

The author emphasizes that spiritual formation isn't self-initiated; it's something done to us by God as we make ourselves available to Him. Borrowing analogies from Scripture, the author illustrates our relationship with God: He is the shepherd, potter, and mother nurturing a child in the womb. While God transforms us, our role is to cooperate and surrender to His grace, as highlighted by the adage, "Without God, we cannot. Without



us, God will not." The community of addicts has shown that our power lies not in ourselves but in the grace of a Higher Power—God.

An apprentice to Jesus arranges life around becoming more Christlike, characterized most profoundly by love. Spiritual growth is assessed not by knowledge or church involvement but by love's presence and quality in our closest relationships. The goal of spiritual formation, as Robert Mulholland notes, is to be formed into the image of Christ for the sake of others, which stands in contrast to modern self-actualization that often focuses on individual gain.

The idea of "Christ in us" is central to this process, emphasizing that Christlikeness results from His presence within us. This transformation is an act of grace, often described as 'incorporation' or being integrated into God's life through Christ. The concept underscores an intimate union with God, drawing from Jesus' teaching in John 17, which speaks to being one with the Father. This divine invitation offers the possibility of healing and empowers us to become agents of God's love in the world.

Ultimately, spiritual formation is not just self-improvement but a journey toward union with God—becoming one who embodies Jesus' self-giving love through deepening surrender to the Trinity. By becoming a person pervaded by divine love, one finds true purpose, suggesting a union that fulfills the reason for human existence.



# Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Transformation through Spiritual Formation

**Critical Interpretation:** In your journey toward becoming your truest self as envisioned by God, allow spiritual formation to redefine your life. This transformative process offers a stark divergence from societal norms, where the pursuit often leads to mundane uniformity dictated by primal tendencies. Spiritual formation invites you to shed superficial layers and embrace a deeper evolution into authenticity, shaped by love. Envision it not as a swift change but as an enduring journey requiring your patience and an open spirit. Remember, transformation is not a solo venture; it is a divine interplay where God's grace acts upon your willingness to be reshaped. As you align your life around being more Christlike, grasp the beauty of this gradual evolution. Let love define your growth, echoing in every relationship and enriching your existence with a purpose beyond self-fulfillment. In these moments of surrender, find fulfillment as you embody Jesus' selfless love, realizing your divine potential, crafted by the gentle hands of the Creator.

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## Chapter 16: No accidental saints

The chapter "No Accidental Saints" delves into the concept that becoming Christlike is a deliberate and challenging journey. Unlike what some might fantasize, spiritual maturity and holiness are not attributes someone randomly wakes up possessing one day. The chapter emphasizes that true spiritual formation doesn't just occur by happenstance; intentionality and active engagement in following Jesus are required.

The author highlights a common misconception in the North American church: that spiritual growth and formation can be simplified to attending church, reading the Bible, praying, and giving. However, while these practices are beneficial, they do not on their own constitute a robust pathway to becoming an "apprentice" of Jesus. Using insights from Dr. Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich's research, the chapter outlines a six-stage process of spiritual development and notes that most Christians plateau at a basic level of maturity, rarely reaching their full potential in Christ.

A significant problem identified is the lack of a coherent or effective change theory—a structured understanding of how to grow spiritually. This absence leads many Christians to remain in spiritual adolescence without advancing to spiritual maturity. The chapter cites Richard Foster, an influential voice in spiritual formation, who observed a widespread lack of understanding or awareness of how spiritual transformation occurs.



The author explains various ramifications of this ignorance: a prevalence of hypocrisy within churches, with the life and teachings of Jesus not visibly reflected in believers' lives; a disenchanted generation losing faith in institutional religion; and many who feel spiritually stagnant and yearn for deeper connection with God.

Ultimately, the chapter is not meant as an indictment but as a call to recognize and address these shortcomings. There is an acknowledgment that many have never learned a soulful, Jesus-centric change model, and the chapter ends with the implication that moving forward requires being intentional about pursuing spiritual growth in a way that aligns with Jesus' teachings and example.

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## **Chapter 17 Summary: Three losing strategies**

The exploration of how to genuinely transform into the likeness of Jesus begins with identifying common but ineffective strategies people often employ in their spiritual journey. For over twenty years, I have observed these three "losing strategies" as a pastor.

### **Losing Strategy #1: Willpower**

While willpower is important, it is not a sustainable method for profound change. The notorious failure rate of New Year's resolutions—where 80% fall through by the end of January—illustrates its limitations. Willpower, much like a muscle, is limited and can exhaust quickly, unsuitable for lasting transformation. Small changes are manageable, but deep-seated habits, familial influences, and subconscious reactions such as trauma demand more than sheer self-effort. Jesus' teachings emphasize that true change originates in the heart. The process requires a partnership of self-effort and divine grace—allowing us to create space for practices that enable God to enact profound healing and transformation. As author Leslie Jamison notes, believing in something greater than our willpower reflects the need for this divine partnership.

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The second common misconception is the belief that increased biblical knowledge equates to spiritual maturity. Although the Scriptures are a foundational element for shaping Christian behavior, knowledge alone often does not lead to transformation. This stems from a Western, intellectual-centric mindset, where cognitive understanding is mistakenly prioritized over holistic practice. The philosopher James K. A. Smith aptly illustrates that following Jesus is about embodied practice, akin to mastering a physical discipline like aikido rather than acquiring academic theories. Knowing God's commandments is different from naturally embodying them. For instance, understanding the value of generosity does not automatically make one generous—more profound integration of Jesus' teachings into our neurobiology is needed. Bible study and church activities are essential, yet without being coupled with genuine embodiment, they often lack transformative power.

### **Losing Strategy #3: The Zap from Heaven**

Lastly, some await a miraculous, instantaneous change akin to a "download" from heaven, drawing parallels to scenes in fiction such as "The Matrix." While divine interventions can result in deep, necessary change, relying solely on such moments can lead to spiritual laziness. True discipleship

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involves daily, diligent work, not just the pursuit of spiritual highs. In the Gospels, Jesus healed many physically but did not instantly rectify disciples' flawed character traits; instead, he guided them to grow over time. The journey of discipleship involves gradual, incremental growth, similar to natural maturation processes.

In summary, these strategies underscore valuable aspects of spiritual growth, like the importance of will, Scripture, and divine encounters. However, when used in isolation, they fall short. Recognizing this opens the path to exploring effective methods of genuine transformation into Christlikeness. Two underlying issues with these strategies...

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## Chapter 18 Summary: Problem #1: Sin

The chapter on "sin" explores its multifaceted nature within the human condition, as agreed upon by various thinkers from different traditions. Rather than solely actions, sin is also recognized as a condition inherent in human beings. This chapter delves into three dimensions of sin: sin committed by us, sin committed against us, and sin surrounding us.

