



rhythms  
*of grace*

life group book

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## **LIFE GROUP SERIES**

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The content in this book has been influenced by other resources designed to give you and your life group an array of opportunities to practise the ways of Jesus.

We particularly want to acknowledge Bridgetown Church for their inspiring work and encourage you to continue to grow by engaging with their content beyond this series. You can visit their website: [bridgetown.church/practices](http://bridgetown.church/practices)

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it.

Learn the unforced **rhythms of grace**. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

- Matthew 11:28–30  
(The Message)

# RHYTHMS OF GRACE

## Practising the ways of Jesus

Life is filled with rhythms. It is deeply embedded into life and fundamental to flourishing. Each morning the sun rises, waking up the world around us and leading to the bustle of fresh activity, energy and life. As the sun descends behind the horizon ushering in darkness, the world prepares to lay its head on the pillow for rest and recovery. Our days turn into weeks, which turn into months, which turn into seasons. Summer to Autumn. Autumn to Winter. Winter to Spring. Back to Summer again. And the earth responds by producing its fruits and crops in accordance with these divine rhythms. Animals come and go as the world follows the patterns God has finely tuned into it. From the very beginning, life has been created with a beat that provides the foundations for a fruitful tune.

Today our environment is marked by hurry, impulse and distraction. These environmental factors override the gracious intentions of our Creator and have a damaging impact on our wellbeing. New beats are being made that deeply shape our habits, behaviours and our values. Our lives are being formed by the pressures of our modern secular environment, often without thought, intent or recognition of the deeper rhythms. And sadly, these habits and patterns of behaviour have the power to move us away from the grace and purposes we were ultimately created for. Our hearts are moved away from where and who God wants us to be.

Jesus was not only committed to teaching and living a disciplined life, but He purposefully invited His followers to do the same. He knew that the patterns of behaviour shape our heart and our loves. And so, He sought to instil into His disciples, and to us, a life of discipline and surrender because it was the only way to true love, freedom, joy and life.

Jesus invites us into a radical way of living that works against the ways of this world. It takes practice and faith to walk it, but it will set us free to live freely and lightly with Him in the unforced rhythms of grace.

# SIMPLICITY

*“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”*

*- Matthew 6:25–27*

‘Money doesn’t make you happy’—do you really believe that? It’s pretty hard to truly live it when everything around us in our consumer-driven society proclaims that true happiness comes through the things you can buy: that iPhone, those sneakers, a house, a fancy holiday. If you just work a bit harder, you can have it and your joy will be complete.

Jesus saw this and He didn’t buy it, and He doesn’t want us to either. He knows the pursuit of stuff rather than trust in Him ultimately leads to worry and anxiety, and robs us of the true joy that can be found in Him. If we are really willing to trust Him rather than the trappings of life, He will invite us into a new way of life—a new, simple rhythm of grace that will bless us and bring blessing to those around us.

## **More about simplicity**

Rhythms of Grace series—[gatewaybaptist.com.au/series](http://gatewaybaptist.com.au/series)

Bridgetown Church Practices—[practicingtheway.org/practices/simplicity](http://practicingtheway.org/practices/simplicity)

Living with Margins; Christine Wood—[livingwithmargins.com](http://livingwithmargins.com)

## Reflect

**Ask:** Have you thought of simplicity as a spiritual discipline before? What is new about this idea to you?

**Ask:** Where did the lie that 'more is better' come from? How is this unintentionally embedded into your own life?

**Ask:** What are some areas of complexity in your life? How would living simply change how you live?

**Ask:** How do you see Jesus living a simple life? How can you model your life on and practise living like Jesus?

## Practise the ways of Jesus

There are a number of ways you can practise the spiritual discipline of simplicity. However, to make space to practise, we need margins in our life. To start something, we must also stop something.

**One thing I can STOP:** \_\_\_\_\_

- stop waking up to social media - reduce media subscriptions -
- speak less - delete unused apps - donate unused clothes to charity -
- examine your budget for waste - stop seeking drama in relationships -

**One thing I can START:** \_\_\_\_\_

- start your day with 5 minutes of silence - journal to clear your mind -
- walk slowly in nature and look around - retreat in solitude -
- listen more - practise saying no - create margins in your calendar -

**Pray:** King Jesus, show me how to practise and live a simple life as you did. Pry open my life and remove complexity so there is more room for the simplicity and freedom you want for my life.

