

### **Begin with Silence and Prayer (5 Minutes)**

Gather together as a community group in a comfortable setting; around a table, on a couch, a living room floor, etc. Have someone lead a quick prayer inviting the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Then spend a moment in silence together. Instruct your group,

“As you sit in silence, invite the Holy Spirit to quiet your heart and mind from distractions. Ask God if there is anything he would like to share with you during this time.”

Why silence? In our overcrowded, busy world, silence (even if for only a few minutes) cuts through the noise and allows space to calm your mind and your heart before God. Close this group time of silence with a moment of gratitude, thanking God for the opportunity to be together.

### **Review Last Week’s Practice (10 Minutes)**

After spending a few minutes catching up on life events over the past week or two, talk through the following debrief questions focusing on the practice that was given last week.

How did it go?

What was the best part? What was the hardest part?

What did this particular practice show you about your relationship with God?

\*\*Re-emphasize that this is not something you can succeed or fail at, all you can do is show up. Be patient and give yourself grace. Resist the urge to be critical of yourself. Don’t rush to judgment, but rather resolve to simply take one small step forward. This may be different for many of us and that is okay.\*\*

### **Debrief the Teaching (10 minutes)**

If you have a large group, it may be best to divide into small groups of three to four people. Spend a moment catching up on life and then talk through the following questions:

Did you listen to this week’s sermon? What did you think?

What comes to mind when you think about spiritual practices?

### **Discuss this Overview (10-15 Minutes)**

We become what we do on a regular basis. To be human is to be shaped by that which we love and our practices (intentional or unintentional) shape our loves and longings. As Augustine famously said, “Our hearts are restless until they find rest in you.” Spiritual practices, therefore, carve out space in our life to open ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit to transform our loves and our longings.

Spiritual practices are not about trying harder, but about training. They do not earn us favor with God and are not a measuring stick for our spiritual success or failure. Rather, they are intentional practices that equip us to live fully and freely into the presence of God.

Spiritual practices have been used across the centuries to cultivate spiritual formation. In the same manner that a musician must learn scales before performing the symphony, so too, spiritual practices are used to train ourselves to open our lives up to the transformative work of the Holy Spirit.

In your own words, what is the purpose of spiritual practices?

What has been your experience with spiritual practices in your faith journey?

## Open the Bible Together (10-15 Minutes)

Have someone read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 out loud.

In this text, Paul uses a familiar metaphor to describe the work of training in spiritual formation - an athlete training for a race. Paul contrasts two types of athletes to make his point.

The first is someone "running aimlessly" or a boxer "beating the air" (v. 26). The image is one of someone who is haphazardly working through their life, which is characterized by unintentional activity. They are hoping to and assuming they are training to gain the prize, but have not given forethought and intentionality as to how this is coming about.

The second athlete is someone who has an intense discipline and focus. Speaking in strong hyperbolic terms, Paul writes, "I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave." This is not a literal instruction that we should follow. He is not endorsing self-harm but is instead drawing to our minds the deep intentionality in which this individual approaches their training.

### Athlete #1 - Unintentional Formation

The first example is an illustration of an unintentional approach to spiritual practices. The assumption here is that spiritual maturity and formation will naturally happen. But this isn't the case, Christlikeness is not a natural thing. As our working definition of spiritual formation states, it will be an "intentional process." As we consider the ways we are unintentionally walking through life, consider and discuss the following questions.

What habits do you notice in your life that are unintentional?

i.e., your digital use, Netflix, sleeping patterns, etc. \*\*The idea here is not to feel guilty about these things, but to consider the ways ordinary and regular habits in your life are forming who you are.

What are the ways you have approached spiritual formation unintentionally?

### Athlete #2 - Intentional Formation

The second example details the life of someone who is focused and driven to seek ways to bring change in their life. Any change in our lives takes intentionality; the same is true of spiritual formation. Again, this is not to earn God's favor or love, but it is to organize our lives around the way of Jesus. As we consider the ways we can be more intentional in our spiritual formation, discuss the following questions.

What does it look like to 'organize' our life around following Jesus?

What is one step you can take this week to be more intentional in your discipleship to Jesus? Maybe it is taking up a new spiritual practice?

Maybe it is meeting with someone for coffee to discuss the state of your discipleship, or maybe it is carving out more time in the quiet to be with God. It will look different for each of us, and the point isn't uniformity in how we grow, but the point is to take one step toward a more intentional formation so we can "run in such a way as to get the prize" as Paul wrote.

## Something to Practice Individually this Week - Habit Audit (5-10 Minutes)

Below is a practice that everyone in your group can try out this coming week. Spend a few minutes reading this out loud with the group and discuss any questions that may arise.

This week you will perform a habit audit. The goal is to better understand your regular rhythms and patterns throughout your day and then begin to ask questions about how those things are forming you.

The basic concept is simple, carry a small notebook with you, or open a new note on your phone and create a running log of all the ways you spend your time throughout the day. Take particular note of the things to which you commit time and energy. Entries into this sort of log could look something like the following:

30 minutes making and enjoying my coffee

25 minutes on social media

1 hour working out

2.5 hours watching TV

45 minutes reading

By tracking our regular habits and rhythms, we can better understand how the things we do shape our lives. At the end of the week, sit down with your habit journal and prayerfully consider the following questions:

What habits and rhythms do I spend the most time and energy on?

How are these habits shaping my life and my spiritual formation?

What has been shaping me unintentionally that I am not aware of?

After spending some time thinking about these questions, spend a moment in quiet prayer, and ask God to highlight any areas he would invite you to swap a particular habit for a spiritual practice.

This could be as simple as spending time in prayer rather than reading the news on your lunch break, or interrupt long blocks of work by pausing for a minute or two and inviting God to be with you in the middle of your office. Be open to what God may highlight for you to change.

Be patient and give yourself grace. Consider small incremental steps forward. The goal is to slowly organize our lives more around the Spirit so we can be transformed to be more like Christ.

### **Close in Prayer (5 Minutes)**

Have someone close out your time in prayer. Thank God for the time together, and pray for each other's upcoming week.