



c o r e r h y t h m s

Introduction

The Christian faith begins and ends with Jesus Christ the incarnate God. The Scriptures all testify about him (Luke 24:25-27) and he is quite literally the founder and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). Furthermore, Jesus is many things to his people. He is the great revealer of God's Word to us, he made sacrifice for our sins by his own death and resurrection and he is our king and leader. His life is also an example for us in how to walk on earth in full surrender and harmony with our creator. His life had a certain pattern and rhythm¹ to it of which we are called to be imitators (Ephesians 5:1,2, 1 Corinthians 11:1). We are not called to ask what Jesus would do in some hypothetical way, but we are to know him personally and follow him with wisdom in the contours of our lives. One of the things we see over and over in the life of Jesus is a path of constant contact and communion with God. His life was given in joyful obedience and fellowship with his heavenly father; we desire our lives to have a similar rhythm. Christian Philosopher Dallas Willard makes note of this simple yet profound connection:

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

Yet there remains a major difference between us and Jesus. Jesus lived in complete and perfect harmony with the Father and we struggle forward with our sinfulness while he works on us day by day. Jesus lived in communion with God in a complete way and our lives struggle in finding our rhythm in keeping in step with God. Now let me also make something clear, Jesus lived his life on earth as a spiritually empowered human being, not some sort of superman. He was tempted in every way yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). He grew tired and frustrated with life just as we do, but stayed intimately connected with the Father. We can become like him as God leads us as well, we just fall short at times where he did not. That is why *WE* follow *HIM*.

¹ In this essay we will use several terms almost interchangeably. Life Patterns, Rhythms, Pathways, Activities, and Disciplines will all be used to describe certain occupations to which all Christians are called.

² Quoted in Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1991), 21.

For us to live like Jesus we must examine the regular practices and flow of our own lives. Rather than jumping right to an exhortation about the things we need to be doing, I want us to begin by looking at the heart behind certain spiritual activities. If we do not initially cultivate a heart *for God* we will only create a list of duties which is disconnected from our relationship *with God*. This never goes well and ends up with wearisome and lifeless religion.

In this essay we will travel the following road together. First, we will discuss our deep need to regularly meet with God in order to be transformed and live in harmonious friendship with him. Furthermore, in doing so, we need to find freedom in our surrender to his purposes in our lives as our King. We will do this by looking at two helpful biblical metaphors which deal with appearing before God. Second, we will discuss the role of what we call *spiritual disciplines* or *means of grace* in shaping our lives. God has given his people certain practices to help transform us and grow us in friendship with him. At this point we are going to shake it up a little and talk about disciplines using the metaphor of a dance. God calls us to learn *the rhythms of gospel life and mission* together as we flow with him. I am using this metaphor for two reasons: 1) to help out the guys as the ladies love to dance. Just kidding; but dancing is just all right with me, 2) more seriously, I like the metaphor as it portrays our relationship with God as the joyful pursuit which it truly is. Finally, we will give a brief overview of each of the rhythms we will discuss as a community over the next eight weeks. So let us appropriately begin with our need for God.

Our Need to Appear Before God

In the Old Testament we read the following heart cry from the Psalmist. *As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?* (Psalm 42:1, 2) We live a daily struggle to connect with God because our world and our lives are out of rhythm and disjointed from him.

The Scriptures teach us that God created all things good for his purposes. The universe and human beings were made to be in rhythm with their creator celebrating his goodness, power and glory. Yet because of the sin and rebellion of human beings the rhythm of the world is now out of sync with its maker. Creation groans containing both the echoes of an original harmony amidst current brokenness and futility (See Genesis 3 and Romans 8).

The good news of Jesus Christ has vast implications as it is God's promise to redeem our lives and reconnect us with God. Furthermore, the promise of the cross of Christ is that all things will be made new and brought back into perfect harmony in the coming Kingdom of God. In the present age we struggle forward and long for this coming redemption that has started in us by faith in Jesus. In Christ God has made a way back to the paradise which was lost in Eden both in reconnecting us personally with God and bringing all things under the Lordship of Jesus (See Ephesians 1). In fact, the Kingdom will be better than Eden...really, it will.