# SABBATH REST

*There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.*

- Hebrews 4:9-11

We read in the story of Genesis that the first day of human existence starts with a pause. On the sixth day God creates humanity, and on the seventh He rests. In the midst of the hustle and hurry that fills our days and pressure we feel from every side, God continues to invite us—actually command us—to stop and rest. It is a commandment that we must make every effort to obey. Why? Because it will save us.

God knows us and knows that without one day in seven away from work, our lives will be robbed of life itself. It is time to resist the pressures of our world and learn to truly rest. Because, when we do, we enter afresh into grace. To stop—to sabbath—is to embed in our lives a rhythm that declares that our hope is not in what we do and what we produce, but rather that our hope is in the God who has already achieved everything for us.

How can you make every effort to enter rest? What creativity and discipline is needed to see you enter that rest?

## **More about Sabbath rest**

Rhythms of Grace series—[gatewaybaptist.com.au/series](http://gatewaybaptist.com.au/series)

Bridgetown Church Practices—[practicingtheway.org/practices/sabbath](http://practicingtheway.org/practices/sabbath)

Emotionally Healthy Spirituality; Peter Scazzero—Chapter 8; Rule of Life

# Reflect

**Ask:** Sabbath rest is more than just a day off; it's about a rhythm of intentional restfulness and worship. What is new about this idea to you?

**Ask:** In what ways do you practise Sabbath rest? If you don't have a rhythm, how can you be more intentional about this?

**Ask:** How can Sabbath also be a practice of resistance to our obsession with accomplishment and accumulation?

**Ask:** How do you see Jesus practising Sabbath? How can you model your life on and practise living like Jesus?

# Practise the ways of Jesus

There are number of ways you can practise the spiritual discipline of Sabbath. However, to make space to practise we need margins in our life. To start something, we must also stop something.

**One thing I can STOP:** \_\_\_\_\_

- turn off all phone notifications - stop doing chores on rest days -
- stop saying yes to everything - resist FOMO - avoid cramming -
- don't be seduced by accomplishment - don't neglect physical health -

**One thing I can START:** \_\_\_\_\_

- leave work at the office - schedule time for you, family, friends -
- designate one day to be your weekly rest day - waste time with God -
- have fun - try new hobbies - retreat in solitude - exercise your body -

**Pray:** King Jesus, make me aware of my unconscious addiction to achievement and accumulation, and instead enter into God's restorative rest and prioritise Sabbath in my life.



# SCRIPTURE

*“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”*

- Matthew 7:24-27

Our world is constantly changing. Technology is forcing change quicker now than any other time in history, with access to ideas and information distributed at lightning speed, and a variety of opinions on any subject freely shared on a plethora of social media platforms. Our minds and lives are being deeply formed and shaped in these new digital chambers. But is it making us deeper and wiser people?

Jesus invites us not to form our lives around the words and opinions of others, but around His words. Jesus claims to be the fulfillment of all of the law and prophets (Matthew 5:17) and Scripture claims that Jesus is the wisdom of God (John 1, 1 Corinthians 1). The message of Jesus is a message of grace. And Jesus Himself invites us to put into practice the words He speaks. In an age of overload and distraction, we must place a priority in reading God’s Word and then put it into practice. What distraction do you need to remove so you can hear the voice of God afresh today?

## **More about Scripture**

Rhythms of Grace series—[gatewaybaptist.com.au/series](http://gatewaybaptist.com.au/series)

Bridgetown Church Practices—[practicingtheway.org/practices/scripture](http://practicingtheway.org/practices/scripture)

[Hide this in Your Heart, Memorizing Scripture; Frost and Hill](#)

# Reflect

**Ask:** What does your practice of reading Scripture look like right now? How did you get to that point?

**Ask:** We likely all want to read the Bible more. What challenges do you face when it comes to reading the Bible?

**Ask:** Have you considered other ways to engage with the Bible? Look at some of the digital resources listed and discuss.

**Ask:** How do you see Jesus living immersed in Scripture? How can you model your life on and practise living like Jesus?

# Practise the ways of Jesus

There are number of ways you can practise the spiritual discipline of reading Scripture. However, to make space to practise, we need margins in our life. To start something, we must also stop something.