- 1. Sin Done by Us:** This is the most overt form of sin, encompassing the mistakes, misdeeds, and harmful actions we deliberately commit. The author emphasizes that acknowledging our tendency to "mess things up" is crucial for spiritual development, as denying this facet is akin to running an ultramarathon while severely incapacitated.
- 2. Sin Done to Us:** Beyond our actions, we also experience sin as victims. This includes the hurt, injustices, and betrayals we endure, tying our personal wickedness to our woundedness. The chapter highlights the importance of healing from these traumas to progress on our spiritual journeys.
- 3. Sin Done Around Us:** The final dimension considers the societal and environmental influences that corrupt us, otherwise known as secondary trauma. This idea aligns with the concept of original sin, suggesting we are born into a world inclined towards wrongdoing, complicating our efforts to



live virtuously.

The conventional Western view of sin, focusing on guilt and innocence, is recognized but critiqued for its narrowness. The chapter proposes alternative paradigms, such as seeing sin as a disease of the soul and salvation as holistic healing. This perspective aligns with early Christian thought, where Jesus is viewed as a "doctor of the soul."

The chapter underscores the transformative power of confession—not as a form of public self-flagellation, but as an act of naming our faults and wounds within a supportive community. Confession, akin to the practices in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), involves radical honesty, surrender to a higher power, and community support. This triadic structure is essential for spiritual growth and healing.

In conclusion, confronting our sins is the first step towards healing and transformation. Ignorance and self-deception hinder progress, underscoring the need for introspection and vulnerability. True change begins by openly acknowledging our failings and allowing divine and communal intervention to facilitate our journey towards love and wholeness.

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## Chapter 19 Summary: Problem #2: You've already been formed

In this chapter, the author challenges the idea that individuals begin life with a blank slate, specifically addressing it from a Christian perspective. The chapter first establishes that our inherent nature is subject to powerful pre-existing forces that shape us, regardless of our spiritual beliefs or intentions to become more like Jesus. These forces are identified as the stories we believe, our habitual actions, and our relationships.

**1. Stories We Believe:** Humans are narrative creatures who construct mental maps through stories, which guide our understanding of the world and influence our actions. For instance, if someone adopts society's materialistic narrative that equates wealth with happiness, they may become driven by greed and dissatisfaction. Contrarily, believing in Jesus' teachings about wealth, seeing it as an obstacle to spiritual fulfillment, could lead someone to a life of simplicity and generosity, reflecting a Jesus-like character. Ultimately, the stories we adopt dictate who we become.

**2. Habits:** The chapter refers to Charles Duhigg's concept of the "power of habit," highlighting that our repetitive actions shape us profoundly. Activities we engage in regularly—such as watching TV or shopping—do more than occupy time; they mold our inner selves and desires. Thus, our character is essentially the sum of our habits, whether they lead us toward



good or ill.

**3. Relationships:** Our interactions with family and friends significantly define who we are, often leading us to mirror those we associate with. The influence of our family of origin, peers, societal groups, and cultural affiliations is deep-rooted, affecting our actions, beliefs, and even politics. The author stresses the importance of discerning the ways we've been unintentionally shaped by our surrounding environments to ensure they align more closely with the teachings of Jesus.

The author emphasizes that Christian formation is a form of counter-formation, contrasting with the prevailing cultural norms. Citing Paul's letter to the Romans, the command is to resist conformity to worldly patterns and instead pursue transformation into Christ-like figures. In the overwhelmingly formative environment of ancient Rome, this counter-formation was critically important, as it is in modern times, with diverse cultural pressures.

To truly embody the teachings of Jesus, people must rigorously examine the forces shaping them and deliberately replace them with stories, habits, and relationships that guide them towards spiritual growth and fulfillment. Life is inherently a process of spiritual formation, and recognizing everyday actions as liturgical acts can help alter one's trajectory from being malformed by secular influences to being spiritually enriched. By



intentionally partnering with Jesus in their daily choices and pursuing the practices he exemplified, individuals can aspire to become "fully alive," reflecting the divine image within. This endeavor raises the fundamental inquiry: How can one effectively partner with Jesus in this transformative journey?

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## Chapter 20: A working theory of change

In this chapter, the author introduces a "working theory of change," a model of spiritual and personal transformation. This theory, while not an absolute truth, draws from various fields, including Scripture, psychology, and social sciences, and aims to help those seeking transformation in their spiritual journey.

**1. Teaching (Truth):** The chapter emphasizes the role of teaching in reshaping our beliefs and mental frameworks. Jesus, viewed as a rabbi, imparts truth that helps counter the lies and false stories propagated in society. Humans have the unique capacity to imagine and sometimes believe unreality, which makes the role of truth crucial for spiritual growth. Transforming our vision of God, as Tozer suggested, directly influences who we become, thus making it imperative to confront and heal our false images of God.

**2. Practices (Training):** Just as you wouldn't attempt to run a marathon without training, spiritual growth requires continuous practice and effort. The author stresses the importance of spiritual disciplines, akin to training regimens, as necessary to embody the teachings of Jesus, such as living without anxiety. Practice, rather than mere trying, cultivates the kind of character that aligns with the values of Jesus.





3. **Community:** Emphasizing that spiritual growth cannot occur in isolation, the chapter highlights the necessity of community as a crucible for genuine progress in the Christian life. Salvation is seen as a communal experience, akin to adoption into God's family, fostering relationships that mend what is broken by the fall of man. Despite the inherent flaws in any church, embracing and participating in community is essential, as real growth occurs in genuine interpersonal relationships.

4. **The Holy Spirit:** The chapter underscores the transformative power of the Holy Spirit as the ultimate source of change. While practices and community provide a structure for growth, it is the grace and power of the Holy Spirit that effect real change, doing the heavy lifting in our journey towards becoming Christlike.

5. **Over Time:** Transformation is depicted as a "long obedience in the same direction," emphasizing patience and a long-term commitment. Unlike the instant gratification sought by society, spiritual growth requires consistent and intentional time investment, akin to nurturing any significant relationship.

6. **Through Suffering:** The chapter concludes by acknowledging the transformative potential of suffering. Trials, though painful, serve as opportunities for deep growth and character formation. By opening one's pain to God, suffering can become a crucible for forming one's soul into the



likeness of Jesus.

In summary, the chapter provides a holistic view of spiritual transformation, blending various elements like teaching, practice, community, divine guidance, time, and suffering into a cohesive path towards becoming more like Jesus—transforming one's heart, mind, and soul in the process.