The cry of the Psalmist above is a cry for reconnection with God in the midst of a world of sin, chaos, enemies, personal wandering, sadness and depression. His soul is *longing for God*; for communion with and intimacy with the Father. He wants to personally appear before God in worship. There are two biblical metaphors which describe well the aspect of appearing before God; we will treat them ever so briefly here as I think they help us to get to the heart of the gospel and the "why" behind certain spiritual practices.

- *The Face of God – Favor in Relationship* – The Scriptures speaks of someone's face representing their character and presence. To seek the face of God is to seek his favor and an audience with him. If God hides his face from his people, they feel distant and far from him like abandoned children. (See Psalm 27) If God were to allow his face to

shine upon them they experience the joy of his pleasure and salvation (See Psalm 80). This metaphor is also extended in the New Testament where we are told the light of the knowledge of the glory of God is seen *in the face* of Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 4). In Jesus we receive mercy, grace and favor from God. His face upon us shifts from guilt and condemnation for our sins to fellowship and joy with our Savior. Here we see the reality of the pleasantness and friendship involved with the favor/face of our Creator. We want to appear before him in this sort of friendship.

- *The Throne of God – Bowing before our King* – Another metaphor of appearing before God deals with a throne. God is presented in Scripture as a high, lofty, holy and majestic King (See Isaiah 6). To come before his throne is to come in a posture of reverent fear and respect for our King. We dare not approach him unless we come in his favor (See Psalm 89:1-18 and Revelation 4).

Both of these metaphors are needed for us to understand our relationship to God as his creatures and his children. The gospel reestablishes relationship and the gospel brings joyful submission and surrender of our lives to God. We understand that in the gospel, God is both our father/friend and sovereign king. Some treat God in such a way that he is domesticated into our equal. Let me be clear, friendship with God is not the same as having a buddy. Furthermore, some make God such a high and distant king that we forget that Jesus calls us his friends. Both of these realities provide for us the right posture as we relate to almighty God. This sort of posture of appearing before God is articulated well in the book of Hebrews.

¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4:14-16 (ESV)

Here we come before the throne of God our King with the faithful advocacy of our high priest Jesus. We come to a friend on the throne, but we only come as we have been forgiven on his terms. We come as worshippers in need of mercy, grace and help. This is the posture in which we need to come to before God.

How do we arrive before the face and throne of God? How do we connect in deep relationship and joyful surrender to our King? Through the gospel! In the gospel God has given us paths to walk which lead us precisely to these realities. It is not a formula; it is a struggle forward driven by our desire and love for God. The spiritual practices, disciplines and rhythms of life begin with a longing for relationship with God in Jesus Christ. They place us in a proper posture to receive from him and be transformed by him. They help us, as a Christian long ago once said, to practice the presence of God.³

The Dance of the Gospel

In talking about spiritual practices and rhythms we are never leaving doctrinal truth behind. In fact it is the truth of the gospel that provides grounds for all our spiritual practices. We live

³“The holiest, most universal and most necessary practice in the spiritual life is the presence of God. To practice the presence of God is to pleasure in and become accustomed to his divine company, speaking humbly and conversing lovingly in our hearts with him at all times, and at every moment, especially in times of temptation, pain, spiritual dryness, revulsion to spiritual things, and even unfaithfulness and sin.” Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, trans. Robert J. Edmonson, Christian Classics, vol. q (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 1985), 125.

certain rhythms in relationship to God who is revealed in truth. Our theology should point to the one we love and desire to be more like, not to gods of our own making and imagination. Our practices and rhythms are the enjoyable paths which enable the transformation and fruitful lives to take place. The late Francis Schaeffer once said it this way:

In the last analysis it is never doctrine alone that is important. It is always doctrine appropriated that counts... We may know the truth, we may have the knowledge, but it has not been appropriated, and so it will not mean anything to us in practice, and the fruit will not be born.⁴

So we begin with gospel truth and then we move towards certain rhythms of life which God uses to change our lives. If we use the metaphor of a dance, the gospel is the music and the steps will be our spiritual disciplines and practices. We'll return to the dance a bit, but before that I want us to walk through some history together.