**One thing I can STOP:** \_\_\_\_\_

- avoid shame or guilt about not reading the Bible - don't do it alone -
- don't get stuck; just jump to something new in Scripture (e.g. Gospels) -
- don't force yourself to read at times you won't engage well -

**One thing I can START:** \_\_\_\_\_

- read Scripture aloud - memorise short verses - try the NLT version -
- try engaging in new ways like Lectio Divina - follow a reading plan -
- listen to the audio Bible while driving or walking -
- invite someone to read with you - start highlighting key verses -

**Pray:** King Jesus, your grace removes my guilt and shame when I don't read your Word. I pray you would grow in me a deep desire to know Scripture intimately and know you more through it.

# PRAYER

*“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”*

- Matthew 6:5-8

Hands up if you pray. Hands up if you find it hard to pray? Most people say both! There is something embedded in us that longs to lift our hands and pray, whether we have faith or not. Jesus expects His followers to pray, and promises that prayer will be powerful and effective. So why do we find it so hard? Perhaps it is because we don't see our own need? Perhaps because we can't see who we are praying to? Perhaps it is because we don't know how? Perhaps we are just too busy?

Like the disciples, we need to come to Jesus and ask: teach us to pray. Because when we pray, we see change. It changes us. It changes circumstances. As Richard Foster says, “To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives. The closer we come to the heartbeat of God the more we see our need and the more we desire to be conformed to Christ.” Let us not miss this divine invitation to be with God and to receive his grace!

## More about prayer

Rhythms of Grace series—[gatewaybaptist.com.au/series](http://gatewaybaptist.com.au/series)

Bridgetown Church Practices—[practicingtheway.org/practices/prayer](http://practicingtheway.org/practices/prayer)

[A Praying Life; Paul E. Miller](#)

## Reflect

**Ask:** What does your practice of prayer look like right now? How did you get to that point?

**Ask:** What does prayer do to you? What does prayer do for God?

**Ask:** What are some of the challenges you face when you pray? What are some ways to overcome this?

**Ask:** What are some examples of how Jesus prays? How can you model your life on and practise living like Jesus?

## Practise the ways of Jesus

There are number of ways you can practise the spiritual discipline of prayer. However, to make space to practise we need margins in our life. To start something, we must also stop something.

**One thing I can STOP:** \_\_\_\_\_

- don't give up on prayer - leave prayer just for Sunday -
- reframe prayer as a language rather than an event -

**One thing I can START:** \_\_\_\_\_

- memorise the Lord's Prayer - engage with different forms of prayer -
  - eg. contemplative, intercessory, lament, imaginative, listening -
- pray without ceasing/be in constant prayer conversation with God -
  - pray aloud in solitude - schedule in daily prayer in your calendar -
- pray with adoration, confession, thanksgiving, service - pray in the car -

**Pray:** King Jesus, teach me to pray just as you prayed. Help me to hear from you, Spirit, about developing a habit and culture of persistent prayer in my life.

# SINGING

*Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*- Ephesians 5:18b–20*

Music is a universal language. Go to any culture, anywhere, at any time in history and you will find an expression of singing. Songs tell stories about who we are, where we come from and where we find meaning. The songs we sing reinforce the truth we believe and shape the values we uphold. That is why sung worship has always been at the heart of the Christian faith.

For millennia, followers of Jesus have gathered to sing hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5). Jesus himself sang, using the words of Psalms to express emotion (Psalm 22) and celebrate the story of God's redemptive work in His people (Matthew 26). There is something uniquely intimate and powerful when we choose to sing and speak out the wonders of God.

While we may not always feel comfortable or capable when we gather to sing, it is a practice that Jesus and the church down through the ages models for us and Scripture invites us into. As we find our voice, we remind ourselves of who God is, who we are in Him and the great story we are all part of.

## **More about singing**

Rhythms of Grace series—[gatewaybaptist.com.au/series](https://gatewaybaptist.com.au/series)

Bridgetown Church Practices—[bridgetown.church/practices](https://bridgetown.church/practices)

Gateway 'Listen Worship' playlist—[gatewaybaptist.com.au/spotify](https://gatewaybaptist.com.au/spotify)

## Reflect

**Ask:** What is the kind of music that you love listening to and singing along to most?

**Ask:** How do you feel about singing as a spiritual discipline?

**Ask:** Why do you think the church has included singing as part of its practices for centuries?

**Ask:** What is one way you can press into singing as a discipline, even if you aren't musically gifted?

## Practise the ways of Jesus

There are number of ways you can practise the spiritual discipline of singing. However, to make space to practise, we need margins in our life. To start something, we must also stop something.

