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Epiphany

A New Rhythm – One Year Later

We're going to spend some time at the beginning of this year talking about who God is.

The reason we're going to start here is simple:

You've heard me talk about the shape of Jesus' life and our lives should be shaped in the same way. A simple memory tool is the **triangle: Jesus' life, like ours has an up dimension an in dimension and an out dimension**

1. In Luke 6:12 and following we see this laid out: Jesus first goes **UP**, literally, on a mountain and prioritizes his relationship to his heavenly father - the unity of the Trinity comes first and everything else flowed out of that in Jesus his own life.

When we began following Jesus and sharing his life our lives are supposed to take on the same shape and begin with our relationship to God

2. Then there's the **IN** dimension, as we see Jesus choose 12 disciples - he intentionally poured into a few and let those few *speak into his life* in a special way, too.
3. Lastly, he spent time out among the masses. He went out and healed and spoke and taught and served. As we see in Luke 6:17-19

The reason I start here today is because we need to be reminded of this shape of life, and we want to begin this year open to God shaping us to live in this same way.

This is actually how we started last year, too.

I think it's important that we always return to the foundation **not of ourselves but of God**

I want to share these powerful words of one of the church fathers Irenaeus as we begin this year:
But there is one only God, the Creator — He who is above every Principality, and Power, and Dominion, and Virtue: He is Father, He is God, He the Founder, He the Maker, He the Creator, who made those things by Himself, that is, through His Word and His Wisdom — heaven and earth, and the seas, and all things that are in them: He is just; He is good; He it is who formed man, who planted paradise, //who made the world, who gave rise to the flood, who saved Noah; He is the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of the living: He it is whom the law proclaims, whom the prophets preach, whom Christ reveals, whom the apostles make known to us, and in whom the Church believes. He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: through His Word, who is His Son, through Him He is revealed and manifested to all to whom He is revealed; for those [only] know Him to whom the Son has revealed Him. But the Son, eternally co-existing with the Father, from of old, yea, from the beginning, always reveals the Father to Angels, Archangels, Powers, Virtues, and all to whom He wills that God should be revealed.

But we don't want to just know these things about God, and God doesn't want us to just know these things about himself – the goal and purpose is to get to know God and become like Jesus in

the ABC's of faith - our attitude behavior and character. And as Irenaeus and of course the Bible makes clear, **we only know God through the Son, Jesus Christ. There is no other way.**

And this brings us to spiritual rhythms and disciplines.

Spiritual disciplines grow out of a longing, a deep desire within us that bubbles up and overflows. What is that longing for? For God himself. Psalm 42:1 says - **My soul longings for you, o God .**

God puts this thirst in us - and he comes to us and offers us living water and all we have to do is stop - stop rebelling stop running stop trying to do it all by yourself. and let him give you that deep desire - himself his very life in you

Now we worked through this in detail last year for three months but if you're like me you've probably forgotten almost all of it - or at least what you need is a few prompts and some gentle reminders so that you can say Oh yeah I remember that I've been working on that I forgot why I was working on it but I've been working on that or I know that I need to get back at that because that discipline is so important .

So, today we're going to review the list of disciplines we talked about last year and we're going to spend some time individually asking God to show us what areas we need to be paying attention to.

But before we do that, I want to start with an important word of caution.

How many of you know, that even when the pastor's up here telling you *"it's not by your effort it's by God's grace"* –it can still feel **overwhelming** week after week month after month year after year to keep learning about all these practices and disciplines, yet never feeling you've become good enough at any of them?

I know that feeling, too, and there's no easy way to get away from our effort-based thinking which always creeps in. So I remind you (and myself) again - these rhythms and disciplines help us to be open and ready for God's work, they don't transform us – GOD transforms us. Let these words of scripture sink in deep as we begin: **For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works. . . Eph 2:8ff ESV**

Doing these disciplines and rhythms will not make God love you anymore than he already loves you. It will not make God happier with you, he is already overjoyed to call you his child by faith and not by works.

Take a look at me at the words of Colossians 2:20-23:

20 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— 21 "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" 22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? 23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and

asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. ESV

These words are a warning to each one of us to not rely on the efforts of rhythms and disciplines. Of course in Paul's day when he's writing to the Colossians here he's talking about Jewish opponents of Christianity who want them to conform to Torah observance in order to please God. Remember what we said last week- those Old Testament rules were fulfilled in Christ – and he is the master of the Old Testament law but he has not told us to keep trying to fulfill it ourselves, instead he has given us instructions on how to live now. The New Testament lays out the standards for all the nations to come in and join the family of God through the law of “the Spirit of Life” as Paul calls it in Romans 8:2.

We don't want to be people adding rule up on rule that isn't there in the Scriptures – we don't want to be people who fashion a new “self-made religion” - we don't want to be people promoting a pious holier than thou way of living that lacks the most important thing - a real relationship with Jesus Christ .

Now hopefully I've given us enough caution before we look at these disciplines again - some of the best things that we find in scripture also come with the most frequent warnings because we are so liable to twist these things away from what God wanted them to be .

So with that let's look at these important disciplines together - let's be reminded of them and let's each ask God what ways he wants to prepare us for growth this year.

The first 6 are “internal Disciplines” mainly, while the last 4 are external or communal disciplines. I encourage you to ponder how God may be calling you to at least one from each section.