Throughout the history of the church, God's people have sought to live lives marked by certain biblical practices. Prayer, Silence, Solitude, Meditation, Study, Preaching, Baptism, Communion and Mission come to mind. Some have called these *means* of grace as the things which God uses to change us. Others have used the term *spiritual disciplines* reflecting the biblical language from 1 Timothy 4:7, 8:

*⁷ Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather **train** yourself for godliness; ⁸ for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.*

The word *train yourself* in this passage has often been translated *discipline* or *exercise yourself* and for good reason. The word here is *gumnázō* which literally meant to exercise/train at the gymnasium for the purpose of athletic competition. It means we should undertake disciplined spiritual training much like an athlete trains her body for competition. It means spiritually, we need to regularly hit the gym.

Throughout the history of the church there have been people who focused with extreme energy on the disciplined life of spiritual practices. In the first few centuries after Jesus, people known as anchorite monks would withdraw from society to live alone as hermits in the Egyptian desert. Their goal was to remove themselves from all things worldly to focus solely in solitude on God.⁵ One of the most famous was a man named Anthony who became legendary for his devotion to God and even weighed in on the side of orthodoxy against the followers of Arius who claimed Jesus was not fully divine.⁶ Another rather famous ascetic monk was a man by the name of Simeon the Stylite.⁷ His name was derived from the Greek word *style* which meant "pillar" or "pole." Desiring solitude from the world and the pressing needs of humanity this guy lived on a one meter square on the top of a pillar for 39 years. Yes, to love Jesus he sat on a pole by himself in prayer and meditation for almost four decades. Now, I could not do this. One, I am called to some things in the mission of God that involve other people. Two, I don't think the sitting on a pole thing would work for me. Just sayin. All this to say that focused discipline has been a part of Christian history in various flavors from the beginning. Over time the lone monk gave way to monastic orders where men, and women in the case of convents, would withdraw in communities to focus on spiritual practices and seeking God.

⁴ Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1971), 84-85.

⁵ Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, 1st ed., 2 vols. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), Vol 1 - 138-143.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁷ Wiki, "Simeon Stylites," *Wikipedia*. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simeon_Stylites.

Such strict discipline was always the realm of the few in times past, but we are not all called to a monkish existence even though on some crazy busy days a retreat from the chaos of the world does sound quite attractive. The Scriptures do however call all followers of Jesus to implement certain rhythms and practices in our everyday lives. Ancient, biblical practices of disciplined devotion should mark our paths in the modern world.

Yet today, even the word *discipline* can be misunderstood by some to mean some tortuous drudgery so I want to use the terminology of *gospel rhythms* to express these practices as a joyful walk with God. I also want to be clear that maintaining gospel rhythms in life is WORK and requires real DISCIPLINE. We know that God's purpose is to transform us to be more like Jesus (Romans 8:29, 30). God is making us more like him in character, more like him in what we love, more like him in the way we go about our business here on the earth. Yet many just want to say a prayer, have an experience, get a spiritual buzz and "poof!" become instant, mature, spiritual people. No sweat, no work, no struggle. After a while we find out that this just doesn't work. The Christian faith is not a magic trick; it is daily discipleship following our Lord.

