

Practices of the Apprentice of Jesus (more briefly, The Nine Practices)



Introduction

We believe that God calls each of us to an all-encompassing life of apprenticeship to Jesus. As His way of living grows within, we move from a life of aimless wandering to one of purposeful love. Naturally, we seek more-and-more to be with God and participate in His mission to the world.

The following are practices that we believe are essential to this kind of life. As we rely on God's grace, we will intentionally integrate them into our spiritual community. They will serve as a consistent reminder of what matters most. They will thereby act as a guide for the purpose and practice of ministry in our church.

To help remember these practices, we could group them together in three categories: those that involve *learning*, whereby we 1) Study God's Word and 2) Develop the Mind; those that involve *growing*, whereby we 1) Commune with God, 2) Build Moral Virtue, and 3) Foster Spiritual Community; and those that involve *reaching out*, whereby we 1) Love and Serve Others, 2) Seek Justice and Restoration, 3) Witness to the Gospel, and 4) Exercise Stewardship.

Study God's Word

Apprentices of Jesus embrace God's Word as a source of truth and a guide for living well. It is for them a wellspring of life and they receive it joyfully as treasured wisdom. They desire to study it, meditate upon it, and let its words soak into their daily lives. As they do, they come to know God more deeply and their lives bear much fruit. Apprentices of Jesus are compelled to read the Bible carefully, paying attention to its meaning in context as well as applications to daily life. They also engage in focused meditation and memorization of its words.

Develop the Mind

Apprentices of Jesus strive to be redeemed from the harmful beliefs and patterns of thought in which they once walked. They hunger instead for God's truth, which becomes for them a firm foundation for living. As knowledge grows, their thoughts, emotions, and will are progressively aligned around the kingdom of God. Apprentices of Jesus cultivate a life of learning the Bible, doctrine, and apologetics. They also practice the presence of God, turning their mind towards him and his kingdom continuously in their daily lives.

Commune with God

Apprentices of Jesus seek above all else to practice the presence of God. They are enraptured with him and his kingdom. They long to know him intimately and walk with him in all of life. His divine presence progressively overtakes their worries, anxieties, and fears and supplants them with faith, hope, and love. This deep down desire drives apprentices of Jesus to root out whatever stands in the way of a life with God. They increasingly fellowship with him and embrace practices that foster awareness of his presence, such as prayer, stillness, and solitude.

Build Moral Virtue

Apprentices of Jesus are called to live holy lives as they walk by the power of the Spirit. They are learning from him how to put off the rebellious old self and to put on the new. As they follow Christ, they build virtue that lasts and in so doing become the kind of persons for whom obedience to his commands comes quite naturally. Apprentices of Jesus embrace practices that the Spirit uses to transform them into the character of Jesus, such as self-denial, accountability, prayer, and Bible study.

Foster Spiritual Community

Apprentices of Jesus seek to build friendships and unity in the community of God's people. They recognize that discipleship does not happen in isolation but, rather, within communities of encouragement, accountability, and mutual sharing. Accordingly, they prioritize the blessing of fellowship within the body of Christ. Apprentices of Jesus build intentional relationships for discipleship and accountability, strive to learn alongside others in classes, small groups, and other settings, and regularly encourage others along the way.

Love and Serve Others

Apprentices of Jesus seek to live sacrificial lives of *agape* towards their families, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. They are eager to show the same love to others that God has shown them in the person of Jesus. They act according to what love requires any given moment, whether it is forgiveness, compassion, exhortation, or reproach. Apprentices of Jesus seek to love and serve others well. They are sensitive to material, relational, intellectual, and emotional needs in the lives of those around them and intentionally make space for sacrificial service.

Seek Justice and Restoration

Apprentices of Jesus seek the redemption of ruined relationships and conditions of injustice. They work to bring about redemption in the midst of brokenness, wherever it is found. They are willing to go with Jesus to "the least of these," into places of hurt, pain, and oppression as a presence for goodness and hope. Apprentices of Jesus are keenly aware of the need for justice and restoration. They dedicate themselves to restoring love where love has been lost, abundance in the midst of poverty, and freedom in the face of tyranny.

Witness to the Gospel

Apprentices of Jesus bear witness to the good news, both through proclamation and embodiment of the reality of God's now and future kingdom. They sense the deep down need for Christ in the lives of those around them, and their passion is that the lost would come to be healed and walk with him. Apprentices of Jesus spend time with those in need of his redemptive presence. They get to know and spend concentrated time with them. They pray for and seek to serve the lost in everyday ways. They marvel at the power of the presence of Jesus to transform.

Exercise Stewardship

Apprentices of Jesus strive to be responsible stewards of God's creation. They recognize that the physical world as well as their talents, resources, and financial means bear the hand of God. They appreciate these things as his gifts with which they have been entrusted. Accordingly, they use them wisely and judiciously. Apprentices of Jesus are characterized by a commitment to caring for what God has made and seen fit to share with them. They develop their talents persistently, give generously, and live simply.