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## Chapter 21 Summary: Terrible,wonderful news: You are not in control

The chapter begins with a profound assertion that individuals are not in control of their spiritual journeys. This is a challenging lesson, particularly in today's digital era where technology has conditioned people to expect instant gratification and easy solutions. Growing up in Silicon Valley, the author is especially aware of technology's dual nature—its potential for good and its detrimental impact on personal and spiritual development. It fosters an unrealistic expectation that life should be easy, fast, and controllable.

However, spiritual growth, particularly in the Christian tradition of becoming like Jesus, is described as a gradual and arduous process akin to tending a vineyard rather than ordering fast food. There's a danger in believing that mastering spiritual techniques can lead to personal perfection; instead, spiritual formation involves relinquishing control to God and embracing divine grace.

This challenging truth is ultimately liberating because it reminds believers that salvation and transformation come through Jesus, not their efforts. The journey toward Christlikeness is often long and fraught with struggles, but it promises profound joy and fulfillment akin to a mother rejoicing after childbirth. Change may be slow, but transformation into a person filled with love, joy, and peace is achievable.



The chapter then transitions to the concept of apprenticeship to Jesus. Just as students in various fields aim to embody the skills and practices of their teachers—be it plumbing or medicine—Jesus' followers are called to emulate his actions and teachings. The gospel of Acts is presented as a continuation of Jesus' works, demonstrating how his disciples carried on his mission after his ascension. The training process is likened to a four-stage apprenticeship: observing, assisting, practicing with guidance, and finally, independently continuing the work.

The chapter emphasizes that being an apprentice of Jesus means striving to live as he would in one's unique life context—a concept distilled into the question, "What would Jesus do if he were me?" This perspective encourages believers to engage with their distinct circumstances—whether a job, family, or community role—with the mindset of embodying Jesus' teachings and actions.

The narrative acknowledges a common skepticism: the difficulty in believing one can emulate Jesus, who was divine. However, the chapter closes with a reminder from the biblical figure, John, asserting that truly living in Jesus involves striving to live as he did, despite the challenges and differences in circumstance. This journey of apprenticeship is a lifelong endeavor to reflect Christ's presence in everyday life.





## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Relinquishing Control and Embracing Divine Grace

**Critical Interpretation:** You've probably wrestled with the desire to control every aspect of your life, especially in your spiritual journey. However, this chapter powerfully illustrates how true spiritual growth demands letting go of this control and trusting in divine grace instead. In a world that champions immediate results—where pressing 'enter' satisfies your curiosity within seconds—you might be tempted to apply the same expectation to your spiritual walk. But genuine transformation, as this chapter hints, requires a process more akin to patiently tending a vineyard than zipping through a drive-thru. By releasing the grip on perfection and surrendering your journey to the influence of Christ's love and wisdom, you open yourself up to a profound sense of freedom and liberation. Yes, it's slow and fraught with challenges, like climbing a mountain with no clear view of the summit. Yet, isn't it beautiful to know you're promised the profound joy of being filled with love, joy, and peace, like a tender vine growing strong over time? With each step, each attempt to see the world through Jesus' teachings, you find yourself inching towards a life embracing true abundance and fulfillment.

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## Chapter 22 Summary: Jesus the prototype

The chapter titled "Jesus the Prototype" delves into the theological understanding of Jesus as a model for humanity. The New Testament writers refer to Jesus as the "firstfruits," an agricultural metaphor indicating the first sign of a larger harvest. In this context, Jesus represents the initial example of what humans can become in him, akin to calling him a "prototype" of a new kind of human being. This implies that Jesus' life on Earth was an advanced version of human potential, serving as a template for how individuals can shape their own lives.

Contrary to this view, many Western Christians primarily interpret Jesus' miracles as proof of his divinity rather than as a guide for living. This perspective stems from the Enlightenment era, where Jesus' role was reduced to that of a great teacher, allowing people to selectively adhere to his teachings. This gave rise to a counterargument emphasizing Jesus' miraculous acts as evidence of his divine nature. However, this logic is flawed as it overlooks the fact that Jesus' disciples and earlier Hebrew prophets also performed miracles without being equated with God.

The chapter then addresses the source of Jesus' miraculous power, attributing it to the Holy Spirit rather than inherent divine abilities. Luke's Gospel highlights that Jesus operated in "the power of the Spirit," emphasizing reliance on divine connection rather than exercising god-like powers. This



signifies that Jesus' incarnation was a demonstration of both true divinity and authentic humanity—what humans can achieve when aligned with God.

Jesus himself stated that anyone who believes in him would do the works he performed, and even greater. Though scholars debate the meaning of "greater things," the consensus is that it implies a continuation, not diminishment, of his work. The same spiritual power that enabled Jesus and his apostles is available to believers, urging them to surrender to the Father and be receptive to the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Through this, believers are encouraged to become disciples trustworthy with spiritual power, capable of stewarding it with grace. This pursuit involves understanding Jesus' ministry, which moved through stages of solitude, community, and active ministry. Jesus' ministry can be distilled into three core rhythms: creating opportunities for the gospel, preaching the gospel, and demonstrating the gospel. Each of these aspects highlights how believers can actively participate in bringing about God's kingdom on Earth, following Jesus' example.

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## Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Jesus as the Prototype for Humanity

**Critical Interpretation:** Through recognizing Jesus as humanity's prototype, you are invited to view his life as a template for your own spiritual and practical journey. Rather than solely seeing his miracles as proof of divinity, interpret them as demonstrations of what is achievable through divine connection. This understanding encourages you to align with the Holy Spirit, enabling you to channel spiritual power in your life akin to how Jesus did. The call is to embrace the promise that you can embody this divine-human potential, actively participating in the rhythms of Jesus' ministry—solitude, community, and action—and thereby contribute to the unfolding of God's kingdom on Earth.

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## **Chapter 23 Summary: Rhythm #1: Making space for the gospel (i.e., hospitality)**

### **Rhythm #1: Making Space for the Gospel through Hospitality**

The modern world often views Christianity with hostility, seeing it as part of the problem rather than the solution. This isn't new; even in Jesus' time, many were so hostile to his message that they ultimately killed him. In such a charged atmosphere, how can one create space for God? Jesus demonstrated a simple yet profound way: through meals.

The story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19 is a prime example. Zacchaeus, a despised tax collector akin to a Nazi collaborator, was someone no respectable rabbi would dine with. Yet, Jesus not only ate with him but transformed him into a follower. Meals, as anthropologist Mary Douglas put it, serve as "boundary markers"—they can both separate and unite. In first-century Jewish culture, eating together signified acceptance and community. Jesus subverted this norm by using meals to invite those on the fringes—tax collectors, sinners, and Gentiles—into the kingdom of God.