OK, back to dancing. I think if you know what it takes to dance really well you will realize it indeed involves some work and discipline. Just take the show *Dancing with the Stars* as an example. The training involved to learn to dance in a new way, with a new flow and with a partner is quite rigorous. On the show some sort of celebrity is partnered with a pro that is charged to teach and train said celebrity to dance. They are whipped into shape by an arduous regiment of dance training. As an aside, my favorite contestant had to be Steve Wozniak, co-founder of Apple computer...I think they said he looked like a Tele Tubby while doing his thing. Dang Steve! Anyway, when you think about the dance for a minute you will realize that someone leads, someone follows. Sanctification, the progressive work of God in our lives making us more like Jesus, is a bit like learning to dance. God plays the music and leads his people; he gives us certain rhythms and steps that we must learn. We must do some work and we must follow.

If you have seen "The Carlton Dance"⁸ on the old school show the *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, you realize that not everyone has the same kind of rhythm. However, in the gospel we have the music and the beats that all of Jesus' followers can flow to. Let's close by looking at the gospel rhythms that are core, or central, to our lives with Jesus.

Core Gospel Rhythms

God not only ordains *the end* for our lives, becoming like Jesus, but he also has designed *the means to that end*. *Gospel Rhythms* are gifts to our lives to return us to the story of redemption, renew our minds with truth, refuel our souls with spiritual food and keep us connected in life giving relationship with God. These rhythms are not simply made up by human beings, nor are they divine suggestions, but they are indeed gifts from God for every believer. You may have a tendency to enjoy one more than another due to your unique design by God, but each is important. Furthermore, there is a diversity of expression within the body of Christ of devotion and connection to God. Some are more drawn to study, others more towards long walks in nature praying to God.⁹ We also must realize that there should be no Christian life that is devoid of scripture, prayer and other gospel rhythms exemplified and commanded by Jesus. In other words, you may like study better than prayer, but you need to pray. You may like serving the

⁸ For such delights, reference that web browser to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zS1cLOixsQ8>

⁹ For an interesting historical and sociological look at the diversity of ways in which people connect with God in the Christian tradition see Gary Thomas, *Sacred Pathways* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

needy more than you like meditating on Scripture, but you need biblical intake or your spiritual life will starve. All of these rhythms are important for us but it is a reflection of the diversity of the church that you may feel drawn more towards one or the other. One final note is in order.

The gospel rhythms we will discuss here are by no means exhaustive of the practices in the Bible. There are certainly other things we do as believers and certainly other things which could be listed under spiritual disciplines for the Christian life. We are simply covering a few practices we walk in as individuals and as a community of faith.

Scripture: Study and Meditation

Much can be said about the study of the Bible, the Word of God, and the importance it has in our lives as followers of Jesus. Author Donald Whitney is blunt and to the point in stating:

No Spiritual Discipline is more important than the intake of God's Word. Nothing can substitute for it. There is simply no healthy Christian life apart from a diet of the milk and meat of Scripture. The reasons for this are obvious. In the Bible God tells us about Himself, and especially about Jesus Christ, the incarnation of God. The Bible unfolds the Law of God to us and shows us how we've all broken it. There we learn how Christ died as a sinless, willing Substitute for breakers of God's Law and how we must repent and believe in him to be right with God. In the Bible we learn the ways and will of the Lord.¹⁰

Jesus tells us the importance of the Bible in quoting Deuteronomy 8:3 – “Man shall not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” The most desirable possession we have been given are the very words of God. The Bible is the solid food for our lives which align us with the heart of God. He speaks through the Scriptures, which the author of Hebrews describes as “living and active sharper than any double edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12) Paul told Timothy that the inspired Scriptures are useful for “teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness” to prepare our lives for everything God will call us to do (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). The importance of the Bible cannot be overstated. If we love God, we will love his Word; we will realize that without a word from God we would wither away spiritually and die.

The believer therefore will desire to be intimately involved with the Bible. She will want to hear it taught and preached regularly. She will want to *memorize* it, hiding it in her heart. She will want to *read it* daily for encouragement and *study* it deeply so to grasp its truth and meaning. She will want to *meditate*, think deeply upon, and ponder the wisdom of the Word of God.

