

Week 5: March 21

So . . . who do you follow?

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

John 14:6

When we decide to be a follower of Jesus, we discover more than a set of beliefs. We discover a way of life! Jesus is the way as our model/mentor and as the one who empowers us to live a way of life that resonates truth and engages God and life.

For six weeks, we will look at some life practices, spiritual practices that are as postmodern as they are ancient, practices that form us into people who love, people who are awake to life and awake to God.

These life practices help us live a centered, simple, connected, trusting, giving, and joyful way of life.

Giving Way of Life

If you have received requests from universities, businesses, charities, or ministries asking you to give, you may be familiar with the term “level of giving.” The levels may be described as supporter, partner, sustainer or by colors such as bronze, silver, gold, platinum. For example, a bronze level giver contributes \$100, a silver gives \$500, a gold gives \$1000, etc.

To follow Jesus we also practice giving at different levels. However, the levels aren’t arranged in a graded series. Instead, they overlap, and we are invited to give at all levels. We give through individual practices, through communal practices, and through missional practices.

Individual Practices of Giving

Tithing

Tithing is a spiritual practice as ancient as Abraham. The Hebrew people gave their first fruits, making their giving an act of trust that God would provide the rest of the harvest. Tithing is giving a tenth of our income to our local church. When we tithe, we also trust that God will provide for us.

“Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” 2 Corinthians 9:7

Secret Giving

Giving secretly means giving anonymously, so the receiver feels no obligation to say thanks or repay you. Jesus says, “*But when you give to someone, don’t tell your left hand what your right hand is doing. Give your gifts in secret, and your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you.*”

Matthew 6:3, 4

Communal Practices of Giving

Mentoring/Discipleship

Mentoring or discipling people means being in a relationship where you encourage, teach and guide them to follow Jesus. Discipling means investing in someone’s life as they learn to follow Jesus.

Jesus says, “*Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*”

Matthew 28:19, *The Message*

Humble and Generous Service

Jesus chose service as a way of life and taught us that through our service God blesses the world. Our humble and generous service on Sunday mornings and other times helps people experience God’s love in tangible ways. Nothing makes a community more welcoming and loving than people serving humbly and generously.

“*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others as better than yourselves.*”

Philippians 2:3 NLT

Missional Practices of Giving

Mercy

Jesus instructed, “*Love your neighbor as yourself*” (Matthew 22:39), and he showed us what a merciful way of life looks like. Jesus spent long hours with people who were sick, oppressed, blind, hungry, and poor. He cared, and he asks us to care.

To those who practice mercy, Jesus says: “*For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.*”

Matthew 25:35, 36

Justice

Jesus criticized the religious leaders of his day who gave individually and communally but ignored the injustices in the political and economic systems of their times. He says, “*For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest part of your income, but you completely forget about justice and the love of God. You should tithe, yes, but you should not leave undone the more important things.*”

Luke 12:42

Also, see Brian McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again: The Return of the Ancient Practices* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), pp. 89-122.

Life Practice

1. On a sheet of paper, make three columns with the following headings: For Me, For Others, For God. Review the past week or month. Jot down in each column the things you have bought and done for yourself, others and God. What does this inventory reveal about your life?
2. This week pay attention to the people you meet and situations you encounter. How can you serve or give anonymously?
3. Look into the possibility of going on a short-term mission trip, either nearby or in another country.
4. Start a prayer group that prays through the concerns of the newspaper. Pray for peace and justice issues. Be open to what God might want you to do.

Adapted from Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2005).

If you want to learn more about life practices that provide a giving way of life, come next Sunday from 9:35 until 10:15 for the fifth week of our six-week study, Follow the Leader.