

SOU TRAINING 3.0



“...train yourself in godliness.”
1 Timothy 4:7

Soul Training 3.0

A Word from Your Pastor:

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:13-16)

These words of Jesus are at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. Bible scholars tell us that it is set up as the new law. In the Old Testament, God gave the Law of Moses to the people of Israel to show them how to be God’s people in the world. They were to be distinct--to live differently than the nations around them--to carry God’s blessing to the nations. In the New Testament, Jesus formed the Church as the new Israel and the Sermon on the Mount is the new law. When Jesus tells his followers “you are the salt of the earth...you are a city on a hill,” he is telling his Church that we should be different from the world around us. In fact, it is not our relevance, but our distinctiveness that causes people to glorify God.

Unfortunately, we are not always different. Christians are often just as greedy, just as lustful, just as power-hungry, selfish, and ruthless as the world around us. This is true of individuals and it is true of the Church. What we need is not just to *act* differently, we need to *be* a different kind of people. We need to change at the level of our deepest desires and cravings.

The purpose of this book (and the Soul Training exercises in it) is for these practices to train our soul to become the kind of people and the kind of Church that becomes a “city on a hill”--people who refuse to hold on to anger, who respect others, who are always true to our word, who not only refuse to take revenge but even love and do good to our enemies.

This is our third Soul Training Focus Season. The previous ones have highlighted other practices, so you can always go back to review on our website or YouTube channel if you're interested. Soul Training 3.0 will look like this:

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: The practice of “Slowing.” Our world trains us to be busy and distracted, to focus on achievement and accumulation and the casualty is relationship—with God and with each other. Slowing will help us consider how our schedule is preventing us from developing loving attachment to God and each other and reorient our lives toward what God says is important.

Week 3: Examen. Examen is an old word for taking the time for reflection. It calls us to meditate on the love and forgiveness of God, to search our hearts for anything that hinders our relationship with God, and calls us into deeper relationship with him.

Week 4: Cultivating Joy through Gratitude. God created our brains to thrive on joy. But we can't just force ourselves to be joyful. Gratitude is the doorway to joy. So, in this week, we will learn how we can practice gratitude.

Week 5: *Hesed* Relationships. *Hesed* is a Hebrew word that is often translated as loving-kindness. It is the word that describes God's covenant love for his people. It's a sticky kind of love that binds us to God and to each other. If we want to be what God created us to be, a church full of “*hesed*” relationships is not optional. Because we become like those we love, we must learn the counter-cultural life of sticky relationships.

Week 6: Transformational Communities. This week is simply a continuation of week 5. It's not enough to be in relationship with God's people, we must learn the skills of being in a community that transforms. This week, we'll learn, and begin to practice the essential skills for living in such a church community.

We're glad you're a part of the Soul Training journey. We look forward to new insights, habits and breakthroughs that come as a result. Prepare your heart, mind, soul and body and let's get to training.

Pastor Kory

How to Use this Book

This Focus Season Book will guide you through the entire Focus Season. The practices over the next five weeks are to shape our church family to live transformed lives. Each week will contain an introduction, breath prayers, discussion questions, and instructions to practice. Use the blank pages to journal your thoughts and responses so when we arrive at the end of the season, you will have some clear takeaways. The practices are meant to be done with others in a Small Group community. We would love to get you connected in one for you to learn with others.

The practices are crucial to create space in our lives for building rhythms that develop our character to be more like Jesus while we learn to grow in our love for God and others. Lesslie Newbigin describes being a godly witness as “reproducing the life of Jesus in the life of the world.” Let’s grow in reproducing life together!

Families, we want to equip you to flex your “faith muscles” with your kids during this Focus Season. Keep an eye out for the “▶▶” symbol for ideas on how to engage your kids in soul training alongside you. God is still in the business of raising up those whose faith “the world was not worthy of” (Hebrews 11:38). He can do it in you and He can do it in your kids too.

Additional Resources:

In addition to the sermon and book, each week we will have additional resources to help you dive deeper. One word of caution, however. The point of this series is not simply to fill yourself with more content, but to put yourself in a position where God can do his work in your life. So, use the content as a resource, but do not do it at the expense of practicing the habits. For this Soul Training focus season, we have a resource page on our website. Use the QR code below for quick access to <https://www.waiteparkchurch.org/soul-training-three>



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Habits and “Telos”

When the Bible talks about maturity, it uses the Greek word “telos.” It’s sometimes translated as “mature,” “complete,” or even “perfect.” Essentially, to reach your “telos” is to fulfill the purpose for which you were created. Spiritual maturity is to “love God with every part of your being and to love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:34-40) According to Jesus, this is our ultimate purpose. The Apostle Paul also wrote in Galatians 5:6 that our religious practices are not what matter. “But,” he says, “the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”

Doing Soul Training is not the end-goal of the spiritual life. We will not stand before God someday and hear him say, “You were really good at Bible study! I’m impressed.” No, Soul Training is a means of shaping our lives--our minds, our bodies, our emotions, our habits--to enable us to fulfill the “telos” for which we were created, to love God with all our being and our neighbor as ourselves.

