

CORE

PRACTICES

explained

15 ways

WE'RE BECOMING LIKE JESUS



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Inside this Booklet:

Introduction	1
Worship	3
Devotion.....	3
The Bible	4
Prophecy.....	4
Intercession.....	6
Purity of Heart.....	6
The Arts.....	8
Generosity.....	9
Community	10
Circles of Sharing.....	10
Relationship	11
Rhythm.....	13
Prayer Ministry	14
Justice	16
Gospel.....	16
Mercy	17
Compassion.....	18
Confrontation	19

INTRODUCTION

In every place the gospel has been planted, the tree that grows from it looks a little different. As in nature, where the soil may have more clay, or the wind may blow more blustery, the church is shaped profoundly by the place it grows.

The place where we live impacts us; so does the passing of time. “As the twig is bent, so the tree's inclined” goes the proverb, and it is true that things that bumped us in our first years after we began in 1995, have left us leaning in peculiar and obvious directions by this our second decade.

What follows is an attempt to notice the particular bends of our branches, and twistings of our trunk. Yet for whatever uniqueness there may be here, what is clear is that we are a community that bears the signs of being planted by Jesus the Sower, and we carry in common with churches of all ages the struggle to keep the main thing the main thing:

"Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." (Mark 12: 28 - 31)

What is true of the tree as a whole is also true of the leaves. The growth, or discipleship, of the individual that is grafted or grown into us will reflect the same genetic code. These core practices are a description of

what we are intentionally mentoring and nurturing in the lives of individuals. They are a short and imperfect description of what we think a follower of Jesus looks like in our context.

Any simple summary has the disadvantage of not doing justice to what takes the whole of the New Testament to describe, but it can prove helpful in giving handles for us to “make disciples”. These core practices are more a tool for us to do the work of discipleship than they are a theological statement. We're not trying to replace the creeds – only live them out in our setting.

Our basic bent is set. But our prayer is still that we remain supple in the hands of the sower. He who planted can also prune. Let's practice these things, rooted as they are both in scripture and the soil of our city, so that we bear much fruit for the Master Gardener.

"We exist to build a safe community that invites all peoples to worship Jesus as they embrace a kingdom lifestyle that extends God's justice on the earth."

Worship – Community – Justice



WORSHIP

1 Devotion:

to Jesus

More than to any person or cause, we seek to be devoted followers of Jesus. We know him as God incarnate, Creator, Lord and Saviour: the one who shows us the heart of the Father. He lived in history, died, was raised from the dead, and lives today. He is our centre, as individuals and in our life together. Following him leads us to the Father; the Holy Spirit leads us to him.

Jesus is our hero.

Coldness of heart, idolatry, and disobedience must be transformed into passion, purity and obedience towards him. We'll live and die to be near to Him, be like him and to do his mission on the earth. Our most central practice is loving him. We want this love to flow into every part of our life. We want it to be seen in every way we think, and feel, and act. We ask his Spirit to fill us.

Mat 22:35-38, John 12:1-8, Mark 1:14-18, Eph 1:17, Rev 2:4-5



2 The Bible:

knowing and using it

Because God has spoken to us authoritatively in scripture, we need to know what it says, understand what it means, and figure out how to obey it. When we do that, it transforms our minds. It helps us to both know the important questions to ask, and to find God's answers. It acts like a map to show us God's view of reality.

So, we spend time teaching and learning from it when we gather together; we spend time pouring over it personally. We memorize it. We hear the Spirit speak through it. We pray from it. We encourage and correct each other with it in a spirit of love. Though it helps us discern what is right and what is wrong in people's lives (especially our own), we don't treat it as a weapon to judge people. Nor do we stop learning from people that understand it differently.

We study to understand its original context, so that it can be applied accurately in our time and in our cultures. Accepting what God speaks to us through His Word is part of worshiping him.

Josh 1:8, Psalm 119, Mark 12:24, Rom 12:2, 2 Tim 3:14-17

3 Prophecy:

hearing God

God speaks. When we listen, and speak what we hear, we understand this to be the gift of prophecy. While scripture is like a map, giving us the big picture, prophetic gifts can situate us on that map, and speak to

our immediate situation. Jesus taught that his sheep would hear his voice.