1. **Meditation**- time of special focus, choosing to separate from all other distractions except God's word as it is before you in a book form or perhaps recited from memory. it's a time to ponder and mull over the things that God speaks to us in the permanent record of his written Word. Is God inviting you into a new or renewed rhythm of meditation?
2. **Prayer**: This is our foundational communion with God. the live real-time interaction of speaking and listening. we can speak to the creator God of the universe and more importantly we can listen to the one who made us and knows us. Is God inviting you into a new or renewed rhythm of prayer?
3. **Fasting**: fasting most often from food although it could be from a cell phone or some intrusive habit in your life - it's about self denial in order to make space for increased attentiveness one things that are truly important, it's about denying ourselves luxury so that we can live with greater understanding and compassion, and it's about removing the grip of addictive habits and substances in our lives so that we can be conscious have an even deeper sense of freedom in Christ. Is God inviting you this year into a new or renewed rhythm of fasting?

4. **Study** - rotation is the devotional reading of scripture then study is the analytical reading of scripture. but study can take us beyond scripture we can study creation, we can study our relationships. this isn't study for the sake of learning its study as a spiritual discipline -which helps us to understand God's great story of creation and brokenness redemption and salvation. when we study the scripture or creation like this we don't just find out facts, we get to know who God is and what he's like. Is God inviting you this year into a new or renewed rhythm of study?
5. **Simplicity** - simplicity is popular in our culture through minimalism, buying less, pressing against consumerism and these are good things but that's not the spiritual discipline of simplicity- simplicity is an inward reality that results in an outward lifestyle. - it begins with an inward attitude of having one attachment one goal rather than trying to pursue anything and everything in order to give meaning to our life. that one attachment and that one goal is summed up in Matthew 6:33 seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness or right living and everything else will be added to you. Is God inviting you this year into a new or renewed rhythm of simplicity?
6. **Solitude**: The last of the so- called inward rhythms. Far from loneliness solitude is the deep fulfillment of time spent in the spirit without distraction - it's not a location so much as it is a state of the heart although location can help a lot. a healthy rhythm of solitude is your best way to combat loneliness for you will begin to know the presence of the spirit of God anywhere and everywhere. Is God inviting you this year into a new or renewed rhythm of solitude?

The last four disciplines or what you could call communal or outward disciplines - they are exercised in our relationships with others in the church. a rich and healthy spiritual life cannot be lived in isolation. you cannot try hard enough read the Bible enough pray enough to make up for the spiritual sickness you will develop if you stay isolated from others in the faith.

7. **Submission**: biblical relationships in the church are not focused on outward displays of hierarchy although far too often in local or institutional church this is what we end up seeing. the life of Jesus and the whole testimony of scripture describes attitudes of subordination – Romans 12:3 says do not think of yourself more highly than you ought. And Philippians 2:3 says “in humility consider others better than yourselves”. Submission sets you free from being a slave to your own desires and puts you in the service of the king who came not to be served but to serve (Mk 10:45). Is God calling you to a new or renewed rhythm of submission this year?
8. **Worship**: can be called a whole life rhythm of response to God. Christ is with us when we are alone sitting on the couch, when we are worshiping with our church, when we are on the street talking to a homeless person - in every facet of our lives - embody the praise and love for our creator? how is God calling you to a renewed rhythm of worship this year?

9. **Service:** Do you serve only when it gets attention when you get rewards when you see results or when you simply feel like it? Service is about **giving up control**, not manipulating a situation. The most challenging aspect of service is that it interrupts our leisure and our comfort. are you willing to take on a new or renewed rhythm of service this year?

10. **Confession:** the last rhythm we talked about last year is confession. yes God wants to hear from you in prayer as you confess your sins but he also makes it clear in scripture that we are to confess our sins to one another. but the active confession brings healing and strength to a community and it also allows you to minister out of your brokenness like we just talked about last week. It might be one of the hardest things you ever do but confession could lead to the biggest breakthrough in your life or in someone else's life in a very difficult season of depression, anger loneliness, or addiction. is it time to begin a new or renewed rhythm of confession?

Of each of these things I've said only the most brief summary statements. I encourage you if one of these things sounds like a particular challenge to you this year you can always go back in our YouTube catalog and pull up the sermons from last January to March on these topics.

The reason I want to renew these though is because I want to remind you of this appeal:
Through the practice of these various rhythms this year God wants to do something new in your life.

God is not done with you! and that's a good thing because most of us know that we aren't finished yet. there's still some work that needs to be done on our lives and there's still things we need to do for the sake of other people.

We're going to close today by taking a look at 2 Peter 1:4 - this is one of the most fascinating verses in the Bible because it speaks of the incredibly close relationship that God wants to share with us

And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires. NLT

Some Christians have felt uneasy about this idea, as though the humility to which we are so often exhorted should stop short of thinking we actually get to *share* in God's very being or nature. But what are we to say? After all the Holy Spirit is fully divine and if we say that the Holy Spirit comes to live within us and transform us from within - we are already using the same language of sharing in the divine nature, as God transforms us by his own presence in us to be like himself in our attitude behavior and character. The Holy Spirit leads us forward until we are soaked in God's own presence and power. Obviously for most of us most of the time it's not going to feel like that -but this probably has something to do with all of us struggling to really immerse ourselves in the life of spiritual discipline. The Holy Spirit's glorious presence with us is a deep well, and much more spiritual vibrancy is possible in each one of us.

No matter what you feel right now and where you're at right now - God is calling you away from the corruption that human desires cause and he's calling you toward a glory and excellence that only comes from him.

Isn't that what each one of us needs this year more than anything else?

What is it you want to grow toward this year? Let it be God's glory and excellence - because it's his promise to you, and he's inviting you to prepare yourself for that transformation you so desperately need and I need it, too.

I want to pray a blessing over you as you continue to ponder these things and ask God what ways he's convicting you and inviting you into deeper relationship with Him the opportunity to be a blessing to others in new ways this year.