

Session 01: Love

Key Session Theme:

- We often look to our moral decisions and spiritual disciplines to measure our spiritual maturity, but when the *how* of spiritual formation outruns the *why* of spiritual formation, it leaves us fruitless.
- **Good news:** When we reorient our lives and disciplines around becoming people of love, expressed practically as service, we become fruitful and the promising “firstfruits” of the new creation.

How Do You Measure Your Spiritual Growth?

- We often measure our spiritual maturity by our moral decisions or spiritual disciplines.
- But Jesus tells us that fruit is how we take our spiritual temperature.

Three Ways Jesus Talks About Fruit

1. Fruitless

- When the *how* of spiritual formation outruns the *why* of spiritual formation, it leaves us fruitless.

2. Fruitful

- Jesus inseparably joined together love for God and for people. The way we love others is directly connected, even revealing, of the true state of our heart toward God.
- All spiritual practice is meant to free us to become people of love, expressed practically as service.
- Service is the expression of Christlike love through meeting the practical needs of another, especially those most in need of help.

3. Firstfruits

- Fruit that comes before its season is called “firstfruits.” It’s an early promise of a sweeping atmospheric change for all of creation.
- You and I are firstfruits in a corrupted creation: an early promise of a sweeping atmospheric change.
- We become firstfruits by starting where we are and starting today.

Key Scriptures and Context

- “By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”

—Matthew 7v16-20

- Jesus says that fruit is how you take your spiritual temperature.

- “Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit.”

—Matthew 12v33

- Jesus says almost the same thing here, in Matthew 12 that he said back there in Matthew 7, but the context is different: Jesus is talking to the most devout sect of priests in Israel. These are the people keeping the very practices Jesus says will form us into his apprentices, but they’ve lost the plot. They’ve confused the why and the how.

- “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.”

—James 1v18

- Here, James calls us firstfruits — an early sign of a sweeping atmospheric change that will envelop all of creation.

Session 01: Companion Guide Summary

- **Practice:** Do a simple act of love for someone in need.
- **Reach Exercise:** Partner with a friend or family member to serve together this week.
- **Keep Growing**
 - **Read:** *The Active Life* by Parker Palmer (Chapters 01-02)
 - **Listen:** Rule of Life Podcast on Service (Episode 01)

Session 02: Hiddenness

Key Session Theme

- It's easy to practice service with the wrong motive — “to be seen by men” — which deforms us from becoming people of love.
- **Good news:** When we practice service in hiddenness — often in the context of our ordinary, everyday activities and relationships — we make space for the Holy Spirit to reshape our hearts to mirror the self-giving nature of Jesus himself.

Everyday Service

- Jesus washing his disciples' feet demonstrates that service is not something we do away from our close relationships and outside of our ordinary rhythms.
- Jesus grounded service in ordinary places, and among everyday relationships.
- Most of us are better at doing “projects” of love than becoming “people” of love. The challenge is: can we drag that way of being back into the ordinary?
- The whole point of intentional environments of service is to become people of love in the ordinary environments of everyday life.

Hiddenness

- Service is such a visible spiritual practice, making it a good deed easily engaged for the wrong reasons. It's absolutely essential, then, that at least some of our service be done in hiddenness.
- In Matthew 6, Jesus encourages us to practice our righteousness in secret, and promises a reward for hidden service.

Key Scriptures and Context

- “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”

—John 13v15

- On his final night, between courses at Passover dinner, Jesus got down on his knees, and washed his disciples’ feet. Culturally speaking, there was no more menial, humiliating labor than foot washing.
- When Jesus told us to do as he has done for us, he didn’t mean we should now literally wash each others’ feet. Foot washing was one act of service. And that’s the point — freely giving the love of Jesus I freely received by practically meeting the needs of someone else.
- “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

—Matthew 6v2-4

- The English “give to the needy” is *eleémosuné* in Matthew’s Greek. It’s not just giving your money, but your resources, your time, your life — stewarding all you’ve been given freely on behalf of others: closer to what we call service.
- We don’t know for sure what kinds of rewards Jesus is talking about. But whatever it is, Jesus promises a reward for hidden service.

Week 02: Companion Guide Summary

- **Practice:** Do one hidden act of service.
- **Reach Exercise:** Set aside time for a guided listening prayer session to discern where the Holy Spirit is leading you to serve.
- **Keep Growing**
 - **Read:** *The Active Life* by Parker Palmer (Chapters 03-04)
 - **Listen:** Rule of Life Podcast on Service (Episode 02)

Session 03: Availability

Key Session Theme

- Our spiritual rhythms often make us intentional but not interruptible. This leads us to “pass by on the other side” of needs around us, stifling the compassion of God.
- **Good news:** Jesus models for us that loving our neighbor means embracing service in the midst of interruptions and heeding God’s compassion for the needs of others around us.