Meditation is a word which has almost been completely absorbed by a conception of the practice found in Eastern philosophies. Eastern meditation, of the Hindu and Buddhist flavors, is a practice in which a person attempts to empty the mind, even remove/eradicate the self into the oneness of being. It is a looking inward with the mind completely disengaged. Biblical meditation is a completely different sort and it is lacking today in the lives of God's people.

Meditation of the Biblical species is a contemplation of God, his words, his character and his works. It is a filling of the mind with wonderful thoughts of God; his work in saving us, his works in creation, his works in history and in the world today. It is allowing the Word of God to dwell, to

¹⁰ Whitney.

linger, to simmer in our souls deeply. Colossians 3:16 encourages us to *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.* The goal of biblical meditation is *to arouse the affections*, to still the heart and to set it aflame. Meditation should lead us to prayer; something which meditation will help us find a little easier to do. In summary, in God's Word he speaks to us, in our time in prayer we enter an intimate conversation with the Almighty. To prayer we now turn.

Prayer and Fasting

Perhaps the greatest privilege you have as a believer is that of prayer. The fact is the creator of the universe desires for you to intimately communicate with him each day. Prayer can be viewed as simply talking with God, sharing with him your thoughts, concerns, and desire to walk closely with him. In prayer we can find help, guidance, and strength to face life's many tough challenges. In prayer we also find that the very one who made all things desires an audience with you; for you to worship him, to confess your sins to him, to thank him for all things, and to petition him with your needs.

But to be honest, most of us get too spazzed out in life to have any real prayer life. The cell phones ring, TVs buzz, Facebook notifies, e-mails arrive, tweets flow down the screen and blogs update, etc. making us a rather distracted people. I know I personally struggle to carve out time to pray during the day. Peter reminds us of a very important aspect for a life of prayer when he writes, "The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers" (1 Peter 4:7). We must be self-controlled, mindful of eternal realities, and focused on the coming of Jesus. This is precisely why we so need to sit our butts down to be alone and pray. How it dries up the soul to run around all the time without quiet, peace, not being conscious of the company of God! In prayer we can find the mercy and help we need in every struggle (Heb 4:16), we see God align our wills to his own (Matt 6:9-13), we find grace and forgiveness for sin, and we enjoy the presence and nearness of God. Oh how we all need to make time for prayer!

Fasting has long been a part of the lives of the followers of Jesus, but many times it can be misunderstood or altogether neglected. Put very simply, fasting is the abstention from something for spiritual reasons. Richard Foster has defined it this way: Fasting is *the voluntary denial of a normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity.*¹¹ In the Bible people would abstain from food, at times water as well, and married couples from sex for times of prayer (really, see 1 Corinthians 7:1-5). Fasting is a way to express the worth of God over temporal things, to seek him in concentrated prayer, to confess sin and show contrition of heart. Both the Old and New Testament show believers fasting. We'll take just a quick peek.

In the Old Testament Moses fasted before receiving the law of God (Deut 9:9), the Jewish people fasted for Queen Esther before she went before a king (Esther 4), King David fasts and prays when his son is stricken ill (2 Samuel 12), and the nation of Israel fasts corporately on several occasions to show repentance, consecrate themselves to God and ask his favor (2 Chron 20, Joel 2, Nehemiah 9). Additionally every Jew would fast on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement

¹¹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 160.

(Leviticus 16:29-31) as the people went to God for atonement for sin. Even the Ninevites fasted to show repentance at the preaching of Jonah. In the New Testament, Jesus implicitly assumed his followers would fast when he said to them:

“*And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.* (Matthew 6:16-18, emphasis added).

Jesus expected us to fast in certain seasons for dedicated times of spiritual pursuit, where we say before God, “You are more valuable to me than my normal needs and schedule.” On point of emphasis needs to be made; we should always fast to seek God himself, not as a way to manipulate his hand to give us what we want. It is a declaration that what we desire is in fact our God, not the gifts he may give to our lives...be they food, drink, marital intimacy, or even television.