In Luke's Gospel, food is a persistent theme, underscoring its importance in Jesus' ministry. As theologian Robert Karris noted, "In Luke's Gospel Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal." This reflects

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Jesus' mission and method: to seek and save the lost by simply eating and drinking with them.

This approach, called "hospitality" in the New Testament, comes from the Greek term "philoxenia," meaning love of the stranger. Hospitality stands in stark contrast to xenophobia, embodying a genuine acceptance of the "other." By creating welcoming spaces, Christians can slowly guide others on their spiritual journeys.

Henri Nouwen emphasized the importance of hospitality in a world filled with loneliness and alienation. It is both a scheduled practice and a way of life—a fundamental openness towards others. In acting hospitably, we reflect the welcoming nature of the divine, offering safety, community, and joy. Rosaria Butterfield calls this "radically ordinary hospitality," which transforms strangers into neighbors and neighbors into the family of God.

Meals are ideal for fostering connections and opening dialogues, making them perfect for sharing the gospel. You don't need to be a skilled evangelist or have a perfect setting; you simply need a table to bring people together. This method, following the example of Jesus, is a universal practice that anyone can adopt. By repurposing meals to extend God's welcome, we can invite others to explore faith in an authentic and meaningful way.

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## Chapter 24: Rhythm #2: Preaching the gospel

The chapter “Rhythm #2: Preaching the Gospel” begins with a relatable anecdote about the author's teenage son, Jude, who is disturbed by a street evangelism encounter. The experience, which involved Christians loudly proclaiming the gospel with signs and bullhorns, left Jude worried that such tactics could alienate rather than attract people to Jesus, especially his non-Christian friend. This reflects a broader discomfort many feel towards antiquated or aggressive evangelistic methods.

The author reveals an internal conflict about evangelism, loving the gospel but cringing at the thought of preaching it in the traditional sense. The root issue, he suggests, isn't just ineffective methods but an overall lack of evangelism activity. A Barna Group poll highlights this tension among millennials, who overwhelmingly see value in sharing their faith yet also find it problematic to do so directly.

In today's pluralistic and postmodern culture, proselytizing is often perceived negatively. Yet, the truth is everyone preaches a kind of gospel—whether it's about social movements, health trends, or political ideologies—each claiming to offer hope and solutions. The key question, then, is not whether one is preaching but what message they are sharing.

The author defines the gospel simply as spreading the news of Jesus and



living in the kingdom of God. Unlike some misconceptions, the gospel isn't solely an afterlife promise but an invitation to a transformative life with Jesus here and now. Through his teachings and sacrifice, Jesus offers a path to a fulfilling life intertwined with divine love and the creation of a new society rooted in peace and justice.

The chapter argues that we've lost our sense of witness due to reactions against ham-fisted and judgmental evangelism styles, which have often left people feeling degraded. However, witnessing is vital to Christian discipleship and should be revitalized with thoughtful, culturally sensitive methods.

Five best practices for evangelism in a secular context are presented:

1. **Offer Hospitality:** Building community through simple acts like cooking meals together creates natural spaces for sharing faith.
2. **Find Where God is Already Working** Assume that God is active in everyone's life, and join in on where His presence is already felt, rather than starting every interaction from zero.
3. **Bear Witness:** Evangelism should be as straightforward as sharing personal experiences of God's work in one's life, akin to a witness in a trial rather than a salesperson.



4. **Do the Stuff:** Engage in the spiritual gifts found in the New Testament—such as healing and prophecy—to share the gospel in a powerful, yet calm and loving manner.

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## Chapter 25 Summary: Rhythm #3: Demonstrating the gospel

Chapter three of the book explores the concept of demonstrating the gospel through actions that embody the teachings of Jesus. Unlike simply preaching, Jesus lived out the gospel through tangible expressions of God's kingdom on earth, blending word and deed seamlessly. It emphasizes that Jesus didn't just talk about the kingdom of God; he lived it out through his actions and interactions with others. The narrative demonstrates that when Jesus was present, so was the kingdom.

One significant way Jesus displayed the kingdom was through hospitality, likened by Hebrew prophets to a grand feast where all people, Jew and Gentile, gathered in a new community of peace and justice. This vision was brought to life by Jesus through his meals with "sinners," which were not merely symbolic of salvation but represented salvation itself, as seen in his encounter with Zacchaeus.

The chapter critically evaluates how previous generations of Christians, influenced by the Enlightenment, misinterpreted the miracle stories. Instead, it proposes these stories should be seen as signs of God's kingdom breaking into the world. Jürgen Moltmann, a German theologian, proposed that miracles are restorations of the natural order, countering the chaos and destruction that humanity has come to accept as normal.





The chapter outlines four signs of the kingdom regularly demonstrated by Jesus and his disciples: healing, deliverance, prophecy, and justice. In healing, Jesus became renowned as a healer across Israel, with the sick being brought to him in droves. His influence continued with the early church, where healing became a recognized practice even among the apostles.

Deliverance is highlighted as Jesus exposed and expelled demonic forces, a concept challenging to comprehend in a secular world. However, these acts reveal a deeper worldview where both human and nonhuman beings exist, some of whom threaten God's intentions for humanity.

Prophecy is another sign where Jesus and his disciples exhibited the ability to access divine knowledge beyond human understanding. The apostle Paul called this prophecy, an ability the chapter explains is accessible to believers through the Spirit. Prophecy involves conveying words or impressions from God, approached with humility and love.

Justice, the final sign, is presented as a central component of God's heart, with Jesus following a tradition of Hebrew prophets advocating for justice. Justice involves making wrong things right, exemplified by Jesus' cleansing of the temple. Practicing justice means disadvantaging oneself for the benefit of others and participating in restoring order in the world.



The chapter concludes by encouraging believers to live a life open to these signs, partnering with God in everyday moments. This involves being attentive to where God is at work and joining Him, following Jesus' mantra of only doing what he sees the Father doing. It invites readers to slow down, become present to each moment, and recognize the divine opportunities all around them, emphasizing that every interaction and every day is imbued with the potential for miracles.

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## Chapter 26 Summary: “The joyous burdens of love”

In "The Joyous Burdens of Love," the concept of balancing life's demands with a meaningful spiritual journey is explored. In today's age of anxiety and stress, we are reminded that following Jesus' teachings is not about adding overwhelming tasks but recognizing our collective role, as Paul described the church as "the body of Christ." This analogy underscores the idea that no single person is responsible for everything; it is a shared burden where each of us contributes uniquely.

Thomas Kelly's insights reflect that God grants each of us specific tasks—a "joyous burden of love"—fitting into the broader picture of universal love with individual missions. We can't bear all crosses, but through personal inclinations, we are drawn to particular causes or activities that resonate with us, bringing joy.