Paul stressed that an ability to hear the voice of God and speak what one heard was one of the greatest gifts that the Holy Spirit gave to his people. Though it seems that some people have unique gifts in this way, we know that all Christians have this ability to hear their Father.

When we practice this, we don't expect a person to go into a trance-like state or perform like a medium in a magical way. Rather, listening to God and sharing what we hear is as relational and natural an experience as talking to a dear friend. Nor does sharing what we hear need to be a poetic monologue in which we dress up our words to sound as close to King James language as we can. Prayer is a dialog between friends, and we can speak what we're hearing in everyday language. We can practice this gift of listening, and we find that over years, his voice becomes familiar, clearer and more recognizable.

We know that we still sometimes mistake what we hear, and so our practice is to test with others the validity of each "word" or impression that we believe might be from God. We practice this gift primarily for the purpose of encouraging each other, and building up God's people. We want to use this gift also to show those who don't know Him, that He knows them. We are least likely to use this gift to try and predict, direct individuals' courses of action, or find them marriage partners!

Psalms 19:1-3, John 1:1, John 16:12, 13, 1 Cor 14

4 Intercession:

*praying for God's purposes
on the earth*

God has chosen to place his power behind a people that prays. In doing so he wants to work with His church in an intimate way (his “bride”) to accomplish all his purposes for the world. Prayer changes things. Also, it changes us. As we pray, God gives us his heart - his joys and sorrows, dreams, and thoughts. We value intercession for both these reasons: the transformation of this world and the transformation of our hearts.

We pray with passion, because God is sharing his heart with us. We pray with desperation, because we feel the lostness of this world that we love. We pray with hope, because Jesus said he is making all things new. We pray with lots of thanks, because there is so much of God's character stamped into this world. And, we do it at all times, like we breathe; it's not just for when we gather together in a building, but in everyday life, in all settings. Intercession takes our worry away, because when we exercise faith, we slowly get rid of the illusion that God does not care for his world.

2 Chron 7:14, Dan 9:1-19, Rom 8:23-27, Phil 4: 6-7

5 Purity of Heart:

the inward journey

Jesus taught that what's on the inside of a person matters to God, matters much more than mere outward performance. Its not that actions don't matter; rather, they can only be sustainable when they come from a right heart. Or, as Jesus put it, only a good tree

produces good fruit.

Yet all of us are double-minded in some ways. We love the fleeting pleasures of sin even though we know that they'll hurt later. This double mindedness tears us apart until God unites our heart to want one thing above all else.

What is this one thing that can unite all the warring parts of our inward being? It is love for God. Only that. Uniting our hearts under any other purpose, however noble, will make us less than we were created to be.

Purity of heart is truly a practice. In other words, it doesn't come through one quick decision, but many choices over years. It doesn't come from sheer discipline or will power, but from seeing as God sees, and then acting on what we see. It doesn't come only from quickly over-ruling our dark side with our good desires, but from being real about both sides of who we are and surrendering both to God for his reshaping.

The scriptures speak of many issues of inward purity, but almost every time the New Testament addresses purity of heart, sexuality and anger are mentioned. Seduction and aggression have many faces. We seek to turn away from all their perversions, but we know that respecting the behavioral boundaries of scripture begins with an inward journey. Here in our neighborhood, where sexuality is often reduced to a commodity, and anger often boils over into violence, we have agreed to let the light and darkness wrestle together in our hearts, and not stop wrestling until our hearts are united by love.

Mat 7:15-23; 5:8, Mark 7:14-23, Rom 6:19, Eph 5:3-20,
Heb 12:14-15

6 The Arts:

expressing the beauty of God

God is radiant with perfection in every way. To discover his beauty is the inheritance of every disciple, and to find ways to express it is our calling. Because everyone has a unique angle from which they perceive God, the art of expressing God's beauty does not belong only to a few. Everyone's gifts deserve to be nurtured, so they can express what they have glimpsed of the magnificence of God.