Good Samaritan

- The story of the Good Samaritan began with a man asking Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” And Jesus flips the question back on that man, essentially asking, “Who made that stranger in need on the roadside into a neighbor?”
- The question we should be asking is: does my spiritual practice draw me toward the suffering and injured one on the roadside, toward the strangers I might pass by without recognizing them as neighbors?
- And Jesus practiced this! The ministry of Jesus, as presented in the Gospels, is largely one of responding to unexpected interruptions with divine compassion.

Intentional and Interruptable

- A life of apprenticeship to Jesus typically begins with growing more intentional (like Jesus), but that intention is meant to free us to become more interruptible (like Jesus).
- Apprenticeship to Jesus is intentionally training to become the kind of person who, when we are pressured by life, when the unplanned and unexpected come our way, we increasingly respond and react to life the way Jesus would respond and react if he were in our shoes.

Key Scripture Passage and Context

- On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

—Luke 10:25-37

- The English, “Pity” is the Greek, “*splanchnizomai*” and it’s mostly translated “compassion.” It’s a feeling word, meaning, “from the gut.”
- And it’s not a single stop. He enters into his pain in the moment (allowing himself to be interrupted). He pays for his healing and rehabilitation slowly, over time, at his own expense. And he returns to him (remaining in relationship over time).
- As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” Jesus stopped and called them. “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked. “Lord,” they answered, “we want our sight.” Jesus had compassion on them and touched

their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.

—Matthew 20:29-34

- It's a real-life Good Samaritan scene, the non-fiction version. Jesus stops. Diverts his path. Allows himself to be interrupted.

Week 03: Companion Guide Summary

- **Practice:** Do one unplanned act of service.
- **Reach Exercise:** Do an audit of your schedule and cut at least one thing out.
- **Keep Growing**
 - **Read:** *The Active Life* by Parker Palmer (Chapters 05-06)
 - **Listen:** Rule of Life Podcast on Service (Episode 03)

Session 04: Kinship

Key Session Theme

- It's easy to think service is just meeting needs or doing charity from a distance, but that keeps people as "projects" rather than as family.
- **Good news:** Jesus shows us that the true destination of service is kinship. When we embrace others not as statistics or causes but as family at the table, we make space for their full redemption and our greatest transformation.

Marginalized at the Center

- Jesus claims to be the King of a new Kingdom, only authority in his Kingdom is upside down according to the social order of the world.
- Jesus has structured his Kingdom in a way that very intentionally erases divisions by bringing the marginalized to the center, so those at the center come into fellowship with the marginalized.

Names and Numbers

- In all his parables, Jesus only ever gives one name: here. Jesus names the nameless and the unknown. Lazarus is not a cause or project or mission, but a friend to know deeply and be known by deeply.
- The Rich Man asks Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brothers. But Dr. Leonard Sweet concludes: The rich man is condemned because he thought he had five brothers, when God actually gave him six. This wasn't a sin of injustice: he helped alleviate Lazarus' felt need. It was a sin of kinship: he did not see him as family.

Kinship over Mercy

- The rich man didn't lack mercy; he alleviated Lazarus' suffering. He lacked a relationship; he

kept Lazarus in a separate space as a particular project.

- Isolated acts of service are easier than welcoming someone all the way in, so they can be fully redeemed.
- Kinship is what distinguishes Jesus' vision of service.

Key Scripture Passages and Context:

- “Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’”

—Matthew 20:25-28

- In Jesus' day, benefactors were surrounded by rulers who oversaw households in cities full of peasants. There's power and privilege at the center, and it is distributed outwardly from there.
- But Jesus' ministry — for three years and counting by this night — has turned the social order inside-out: Jesus was surrounded by peasants, he prioritized the injured, sick, and demonized, and befriended tax collectors and sinners.
- That means for the powerful and privileged, the well-off and established, the socially honored and objectively successful to get near Jesus, they have to rub shoulders with the very people they've spent their lives avoiding, perhaps looked down their noses at ... or simply been socio-economically divided from.
- “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in

your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’ He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ ‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”
—Luke 16:19-31

Week 04: Companion Guide Summary

- **Practice:** Do one act of service to someone in need.
- **Reach Exercise:** Take time to listen and learn a person’s story.
- **Keep Growing**
 - **Read:** Finish *The Active Life* by Parker Palmer
 - **Listen:** Rule of Life Podcast on Service (Episode 04)