These energies of love manifest primarily in two areas: our work and "good works." Work, viewed as a calling or ministry, is elevated from mere job responsibilities to expressions of love, as seen through the words of Tony Evans. The transformative mindset shifts from merely time-marking to infusing our roles with purpose akin to how Jesus might approach our jobs. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. illustrated, excellence in any task, no matter how mundane, constitutes a profound form of service.

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The second field of love includes spontaneous acts of kindness, echoing Jesus' call for his followers to be the light through their good deeds. Inner stirrings for small acts of generosity often signify our "joyous burden," and fulfilling these can lead to deep happiness.

Tension exists between contemplative and active lives—being with Jesus versus doing as he did—which should not be contradictory but a harmonious blend leading to a balanced, purposeful life. Overcoming reactive living and the chaos of modern life in favor of intentional, spiritually-aligned action represents the hardest yet most fulfilling path.

For spiritual aspirations, such as visiting Japan, a plan is essential. Just as we organize our finances or schedules, a similarly structured approach is vital for spiritual growth. Intentional planning nurtures spiritual depth, as Pete Scazzero highlights, moving beyond mere good intentions to a disciplined life redesigned for divine transformation.

John Ortberg emphasizes the urgency of rearranging our days for deep joy and contentment with God, requiring liberation from modern life's hurried, exhausting pace. Discipleship becomes a conscious effort to decelerate, creating space for spiritual metamorphosis.

Such thoughtful planning provides a roadmap, ensuring our spiritual endeavors aren't just aspirations but realized journeys toward living more

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# Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Balancing Demands with Joyous Burdens

**Critical Interpretation:** The concept of 'The Joyous Burdens of Love' highlights a transformative approach to life's demands by embracing specific tasks as joyous responsibilities. This idea invites you to reshape your mindset and approach the obligations in your life not as heavy weights, but as purposeful and fulfilling calls to action. By recognizing that you have unique contributions to offer, these tasks shift from overwhelming to meaningful pursuits that resonate deeply with your heart's calling. This perspective encourages you to integrate love into your daily work, turning ordinary tasks into extraordinary expressions of your individuality and purpose. By approaching your duties with the intentional mindset of a follower of Jesus, you transform your life into an avenue for spiritual growth, balancing moments of action with contemplation, and ultimately finding a life rich in joy, meaning, and service.

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## Chapter 27 Summary: The trellis and the vine

In the chapter "The Trellis and the Vine," the author introduces the concept of a "Rule of Life," a framework derived from ancient Christian practices that is deemed vital for the future church. This concept addresses the fundamental question posed by early followers of Jesus, which remains relevant today: How do we genuinely transform through discipleship?

The Rule of Life is not a collection of rules; rather, it's a singular rule (from the Latin word "regula") akin to a trellis in a vineyard. A trellis serves as a support structure that enables a vine to grow and produce fruit by lifting it towards the light and guiding its growth. Similarly, for followers of Jesus—referred to as apprentices—a Rule of Life acts as a spiritual framework that supports and guides them to abide in Jesus (the vine), bear spiritual fruit, and protect against spiritual vulnerabilities.

This Rule comprises a schedule, practices, and relational rhythms that align life with one's core desire to be with Jesus, emulate his character, and perform his works. It doesn't imply mere adherence to rules but organizing life around the most significant aspect: one's relationship with God. As articulated by Rich Villodas, it is a Spirit-inspired set of commitments fostering wholeness in Christ.

Historically, in the early church, the terms "Way of Life" and "Rule of Life"

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were synonymous, reflecting a lifestyle devoted to Christ's teachings.

Notably, in the New Testament, Apostle Paul references his way of life that synchronizes with his teachings. Later, with the Latinization of church practices, figures like Saint Benedict popularized the term "Rule" to denote the same principle.

A Rule of Life can be likened to the stability marriage provides amid fluctuating emotions, as David Brooks describes commitment as structuring behavior during times when love is challenged. The chapter highlights Dietrich Bonhoeffer's wisdom, advocating for commitment over transient emotions as the foundation for sustaining love and effecting transformation.

Ultimately, the Rule of Life emphasizes constraint through commitment, paralleling the metamorphic transformation of caterpillars into butterflies. It is within this committed structure that true spiritual maturity and transformation occur, empowering followers to evolve into creatures of enduring beauty in their spiritual journey.

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## Chapter 28: You already have a Rule of Life

The concept of a "Rule of Life" suggests that everyone has a set of habits and routines, whether consciously formulated or not, that shapes their day-to-day existence. This framework may be beneficial or detrimental, organized toward long-term success or driven by short-term desires. It's crucial to understand and evaluate your Rule of Life to determine if it aligns with your desired outcomes.

The idea is to perform a spiritual self-inventory, similar to assessments performed in the business world, which acknowledges that your current system of living is perfectly designed to produce the outcomes you are experiencing. If you find yourself emotionally unbalanced, disconnected from spiritual aspects, stressed, or failing to grow into a more loving person, these are indicators that your lifestyle arrangements may need reevaluation.

The proposed Rule of Life challenges modern definitions of freedom, suggesting that true liberation comes not through unrestrained choice but through embracing beneficial constraints. This idea resonates with the thoughts of Francis Spufford, who noted that our perceived freedom can sometimes lead to unsatisfactory life situations. The message underscores that it is our daily actions that define who we become.

Annie Dillard's insight that “how we spend our days is, of course, how we

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spend our lives” is reframed here to emphasize spiritual growth. Everyday decisions contribute to shaping personal identity, such as choosing social media over engaging with more spiritually or intellectually nourishing activities, which subsequently influences character development.

The text emphasizes that daily habits, like excessive social media use or unjustifiable spending, are not merely isolated actions but choices shaping one's identity. These choices have transformative power, shaping human beings over time. Thus, it encourages a mindful approach to daily living, understanding that routine actions have profound impacts on spiritual and personal growth.

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## Chapter 29 Summary: Guarding and guiding

In the chapter titled "Guarding and Guiding," the concept of a "Rule of Life" is explored as a balance between guarding one's habits and guiding one's life. This idea is beautifully put forward by Christian intellectual Andy Crouch, who describes it as a set of practices aimed at nurturing oneself while keeping harmful influences at bay. The metaphor of a gardener tending plants and eliminating weeds conveys how we must carefully choose what to cultivate and what to remove from our lives.

The author shares their personal "Rule of Life," which includes traditional spiritual disciplines such as daily prayer, weekly Sabbath observance, and monthly solitude. However, it also features unique practices tailored to combat the negative aspects of the digital age. These "anti-habits" function as counter-formations against the distractions and deformations caused by technology.