A good fast in modern times is to give up media (iPod, internet, movies, TV) for a period of time to intentionally seek the Lord. These things can be good for our enjoyment, but you would be surprised at how the Lord would speak to you if you set aside time to be alone, in silence, with his word, for prayer. I commend such fasts to you today. Many helpful books have been written recently to assist the church in fasting. I would recommend John Piper’s *A Hunger for God: Desiring God Through Fasting*.¹² In fact it is available free online at <http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/OnlineBooks/ByTitle/>.

Work and Rest

In the Scripture God calls us to a rhythm and balance between work and rest. God has woven into the nature of creation a need to be active and a need to rest. Our bodies need to sleep or they quickly break down. The land needs to be left fallow or it will become depleted and dead lacking the vitality to bring forth produce. God in his kindness modeled and gave to humanity the concept and command for Sabbath Rest whereby we work six days and leave one day for rest and worship (Exodus 20:8-11; Mark 2:23-28). The rhythms of work/rest should occur daily, weekly, and seasonally in our lives for our good and for the glory of God. Some of us in America must learn to rest in order to worship and honor our God. Some of us are slackers and need to work a bit more. We should see the sanctity of work as a gift from God and a calling by him. We also need to see the love of God for us in telling us to slow it down and chill out regularly. Sabbath rest allows the soul to readjust its gaze to the big picture of life and our worship and dependence on its maker. Historically, both Jews and Christians have taken a day to rest and worship. The Jewish community on the 7th day and the early Christians (all Jewish by the way) moved the day of worship to Sunday. Why? To worship the risen Christ on the day he was raised triumphantly over death. Due to our history in America being shaped by both communities we

¹² John Piper, *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1997).

have a two day weekend. The actual day is not the important issue, maintaining a rhythm of work rest is the issue¹³. We need to adjust ourselves to this gospel rhythm in our lives.

Mission – Evangelism and Service

It is easy to think only of contemplative practices, where the soul focuses upon God, as the primary means we connect with him. Yet if we are to follow Jesus we cannot miss that he was an active man living out the mission of his Father. His commission to his people is to “make disciples of all nations” and teaching them to follow everything he commanded us (Matthew 28:18-20). This involves proclaiming the gospel to other people who are in need of the forgiveness of Jesus for their sins. The word evangelism simply means to share the good news of what God has done for us in Jesus. It is a proclaiming of truth to others and calling them to repent of sin and turn to Christ for grace and forgiveness. It is a gospel rhythm, massively neglected by the church in our age. For many reasons, Christians today simply do not share the gospel word with friends, neighbors and the people in their lives. I have found that I meet deeply with Jesus when I am living out his mission with lost people because this is what he is doing today. The Bible tells us that Jesus came to “seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). We should be about this business as a core rhythm of our lives.

In addition to evangelism, we are also called to serve others and care about the poor and oppressed in our world. It is clear that this was expected by Jesus (Matthew 25) and the apostles (Galatians 2:10). In fact, in Galatians two you see both gospel preaching and serving the poor presented in the same passage, in the same context!

⁷ On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised ⁸ (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), ⁹ and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. ¹⁰ Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

Sharing the gospel with people outside of the church community and serving others should go hand and hand as regular gospel practices in which we should engage. In doing so, you will meet Jesus there.

Gathered Gospel Rhythms

Most of the gospel rhythms with which we engage can be practiced both individually and together as a community. There are however, a few practices which mark the gathering of the church together for regular worship. These mark each week with the gospel and mark certain important passages of life together. We'll focus on three of these of which the Protestant Reformers singled out as “marks” of a true biblical church.