**One thing I can STOP:** \_\_\_\_\_

- ask God to renew your attitude towards singing in a congregation -
- let go of fear about what others think - audit what you listen to -

**One thing I can START:** \_\_\_\_\_

- sing your prayers - come to know God created your voice with care -
- find beauty in music - sing your prayers over an instrumental track -
  - listen to and sing along to worship music on your commute -
  - get singing lessons as a hobby -

**Pray:** King Jesus, help me to find my voice to shout your praise and proclaim your faithfulness. Well up a new song in my heart that I may find joy in singing in praise and worship to you.

# HOSPITALITY

*You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.*

- John 13:13-17

We live in a growing world of self-service. We are not served, and we will not be served. A visit to the local supermarket is a clear indicator of this social trend. This extends to the home. It is becoming less acceptable to invite someone over for a meal—such an act is too intimate, too humbling. Yet Jesus shows us in the most profound way possible what it means to live a life of humble hospitality.

The night before He is to be crucified, Jesus performs an act that would become a symbol for us. Before the meal, He washes feet. The Lord of the universe humbles Himself to serve and wash the stinky feet of His disciples. In this profoundly intimate and vulnerable act, He is inviting His friends into a deeper relationship with Him. It is an invitation to receive what is not deserved. In an age of self-service and self-reliance, Jesus invites us to serve others, to invite others into our lives and hearts. As we humbly do this, not only will we be deeply changed, but so will those who receive our gift of hospitality.

## **More about Hospitality**

Rhythms of Grace series—[gatewaybaptist.com.au/series](http://gatewaybaptist.com.au/series)

Bridgetown Church Practices—[practicingtheway.org/practices/eating-drinking](http://practicingtheway.org/practices/eating-drinking)

## Reflect

**Ask:** Have you thought of hospitality as a spiritual discipline before? What is new about this idea to you?

**Ask:** Are you naturally inclined to open your home to others? Or are you more likely to see home as a safe space?

**Ask:** What benefits are there in inviting people in? To you? To your guests?

**Ask:** What are some of the ways you see Jesus practise hospitality? What can we learn from him about this practice?

## Practise the ways of Jesus

There are number of ways you can practise the spiritual discipline of hospitality. However, to make space to practise we need margins in our life. To start something, we must also stop something.

**One thing I can STOP:** \_\_\_\_\_

- stop declining invitations of hospitality out of habit -
- stop leaving church so quickly on a Sunday -

**One thing I can START:** \_\_\_\_\_

- get to know your neighbours - make table time a family ministry -
- create moments of celebration around meals - learn to cook -
- use hospitality as a chance for healing - participate in Biblical feasts -
- practise the Lord's Supper at home - accept invitations to dine -
- reframe church gatherings as family events/chances for hospitality -
- stay longer after church for coffee, community and conversation -

**Pray:** King Jesus, open up my heart and my home to welcome others in. Invite me in and send me out so that people may experience the love and care of God through me, and may my table become part of your church.



# RESOURCES

## BOOKS

[The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry—John Mark Comer](#)

[Sacred Rhythms—Ruth Hayley Barton](#)

[Celebration of Discipline—Richard Foster](#)

[You Are What You Love—James K.A. Smith](#)

[Mudhouse Sabbath—Lauren F. Winner](#)

[The Life You've Always Wanted—John Ortberg](#)

[Emotionally Healthy Spirituality—Peter Scazzero](#)

[Abundant Simplicity—Jan Johnson](#)

[Hide this in Your Heart—Michael Frost & Graham Joseph Hill](#)

[A Praying Life—Paul E. Miller](#)

[The Gospel Comes with a House Key—Rosaria Butterfield](#)

## ONLINE RESOURCES

Bridgetown Church resources—[bridgetown.church/practices](http://bridgetown.church/practices)

Living with Margins; Christine Wood—[livingwithmargins.com](http://livingwithmargins.com)

Rhythms of Grace series—[gatewaybaptist.com.au/series](http://gatewaybaptist.com.au/series)



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