Examples include:

- "Parenting" the phone by setting strict boundaries, such as using an analog alarm clock and putting the phone away during prayer and writing.
- Observing a 24-hour digital Sabbath with no use of digital devices, a practice extended to the author's teenage children.
- Limiting social media usage to one day a week, comparing excessive use to breathing toxic fumes.

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- Restricting media consumption to a maximum of four hours a week, inspired by Andy Crouch and the community at Praxis, to encourage transformation by the renewal of the mind rather than saturation by media.

These practices are not about legalism but are acknowledgments of one's vulnerability to technology's influence. The author stresses that these constraints do not measure spiritual maturity. Instead, they highlight the awareness of how unchecked media can shape a person in ways distant from the aspiration to become Christ-like.

The chapter challenges readers to consider their own "Rules" for digital engagement, cautioning against passive acceptance of control by technology and suggesting that personal rules can reclaim lives according to deeper desires. It questions the common belief in unrestrained freedom by pointing out that without chosen boundaries, one is subtly controlled by technology and its underlying algorithms.

Echoing Steve Jobs, who emphasized the importance of saying no to many opportunities to maintain focus, the author argues that living by a Rule of Life involves careful selection and frequent denial of various options. This disciplined approach aligns with the decision-making criteria of asking not just whether an action is sinful, but whether it brings one closer to Jesus.

Ultimately, the text posits that a well-chosen Rule of Life enriches one's

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existence by enabling a focused, intentional, and peaceful lifestyle, admired by many but achieved by few. It stresses the empowerment that comes from taking control of one's constraints, suggesting that such freedom leads to a life more aligned with one's deepest values and aspirations.

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## Chapter 30 Summary: Four things a good Rule will do for you

The essence of a good Rule of Life is to transform visions and aspirations into tangible realities, providing a structured path that helps individuals align their deepest desires with their daily actions. It serves as a crucial tool for authentic transformation, allowing us to overcome the tendency to self-sabotage by turning aspirations into habits embedded in our bodies and minds. This is akin to mastering a golf swing—not just understanding it intellectually but ingraining it into muscle memory through practice. A Rule of Life moves spiritual ideas beyond mere sentiment into living practice, bridging the gap between hearing sermons or reading books and actually living the principles.

Furthermore, a Rule of Life encourages inner peace by aligning one's schedule with personal values. This alignment counters the constant anxiety many experience due to misaligned lives, exacerbated by the digital world's distractions. Saint Seraphim of Sarov highlighted the tranquility that comes from inner peace, a quality that influences those around us. As emphasized by Stephen Covey, achieving this peace involves ensuring our activities reflect our core values, a challenge in our frenetic digital age. A Rule of Life acts as resistance to this distraction, fostering an intentional life attuned to our deepest desires, whether it's spiritual growth or a particular lifestyle.

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Living at the right pace is another benefit of a Rule of Life. Both hastiness and lethargy can be detrimental—hastiness leads to burnout while sloth saps life's dynamism. Known as "acedia," or sloth, this state was once referred to by monks as "the noonday demon," highlighting the spiritual dangers of inactivity. The Rule guides us to maintain a balanced, well-paced life that propels us consistent toward personal goals.

Balancing freedom and discipline is essential for a fulfilled life, and a Rule of Life aids in achieving this balance. Unlike rigid laws, a Rule is adaptable, stemming from internal desires and designed to steer one toward a good life without the rigidity that triggers guilt. It functions more as an anchor: a guiding principle that provides stability while allowing for flexibility. This balance encourages spontaneity within structure, promoting both freedom and discipline.

A Rule of Life is a personalized, evolving guide rather than a restrictive set of obligations. It serves as a "spiritual budget," subject to revision as one's life progresses, advocating for a flexible approach to spiritual formation. The ultimate goal is to live in freedom according to one's unique path, rather than being bound by rigid ritualistic practices. Though individualized, certain core practices from the teachings of Jesus are encouraged to appear in any Rule of Life, ensuring it aligns with universal spiritual principles.

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## Chapter 31 Summary: The practices defined

The chapter explores the concept of "practices," often referred to as "spiritual disciplines," which are integral to the Christian life. Various terms used to describe these practices include "altars of availability," "sacred rhythms," "rhythms of grace," and "means of grace." These practices are habits modeled on the lifestyle of Jesus, designed to create time and space for spiritual transformation through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The chapter clarifies what these practices are not. Firstly, they are not a metric of spiritual maturity. Although discipline is part of being a disciple, true spiritual maturity is measured by love, not rigid adherence to practices. Discipline serves as a path toward being with, becoming like, and doing as Jesus did. Secondly, these practices are not burdensome. In fact, many, like Sabbath and celebration, are joyful, while others become joyful with time. The chapter cites Richard Foster, who affirms that "joy is the keynote of all the Disciplines."

Thirdly, these practices are not about earning God's favor. They are pathways toward the life God offers, not merit-based systems. For individuals with legalistic backgrounds, understanding that these are expressions of grace, not religious oppression, is crucial. Fourthly, they are not forms of virtue signaling to appear righteous in others' eyes. Jesus warned against performing practices for the sake of being seen, as they



should nurture spiritual formation, not egotism. Lastly, they are not about controlling outcomes in life to avoid pain. Instead, they are means to encounter God amidst pain and deepen surrender to His will.

A discipline, in general, is any activity done through direct effort to achieve what cannot yet be done by direct effort. Using an athletic metaphor, the author compares spiritual practices to basketball drills; both require training to achieve growth. Unlike athletic training based solely on personal ability, spiritual disciplines access both personal and divine power, as they align individuals with God's transformative presence.

The chapter emphasizes a "synergy" between human effort and divine work: God transforms, and we participate by making space and surrendering to Him. Jesus demonstrated core practices such as Sabbath, Scripture reading, prayer, and fasting—"classical disciplines" essential to following Him. Yet, anything can become a spiritual discipline if offered to God as a channel of grace.

In conclusion, the practices are vital but not all-encompassing. They initiate the journey towards embodying Jesus's way of life, helping to re-habituate sinful tendencies and naturally live out His teachings. By embracing these practices with joyful love, individuals are drawn into a deeper relationship with God and the inner life of love shared within the Trinity.

Concept	Description
Definition of Practices	Practices, also known as spiritual disciplines, are habits based on Jesus's lifestyle aimed at spiritual transformation through the Holy Spirit.
Misconceptions	<p>Not Indicators of Spiritual Maturity: True maturity is measured by love.</p> <p>Not Burdensome: Practices like Sabbath are joyful; others become joyful over time.</p> <p>Not Earning God's Favor: They are pathways to life, not merit-based.</p> <p>Not Virtue Signaling: Should nurture real spiritual growth, not perceived righteousness.</p> <p>Not Controlling Outcomes: They invite God into pain and require surrender to His will.</p>
Role of Practices	Practices serve as channels for grace and spiritual growth, blending human effort with divine work to transform individuals.
Examples of Practices	Sabbath, Scripture reading, prayer, fasting among others, can be spiritual disciplines when offered to God.
Conclusion	Practices initiate the journey towards embodying Jesus's life, helping to naturally live out His teachings with love, fostering a deeper relationship with God.