The Word - The Scriptures and Gathered Worship

¹³ In Romans 14 and Colossians 2 the apostle Paul addresses this issue head on. The Sabbath is a gift to man and it is also a type or shadow of our full rest in Jesus (See Hebrews chapters 3 and 4)

Just as the Word is savored in the life of the individual, the Scriptures, the very Word of God, are to be proclaimed, taught, heard and obeyed by the people of God together. The Bible is meant to be read publicly (1 Timothy 4:13) and heard as well as read by people in the church. The Word is living and active (Hebrews 4:12) and will change us as we hear it. A preacher's duty is not only to bring "how to" seminars to people with spiritual themes, but rather to bring God's very word to their ears so that they are changed by it. Christians are exhorted to keep getting together regularly (Hebrews 10:24, 25), to gathering as the church. In part, this is for us to participate in the practice of Communion and hearing the Bible read and preached. In addition to gathering for the preaching of the Bible we also gather to sing and worship the God of the gospel. Singing to one another and to our God is the response of overflow of joy and gratitude. At Jacob's Well we respond to what we see of God in the Scriptures through songs, hymns and other spiritual songs.

The Sacraments - Baptism and The Lord's Table

Christian Baptism

Baptism is the entry sign of the new covenant or the initiatory rite for every Christian. It is the outward sign of the reality that this person belongs to God's church. It marks a person as a Christian and is the way someone recognizes publically with Jesus Christ and his people. As it is an entry sign, it is to be performed one time and is not repeated regularly like Communion. The meaning of baptism is multifaceted. It is meant to portray our own death, burial and resurrection with Christ (Romans 6, Colossians 2:12). It also represents purification, a washing, or cleansing from our sin (Acts 22:16), and it also represents that we have been rescued from divine wrath and the coming judgment (1 Peter 3). Finally, it serves as an outward testimony of the inward change of conversion; people who were alienated from the Lord, yes even his enemies, are now washed, cleansed, and testify to a good conscience towards God.

The Lord's Table

Jesus established the Lord's Supper, or communion, for his people as a lasting sacrament and ongoing ordinance of the New Covenant. A covenant is a promise from God; the New Covenant is a promise sealed in Jesus' own blood. It represents a promise that in Christ, God has purchased his people for himself, forgiven them, reconciled them to himself, and made them right in his sight. In Communion this promise of the gospel is celebrated and displayed in the church. In Communion we do many things together. We remember and celebrate his body and blood which were broken and shed for our sins. We also meet with Jesus in a special way, as he indeed is present with us at his table where he ministers to us by the Spirit. Communion is a time for confession, repentance, and rededicating our lives together before God. It is a time of declaring our allegiance and dependence upon Jesus for all things; it is also a visible picture to the world that the eternal is mingled with our present and that Jesus is still calling people to become his own. It is not to be minimized or sidelined in the churches as it is a central and unique aspect of Christian worship. It marks us as his people and is an intimate time for the bride of Christ before her Lord.

Conclusion

Living life through Gospel Rhythms should always come forth from a heart that has been converted and desires to follow Jesus. It is not something we can or should try to force upon one another. Studying scripture, prayer, meditation, mission and participation in the life of the local church must flow from a deep "want to" that God has placed in us. If we cannot hear the gospel music, we will not pursue gospel rhythms. Yet when Jesus gives us ears to hear even the most off beat brothers and sisters will suddenly feel a gospel rhythm come to life. We want to discipline and train in godliness. We want to say no to temptation and sin to follow Jesus in spiritual practices in our lives. We will want to have his face turned towards us and come before his throne regularly for mercy, help and grace. When I try to get my kids to eat broccoli I can tell them it is good for them and I can even make them choke it down. Yet if they find a taste for it, they will eat with joy for themselves. You cannot make others choke down Jesus, but when he finds them, gospel rhythms will begin to become a joy in their lives.

Jacob's Well I commend to you the pathways of study, prayer, fasting, meditation, evangelism, service, hearing and singing the gospel, baptism and communion. These paths contain life. These paths are led by Jesus.

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