It's not that some kinds of people are artists; it's that all people are some kind of artist. Each person, each act of creativity brings out more of the fullness of who God is.

We put creativity into our worship times together as well as into the creative way we live, serve, work, and lead in our personal lives. We strive both for excellence in this, as well as delight in the small, non-professional and often awkward attempts that we make in expressing our worship.

Our art knows no bounds between secular and sacred: wherever beauty or skill is to be found, we ascribe its source to be God, and wherever it is misdirected, we can often redirect it in our hearts towards him. We use almost any medium or artistic form to delight ourselves in God. We're still wondering if there's any form that can't be redeemed.

Psalm 150, Ex 35:4-35, Col 3:16, Rev 4

7 Generosity:

giving & sharing resource

It would not be fitting for the people that follow the one who "came to serve, not to be served" to not be generous. Wherever we have abundance, we know that it is not for hoarding for ourselves, but rather to extend the Kingdom of God. "If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry." So taught John the Baptist.

But Jesus taught that we were not just to give until our abundance was at risk. He emptied himself, and we are to have the same mind; sacrificial giving from a joyful heart, not rule-based, is what would truly mark us out as Jesus' followers. We don't believe that this means we should give until our families are suffering, necessarily, as 1 Tim 5:8 describes our priority to care for our relatives and immediate family. However, the people of God are also our family and need our care, and all people are part of the human family to whom we belong.

When we give from the first of our money, God tells us he accepts it as worship. When we put our own needs first, he does not, says Malachi, and instead promises to put holes in our wallets until we learn to get our priorities right. So our practice is to take from the first of our income, not what is leftover; many of us begin with the tithe, which was 10% of one's income and commanded in the Old Testament. The New Testament might offer more freedom, but we doubt that the model of Jesus' life points to a smaller, less-generous posture than those that came before him.

1 Tim 5:8, 2 Cor 9, Luke 3:11, Mat 6:25-34

COMMUNITY

8 Circles of Sharing:

to survive, to love & to learn

Against a culture of rugged individualism, we want to hold many things in common, sharing with each other as did the first Christians. They had “no poor among them” because they shared physical necessities (“to survive”). They shared time, care, affection and faithfulness (“to love”), and the stories, wisdom, and knowledge they gathered on their journeys (“to learn”).

To open ourselves up to this kind of lifestyle is challenging for many of us, especially those of us who see ourselves as having more to lose than gain by sharing. Yet, it's the life that Jesus invites us into. He tells us that when we let go of our exclusive and private claim on our possessions, our time, and our learning, we get them all back – one hundredfold, in this life. They are multiplied because they are shared; each individual has access to the common wealth of the community.

Creating a common life of sharing ourselves on these three levels is best done in small and trusted circles, whether they are housegroups, Triads, or other intentional circles of relationship. These groups are necessary to us living out our mission.

We want it to be normal to share resources, to have a



circle of loving relationships, and for that group to be well acquainted with the personal growth of all those in the group. We want to continually and thoughtfully ask: what do I have that I do not need, that you could better use? How can I open up my life for you to feel safe and be loved? What part of my story can I share with you, and what can I learn from you and your story? And we show up consistently, so that the sharing can be counted on and trust can be built.

Here is our paradox: the poor are always to be with us, but when they are really with us, there are no poor among us.

Deut 15:1-18, Acts 2:42, Acts 4:32-35, 2 Cor 8:13-15, Rom 12:10, 1 Cor 14:26

9 Relationship:

*being real, being kind,
taking time*

To know and to be known: how do you do that? It's hard enough when you're similar in background; it's really hard when there are vast differences of culture, class, and religious background. Real relationship requires courage to allow differences to emerge; it doesn't suppress them for the sake of feeling "togetherness". But, it also means that we have some things that we are unified around. We recognize that if we don't have both unity and diversity, we'll either split apart from lack of common ground, or we'll try to control and change each other to make us all fit some mold. Neither of those options looks good to us.

Instead, we go on a journey with each other that begins with finding out and celebrating what we have in common: common interests, vision, likes and dislikes,

common strengths, and even common weaknesses. Above all, what we have in common is that we are loved by the same God, even in our brokenness. Then - we make room for each other to be different, without judgment or need for one person or group to be better than another.