## Chapter 32: The nine

The book segment expands on nine core spiritual practices integral to the lifestyle of an apprentice of Jesus, offering comprehensive guidance on incorporating these practices into a Rule of Life. The absence of an official list of Jesus' practices is acknowledged, suggesting that habits such as walking in nature and washing feet could form part of an apprentice's spiritual formation.

### ### 1. Sabbath

The spiritual journey is introduced with the concept of rest, signifying its importance by referencing Biblical scripture where both the day and week commence with rest, emphasizing Sabbath as a cornerstone practice. It's highlighted as a critical means for renewal and for keeping one's heart tuned to the beauty of life and God amidst life's challenges, underpinning the belief that rest is essential for personal growth and connection with God.

### ### 2. Solitude

Solitude is defined as the most foundational practice, coupling this with silence as a companion. This practice, noted for aiding in spiritual development, is where distractions fade, allowing the peace and presence of God to become evident. It's underscored by historical spiritual beliefs about the pivotal role of silence in communion with God, portraying it as an entryway into divine mystery.

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### ### 3. Prayer

Prayer is depicted as more than just petitioning God, expanding into a broader form of communication and communion. It unfolds into four dimensions: talking to God, talking with God, listening, and simply being with God. Emphasis is placed on showing up regularly to build a loving, ongoing relationship with God, regardless of the method or starting point.

### ### 4. Fasting

Fasting is highlighted as a powerful yet neglected practice, portrayed as an act of worship using one's body to connect with God and foster spiritual growth. The practice involves willingly undergoing discomfort to amplify prayers, discipline desires, and nurture a deeper experience of joy. It confronts the soul's needs, paving the way for grace and spiritual nourishment.

### ### 5. Scripture

Scripture serves as the tool for transforming the mind to reflect Christ's mindset. The document elaborates on various ways to engage with Scripture that fill, form, and liberate one's mind by adopting divine perspectives and sentiments, suggesting it as a path to living in Christ-like joy and peace.

### ### 6. Community

Community is positioned as vital for spiritual formation and healing,



countering the isolation fostered by Western individualism. The church fosters re-parenting into God's family and provides a platform for communal growth and transformation. Life together involves worship, shared meals, and spiritual guidance, underscoring the idea that community is essential for travel on the spiritual path.

#### ### 7. Generosity

Generosity is encouraged as an outcome of simplified living when one centers life around Christ. This practice of giving mirrors divine selflessness and unlocks joy. It advocates experiencing the fulfillment of participating in God's love-sharing, significantly linking a life of giving with the pursuit of happiness.

#### ### 8. Service

Service is emphasized as key to healing the world's divisions and oneself. Mirroring Jesus' example of service, this practice aims to mend societal injustices by acting selflessly for others. Participants in service often find personal freedom and healing, blurring lines between giver and recipient.

#### ### 9. Witness

Witnessing involves sharing the gospel in a culture resistant to spirituality, requiring hospitality and the embodiment of divine love and generosity. It's about extending warmth and understanding to those marginalized by society, suggesting that change often begins with simple acts of inviting others into



one's world.

These nine practices together form a "trellis" that supports holistic spiritual growth and transformation in a modern world teeming with distractions and divisions. The text invites readers to construct this supportive framework for a spiritually rich life in contemporary times.

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## Chapter 33 Summary: A few tips

In this exploration of crafting a Rule of Life, the author provides valuable guidance for embarking on this spiritual journey. The concept of a Rule of Life is about structuring one's spiritual practices to deepen connection with God, rooted in humility and self-awareness rather than rigid ambition.

1. **Start Where You Are:** Rather than striving for unrealistic goals that echo "first week of Lent syndrome," begin by assessing candidly where you are in your spiritual journey. Embrace "tiny habits" by starting small, with manageable and enjoyable spiritual practices, rather than overreaching.
2. **Subtract, Don't Just Add:** Emphasizing that following Jesus is about doing less, not more, the author suggests focusing not just on adding practices but on creating margins by removing distractions. Practices of abstinence (like silence and fasting) can be crucial for those living hectic lives, allowing space for spiritual growth.
3. **Seek Balance:** When crafting a Rule, consider a balanced mix of disciplines—those practiced alone and in community, and those involving engagement versus abstinence. Balance ensures a holistic approach, incorporating all aspects of discipleship.
4. **Consider Personality and Spiritual Temperament:** Understanding and

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aligning your Rule with your intrinsic personality traits and spiritual temperament makes the practice more genuine. Gary Thomas' "spiritual temperaments" offer diverse pathways, such as naturalists who connect with God in nature or intellectuals who engage through the mind, reinforcing that spirituality is deeply personal.

**5. Adapt to Life's Seasons:** Recognize that your Rule of Life will necessarily evolve with different life stages and discipleship phases, acknowledging the challenges and rewards of varying seasons. For instance, parents can find spiritual value in the chaos of young family life, integrating childlike interruptions as spiritual cues.

**6. Balance Upstream and Downstream Practices:** The Rule should combine downstream practices (natural and joyful) with upstream ones (challenging but growth-inducing), targeting both sins of commission and omission, ensuring comprehensive spiritual development.

**7. Embrace the J Curve:** Understanding that initial efforts may seem to worsen your skill before improvement occurs emphasizes the need for persistence. Like mastering the guitar, initial discomfort can lead to growth.

**8. Engage in Community:** Despite the trend toward individualism, historically, Rules of Life were communal. Engaging with a community fosters mutual support and accountability, enriching the journey. Bridgetown

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Church's experience exemplifies the strength found in shared spiritual rhythms.

**9. Embrace Repetition:** Change through repeated spiritual disciplines is gradual but significant. This iterative process can be akin to learning a skill like karate, where repetition fosters mastery, despite the absence of immediate gratification. Philosophers like G. K. Chesterton remind us of the divine joy found in the monotony of sacred routines.

Ultimately, crafting a Rule of Life is a deeply personal yet communal practice, where sustainable change emerges from the faithful repetition of small, intentional acts. The journey requires patience and the willingness to adapt, honoring the unique spiritual paths each individual may tread.

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## Chapter 34 Summary: Find your inner monk

In the chapters provided, the narrative explores the idea of following Jesus, advocating for integrating this commitment into one's life as the central focus rather than treating it as a mere hobby or secondary concern. It emphasizes that modern life, characterized by busyness, consumerism, and digital distractions, often eclipses the deeper spiritual callings of one's being.

