

SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP

We are committed to learning how to be great friends with other believers. We believe each Christian life needs friendships with people from whom we might learn and with those in whom we can invest. We refuse to coast through our friendships with shallow conversation and insist on asking better questions, becoming better listeners, and looking for God's leading together. Examples include:

- Mentoring relationships and coaching relationships
- Meals, messages, and meaningful trips with Christians
- Pursuing each other
- Showing up in times of need and for celebration

GENEROSITY

We believe God has called all his people to generosity with what they have, service, and using our spiritual gifts to serve God's church and the world. We commit to steward our time, presence, possessions, and money wisely. Examples include:

- Creating calendar openings to serve
- Learning how my gifts and abilities intersect with the church's work and mission
- Planning and giving to fund the work of the gospel
- Spontaneously giving extra to God and community or for needs that arise

SABBATH

We believe in saving time for deep rest in private and with our families, time which is not allowed to be scheduled for other purposes. Sabbath rest is rooted in God's resting on the seventh day of creation and reminds us we rest in Christ's work, not our own. Examples include:

- Taking one day off from all productivity
- Disconnecting from media that revs us up
- Cultivating a quiet soul through silence, simplicity, and (some) solitude
- Scheduling things our loved ones love to do

FEASTING & FASTING

Everything God made can be enjoyed with Thanksgiving, but we should not be mastered by anything. Fasting is intentionally refraining from food and drink for the sake of the greater enjoyment of pursuing God. Feasting is how we celebrate God's abundant gifts together. Examples include:

- Giving up some food items during Lent or other seasons or days of the week
- Throwing celebratory meals for major life events or for the sake of generosity
- Addressing our over-consumption by taking breaks from media
- Learning contentment with what is before us instead of chasing more
- Learning to truly enjoy the abundance God provides

Over the coming months of 2023 and 2024 we are going to write, preach, and podcast about these seven rhythms of discipleship and the practices that help us become conformed to Christ's image. Starting in January 2023 we will talk for four weeks about worship – it's the foundation of all the other disciplines. We will not cover the seven in any particular order, and we will probably loop back and cover certain areas again before we're done. The invitation to you is to ask God, "what would you have me do?" Do any of the deformations in this document apply to you? Are there any places you've known for a long time that you desired growth and fuller life? Is there a place God is calling you to form new habits and become more like his Son?



7 DISCIPLESHIP RHYTHMS

WORSHIP

EMBODIED DEVOTION

MISSIONAL ENCOUNTER

SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP

GENEROSITY

SABBATH

FEASTING & FASTING

We became interested in deepening discipleship at Covenant for several reasons. First, because it was Jesus' method of helping his followers take hold of the "full life" that he promised. (John 10:10). Second, because we live in a world that has deformed us so that we are overworked, over-busy, hyper-consumeristic, hyper-individualistic, over-sexualized, and insanely self-focused. Discipleship is Jesus' means to re-form us in his image to become like him and bring freedom from these heavy burdens. (Matthew 11:28-30). Third, because Covenant Church has asked for it. When The Center conducted a survey among us, and when in a later group of over 50 leaders deliberated on three-year goals for Covenant, both processes revealed an intense felt-need for more discipleship. For all these reasons we are launching the Discipleship Rhythms in 2022-2023.

But... What do people mean by discipleship? How would we know if it was happening? What does it look like when it is working? What does it consist of? This brochure will introduce the framework of Discipleship Rhythms. We'll release articles, sermons, and podcasts throughout the year to beef up our understanding of discipleship and the habits that form us.

Let's define Christian Discipleship as imitating Jesus to become like him.

*"For those who love God
all things work together for good,
for those who are called
according to his purpose.
For those whom he foreknew
he also predestined
to be **conformed to the image of his Son,**
in order that he might be the firstborn
among many brothers."
Romans 8:28-29*

One great purpose of God's work in our lives is that we would be conformed to the image of his Son — in other words, that we would become like Jesus. Paul instructed his friends in Corinth to "Imitate me as I imitate Christ," and explained that he wanted them to learn to do everything in their life for the glory of God. (1 Corinthians. 10:31 and following).

Becoming like Jesus means learning to love God with our whole life — head, heart, and hands. It also means learning to love other people as we love ourselves. (Mark 12:29-31). It means demonstrating the fruit of Jesus' Spirit in us, which produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-25). In Jesus' words, it means giving up our ordinary ways of living to take hold of his unique kind of living:

*"Then Jesus told his disciples,
'If anyone would come after me,
let him deny himself
and take up his cross and follow me.
**For whoever would save his life will lose it,
but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.'**"
Matthew 16:24-25*

Discipleship is an entire life pursuit. It is like the restoration of a magnificent but dilapidated home. It is a life-long process. It is a journey in partnership with the living God. It is as if Jesus bought the deed to our hearts on the day he saved us and he continues to remodel our lives, setting room by room in order, as he grows us through discipleship.

Let's be clear about one thing: These rhythms are not something you do to get or earn salvation (which is impossible), we do them because of the unimaginable and all-sufficient grace of Jesus that has already saved us! Out of joy and love for all he has done we try to take hold of the full life he has promised is ours. As Dallas Willard famously wrote: Grace is not opposed to effort. It is opposed to earning.

One other picture before we move on: Discipleship is slow, steady growth like a tree with rings marking the progress. Some years are thin, others thick, some injuries and blemishes become part of the record, but, over time, the tree becomes magnificent. You can order a load of lumber delivered to your yard within a day, but to grow a majestic oak in your yard takes decades. So is the life with Jesus we call discipleship.

We have selected these rhythms of life for Covenant from classic Christian spiritual disciplines that are rooted in the life and teachings of Jesus. As previously stated, we have been deformed by our culture and our own desires to be hyper-individualistic, over-sexualized, argumentative, over-scheduled, over-indulgent, and hyper-consumeristic. The seven rhythms will help us seek God's formation of us as individuals and as a community. There are many practices that legitimately contribute to spiritual growth, but these were prayerfully chosen for our church, in our cultural moment.

WORSHIP

We are committed to a life full of worship in both weekly gatherings and daily solitude. Something special happens when we gather, putting aside our individual schedules for a time. We also surrender time daily to read scripture, examine our hearts, and participate in the rich and diverse prayer traditions of our faith. Examples include:

- Weekly worship services
- Daily quiet time/devotions
- Reading the Bible a little each day
- Annual or regular retreats for seeking God's direction
- 2-3x/month community group engagement

EMBODIED DEVOTION

Our bodies are how we interact in the world for good or ill. With them we speak, touch, approach, or withdraw. Our bodies learn habits and become used to certain behaviors and responses. We are committed to dedicating our bodies to God's work and Kingdom. Examples include:

- Baptism at the beginning of our Christian journey
- Regular celebrating of the Lord's Supper
- Practicing self-control with sex according to God's teachings
- Practicing self-control with food and drink
- Growing more emotionally healthy
- Exercising our bodies

MISSIONAL ENCOUNTER

We seek to share the good news of Jesus with those who don't know him by sharing our own stories and practicing patient and wise dialogue. We believe that meeting another person has a spiritual dimension whether in shared service, enjoyment of the arts, work, play, or by opening our homes and calendars in hospitality. Examples include:

- Sharing how God has changed our lives; "testifying"
- Praying with a stranger
- Hosting people from whom we derive no advantage
- Engaging in honest conversations about our values and beliefs with others
- Serving our local and global community