We observe that much of church culture relies on sameness for unity; that attitude bores us. Differences are never cause for shame; they are cause for a divine curiosity - to inquire and know the other person, and to disclose ourselves. They are reason to spend time together to learn the stories behind our differences. We refuse to be so driven to accomplish things that we need to suppress differences to get everything done right away. Urgency is often an addiction, and we strive to keep the freedom to be able to press pause in our work, to take the time to figure out different needs, feelings, perspectives, and strengths, and from that, decide how closely we can work together on any given task.

Where differences make closeness of cooperation impossible in any situation, we practice serving each other as we separate to do different things. But most often, taking this kind of time to know each other without control results in the ability to do things together in a complementary way. It's less efficient in the short term, but more effective and productive in the long term. And, there is more love and less control of each other along the way.

1 Cor 12, Jam 1:19-20, Mat 5:1-10, Acts 15:36-40, Eph 4:14-15

10 Rhythm:

gather and scatter

Jesus seemed to have a rhythm in his days. Luke tells of how Jesus would go by himself to be with his Father, even all night. Then, in the morning, he gathered his friends and followers together in the morning. They spent time together, relationally, learning together, even had a common purse. Later in the day, they went together to minister to many people. Separateness, togetherness. For us too, the rhythms of gathering and scattering are important.

We practice gathering together weekly. We are consistently present to each other in a social and friendly way, experiencing the presence of God together in worship, welcoming and embracing those who have just begun to join us, considering the same scriptures together, and listening for what the Lord is saying to each other and to us as a whole. We find people that we might connect with during the rest of the week, to serve them, invite them to our housegroup, or find a place for ourselves.

Then, we scatter. We ask God to bring his Kingdom to our homes, places of work and school, and neighborhoods. We daily open up space in our lives for God to make himself known to us through scripture and prayer. We practice a variety of spiritual disciplines in solitude. Half-way between gathering and scattering is making time to meet in a housegroup to practice the sharing that is best done in a small circle of friends. Also half-way are the ministries we do together with a few others.

This rhythm accents the unity and diversity of our body. It helps us stay grounded when we are tempted to withdraw from community out of fear or apathy; it

keeps us maintaining our uniqueness as individuals even though we're part of something larger, something we may not always agree with. And, it is part of our being apprentices to Jesus, who took his rhythms of gathering and scattering right through till his last instructions to "come and see", then "go and tell".

Luke 5: 16, 6: 12-19, 1 Cor 16:2, Mat 28: 6, 10, Heb 10:25, Acts 5:42

11 Prayer ministry:

healing through prayer

Jesus healed people, and told us to go do the same by the power of his Spirit. He did this not by his own power as the Son of God; he told his disciples that by listening to the Father, he could simply cooperate with what the Father was doing. Though God can certainly heal without us, he chooses to work with us. So prayer, real listening prayer, is an essential key to healing.

We want to see the kingdom of God demonstrated wherever we are through signs and wonders. Though healing seems to be one of the most dramatic and frequent of the supernatural signs, both in the gospels and in our own history, we will continue to pray for all manifestations of his presence that were seen in the life of Jesus, and "greater things" also.

We are people who easily and often ask "Can I pray for you?" and are seeing the power of God evident as we obey. We pray for every kind of healing that is needed: healing of our bodies, our inner being, our cultures, and our relationships. Even the healing of nations, and creation.

Our community practices praying for each other. First, in our families and housegroups, with frequency and

consistency. But then, at a moments notice, we love to see the power of God come to any situation of need, to anyone of any persuasion. We look for every chance to say, God, let me join you in what you're doing, right here, right now. We know that when God heals someone who doesn't know him, it's a bigger invitation for them to join his family than words can ever say.

Mat 10:8, Acts 3:1-10, John 5:1-20, John 14:12, Jam 5:16-18

JUSTICE

12 Gospel:

*God's kingdom proclaimed
and enacted*

Jesus came to announce that the world – as we know it – was coming to a close. What was ending? Not its existence, but the way it was ruled.