The central theme is to discover one's "inner monk," a concept articulated by figures like the Japanese Canadian pastor Ken Shigematsu and scholar Greg Peters. This inner monk represents the spiritual yearning present within each of us for quiet prayer, solitude, and meaningful, heartfelt relationships. The text argues that adopting practices resembling monastic discipline—such as prayer, fasting, and abstinence from the cultural chase for pleasure and materialism—is vital for genuine spiritual growth.

The narrative encourages embracing the path of following Jesus, despite its challenges. Like apprenticeship under a master that naturally disrupts one's lifestyle, following Jesus requires embracing significant change and commitment. The potential transformation and communal enrichment promised by this path are profound, urging readers to find spiritual quiet even amidst the chaos of urban life.

The chapters highlight that the journey of discipleship isn't widely

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undertaken. Despite many being drawn to Jesus, few commit to the apprenticeship he invites. This invitation doesn't imply converting to a new religion but rather a call to live by the principles of the kingdom of God. Most individuals resist or procrastinate committing fully, often citing life's responsibilities or awaiting a more convenient time.

Jesus' approach is depicted as non-coercive; he extends an open invitation without manipulation or pressure. The narrative challenges readers to overcome excuses and delay, urging them to respond boldly to the spiritual calling.

It closes with an introspective invitation, asking readers to contemplate the steps they can take toward practicing the Way of Jesus. It speaks to the potential regrets of missed opportunities and ultimately calls for a response to the invitation of apprenticing under Jesus, suggesting that the path, while daunting, is filled with "inexpressible delight of love."

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## Chapter 35 Summary: Surrender

The chapter "Surrender" explores the challenges and deep commitments involved in following Jesus, highlighting the fundamental call to leave behind parts of one's life to fully embrace discipleship. This transformative journey demands a surrender of self-will, depicted metaphorically as taking up one's cross, symbolic of death to self-interest for greater spiritual growth.

Historically, early disciples of Jesus faced tangible, often perilous sacrifices, including martyrdom, as demonstrated by the fates of the twelve apostles, whose deaths fueled the growth of Christianity. For contemporary followers, especially in the Western world, the concept is more metaphorical, centering on the inner battle against self-will and societal norms that prioritize self-actualization over self-denial.

The chapter draws from theologians like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who termed this part of the spiritual journey "the cost of discipleship," and Jaroslav Pelikan, who emphasized Christ's role in teaching humanity how to truly live by learning how to die to self. It's noted that surrender is not just about relinquishing desires but finding true freedom and power in aligning entirely with God's will.

The narrative contrasts cultural pressures to prioritize personal feelings and desires with Christian teachings on obedience and trust in divine guidance.



This requires a shift from willfulness to willingness, echoing Jesus' own surrender to God's will, epitomized in his prayer, "Not my will, but yours be done."

The text further touches on the paradox present in Christian spirituality: that through dying to oneself, one finds renewed life and true self, and in losing lesser desires, one ultimately discovers a deeper fulfillment. Finally, the chapter invites the reader to consider whom to trust and which life path to follow, underscoring that trust in Jesus is central to the life of discipleship.

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## Chapter 36: The cost of (non-)discipleship

The chapter explores the dual notion of "cost" associated with the spiritual journey: the cost of discipleship versus the cost of non-discipleship. It suggests that embracing Jesus's teachings involves sacrifices, yet not doing so incurs an even greater loss. This presents a logical analysis of the potential futures one might choose—either following Jesus or navigating life on one's own path. Following Jesus might require giving up certain worldly comforts, but not doing so leads to a loss of a deeper, spiritual connection with God. It forfeits peace, joy, and freedom from the weight of sin.

Life inherently involves challenges, but these are magnified when faced without divine guidance. Living without spiritual direction leads to existential struggles, as life without God lacks meaning and direction. The chapter warns against the common human pursuit of trying to control one's life, seeking happiness through material or transient means, which often results in dissatisfaction and regret, especially noticeable during midlife crises.

The paradox at the heart of the Gospel is exemplified in the teaching that those who try to save their life will lose it, whereas those who surrender their life to Jesus will truly find it. It's a call to abandon the futile efforts to safeguard one's own happiness through self-serving means. Instead, life under Jesus's guidance, though demanding, offers a profound and





immeasurable reward.

The chapter illustrates this point with a parable of a man who discovers a treasure hidden in a field. In a rational move, he sells everything he owns to buy the field and gain the treasure, showcasing the timeless truth that the

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## Chapter 37 Summary: Begin again

The chapter explores the concept of the spiritual journey, likening it to the repetitive process of "falling and getting back up," much like the story recounted by Finnish Orthodox writer Tito Colliander about a monk in a monastery. The recurring theme is that of human imperfection and the inevitability of failure in spiritual endeavors. This is not a mark of being a poor apprentice, but rather a testament to the human condition.

The metaphor of walking with God frequently appears in Scripture, accompanied by its inevitable stumbling companion. Falling down on this path isn't a matter of if, but when. The crucial takeaway is the act of beginning again, as highlighted by Frank Laubach's reflections on daily failings to practice God's presence.

The narrative introduces the concept of "conversion of life," a vow taken by Benedictine monks symbolizing a lifelong commitment to continual spiritual growth. Salvation is depicted as an ongoing process, not a singular event; it's an endless journey that does not conclude until death, and perhaps not even then. The chapter reflects Saint Gregory of Nyssa's idea that in heaven, perfection signifies eternal growth rather than a static state—suggesting a journey of constant evolution towards divine possibilities.

Importantly, progress isn't achieved by climbing a spiritual success ladder

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but by descending into humility, embracing failures as essential learning experiences. The chapter acknowledges that many spiritual journeys, including the author's, are marked more by failure than success, emphasizing the necessity of the conversion of life—a continual commitment to spiritual development.

To embark on this journey, one must visualize and embody the beauty and potential of life in God's kingdom. Reading and rereading the Gospels, praying, and reflecting on Jesus' life are fundamental practices. Once one's heart is enraptured by this vision, the guidance is to begin right where one stands, taking the next right step, however small it might be, whether that involves baptism, joining a community, exploring new practices, or simply offering an honest prayer.

Ultimately, the journey encourages a relaxed approach, one that prioritizes rest and openness to God over hasty efforts. When failures occur—as they invariably will—it's crucial to rely on God's mercy rather than self-recrimination. The decision to live as an apprentice to Jesus involves a commitment to practicing His Way, taking incremental steps down a divine path, knowing that any journey begins with one small step. Even when the road becomes challenging and missteps occur, the vital mantra remains: "fall and get up, fall and get up, fall and get up." And always, begin again.