Since Eden, the world had been fallen; the standard was that power instead of love ruled human affairs, and so necessarily some would have to come out on top while others would be ground in misery under them. Justice had fled. In the three days at the centre of human history, Jesus would change all that. As the creation crucified its creator in an attempt to assert its usurped authority, it completely discredited itself. And so, as God raised Jesus from the dead, he gave back to his Son “all authority in heaven and on earth”. But Jesus' Kingdom would not come with violent overthrow, it would simply subvert the other rule by refusing to submit to its ways. Now, those experiencing this Kingdom would see the signs of new life coming even while death was still present: love would be willing to suffer violence without returning it; sickness would heal from simple prayer; demons would leave upon command; forgiveness would be given and received even in the midst of the worst human sins. Eternal life



began blooming while the snow still lay melting.

It is our practice, as Jesus instructed us, to announce this good news that he is the Lord. Words are good, and demonstration is even better. The signs of sickness and spiritual darkness losing its grip on people show that a real cosmic change has already happened, and foreshadow the climax ahead. When those who are powerless and vulnerable have equal value to anyone else, it's obvious that we are ruled by love and not the ability to dominate. And the announcement that Jesus is Lord (and the old powers are not) cuts right down to the root of all injustice, and begins to set this world right. We won't stop until the message is known to all peoples.

Luke 4:18-19, 9:1-6, Luke 10, Mat 28:18-20, Acts 28:31, Phil 2:6-11, 1 Thes 1:5

13 Mercy:

care for the vulnerable

The hallmark of business-as-usual in the old order of things is that some have to get weaker for someone else to be strong, and that this is acceptable. The ones who get weaker are not seen as the problem of those who don't - unless you can make a business out of charity.

Our practice is different: to extend respect, care, provision, protection, and shelter - kindness of every sort - to those who have been unable to find it for themselves. It is our priority to give first to those who are most vulnerable. These are the poor, and wherever we are their neighbors, as Jesus taught us, we will not shun them.

Though physical poverty - the absence of bare ability to

provide for one's own needs for survival - is most obviously grinding, we recognize that people are also made to be vulnerable in various other ways. Our practice is to embrace weakness (including our own) without shaming it, giving honor to those that lack it in the sight of society, and by doing so witness to the unconditional love of God.

Mat 5:7, Mat 9:11-13, Luke 10:30-37, Jam 2:12, 13

14 Compassion:

*sharing the struggle to
gather strength*

While mercy (or charity) gives out of strength to weakness, if prolonged it can contribute to the preservation of that weakness. Compassion goes further: it gives itself to struggle together into strength. It doesn't keep separate from the object of its love. It joins together, and is willing to accompany others on their tough path. Compassion literally means "suffering together". This compassion is both more painful and joyful than the mercy it often starts with, but Jesus life teaches us that it is a price worth paying.

We want God to transform our service to others so that we don't merely help people outside of relationship, but share their struggle from within. We practice compassion by sharing many parts of our lives, not just money: time, emotional attachment, family life, and self-disclosure. As we journey with those whose struggle we share, we are transformed by Christ's love, and are able to deeply receive from those we serve.

Isa 58, Gal 6:2, Mat 14:13, 14, Eph 4:32

15 Confrontation:

uncovering abusive power

People or institutions may become powerful for a variety of reasons, some good and some bad, but whenever their strength is used for exclusive privilege and status rather than for compassion, they cross the line – God's line. Wealth, influence, skill, or leadership, were never given by God to hurt or to be hoarded. No resource should be gained at the expense of those who are vulnerable.

Our practice is not to be silent in the face of the great abuses of our time, nor in the smaller, hidden struggles where one person is crushed by the strength of another. We will not be afraid to speak up, though sensitivity to complex situations is always needed. We never begin by judgments; rather, starting by asking questions can help uncover hidden injustice while there is more chance of friendly reconciliation.

Where some have lost their ability to express their pain, we may be able to come along side and help recover the ability to speak. The power of speaking the truth in love is enough; we neither use nor react to coercion.

Mat 21:12, 13, 1 Cor 1:25-29, Mark 12:38-40, Philemon