The purpose is also not to make us people who “try really hard” to live that way. Any activity we have to always “try really hard,” won’t last. It has to become automatic. Jim Wilder says that character is “what happens before we have a chance to think about it.” Our character is revealed in how we:

- Treat our neighbor when we’re not “trying to be good.”
- Respond to our spouse when he or she does something we don’t like.
- React when our kids are misbehaving.

You can probably think of many scenarios where you know how you ought to act or react, but that is not your automatic response. The problem is not that you don’t know your Bible well enough or don’t have enough information. The problem is we are all continually being trained by “the world, the flesh and the devil” (to use the old Catholic vernacular) to do otherwise.

Soul Training is not just about training our minds, it’s about using our minds to train our bodies. A basketball player can’t just think

about shooting a basketball, she has to practice shooting hundreds or thousands of times to do it well. A pianist can't just memorize the notes on the piano, he must play scales and rehearse the music countless times until he no longer even thinks consciously about the notes he's playing. That is when he makes the switch from knowing a lot about the piano to being a pianist.

As we embark on this Soul Training Journey, keep in mind a few things that are necessary for us to reach our goal.

First, **soul training is not about striving.** It's not about trying to earn God's love. God already loves you and wants what is best for you. Our motivation for becoming like Christ is out of gratitude to a God who accepted us and forgave us, even while we were still sinners. If at any point you find yourself feeling that God is about to give up on you because you're not getting it right, remember that none of us is perfect. None of us deserve God's love. And yet, God gives it to us anyway and walks with us as our "personal trainer" until we reach the goal of Christlikeness.

Second, **we are not just training our minds, we are training our feelings, desires, emotions, and even our bodies.** Most of us have learned from our society and our families unChristlike ways of living. We don't realize that we are always being trained by the world to live a certain way. So, we have to unlearn that way of life and train to take on a new way of life. That takes time and practice.

Third, it takes a **community of people who are joyfully pursuing Jesus.** While there are some individual exercises we will practice in this series, do not try to do this alone. You weren't meant to. Without exception, our attachments are the most powerful motivators. Loving attachment to God and his people is critical for Christian character. We become like the people we love. So, dive into life-giving community by joining a small group, even if only for this season. Share what you learn with friends and family. Lean on them for strength and encouragement.

Fourth, **Soul Training is not only a six-week journey.** Consider this Focus Season a boot camp or retreat where you learn practices. But just like you can't exercise for six weeks and expect to be healthy forever, Soul Training is a life-long journey that makes us people who bear the fruit of "love, joy, peace, patience,

goodness, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control.”
(Galatians 5:22)

Finally, **we are not just training individuals, we are training a church.** We want you to be like Jesus, but we also want to be a church community that is so in-tune with Jesus and the Holy Spirit that people are becoming like Jesus even when they don't realize it. We want this community to be an environment that people who spend any amount of time here cannot help but become more like Jesus. Don't underestimate the importance of such a community and don't underestimate the role you play within it.

Breath Prayer

Each week will have its own “breath prayer.” These prayers are based on Scripture and are intended to regularly bring us back to the purpose of the week. Memorize it and pray it five times daily, taking time to reflect each time. You can set a notification or do it:

- First thing when you wake up
- Breakfast
- Lunch
- Dinner
- Last thing before bed

This Week's Breath Prayer: (Pray 5x daily)

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” [Romans 15:13]

Please use these prayer prompts as you pray for each other's growth over the Focus Season.

- We would surrender our lives to God to let Him shape us.
- We would make room for the fruit of the Spirit to grow in us and through us deeply.
- God would reveal areas where our priorities are out of alignment with who we want to be.
- Pray for our capacity for joy and deep relationships to grow.
- Pray for the relationships in our Small Groups and church family to grow stronger through this Focus Season.

Pray Ephesians 3:16-21:

“We pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen us with power through his Spirit in our inner being, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith. And we pray that all of us, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that we may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”

SLOWING

Intro

The first practice of Soul Training 3.0 is the practice of Slowing. It shouldn't be difficult to figure out what this is about. We live in a fast-paced world that values efficiency, multitasking and productivity. It tells us that busier kids are more successful kids, so we get them involved in multiple activities and fill our schedules with sports and music and play dates. While each of these may not be bad in themselves, they contribute to building a life that prevents us from a deep connection with God and each other. Even when we're not busy, we have trained our minds to be busy, scattered and anxious.

The practice of Slowing encourages us to evaluate our schedules and the state of our minds and to adjust them in a way that allows us the time for rest, prayer, reflection and most importantly, relationships. But as you will quickly see in this series, it's not enough to be aware of the problem, we must change our habits in a way that trains our mind and body to crave relationship with God and others over productivity and character over accomplishment.

This Week's Breath Prayer: (Pray 5x daily)

“Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in him.” [Psalm 62:5]

1. How have you seen busyness impact your life or someone else's life? What gets missed when our lives are too busy?
2. Pastor Kory described the difference between rhythm and balance. How have you managed your priorities through a rhythm or balance? Why?
3. Pastor Kory listed some reasons driving our hurried pace. Which if any resonates in your life?

“Modern people lack silence. They no longer lead their own lives; they are dragged along by events. It is a race against the clock. . . If your life is chock-full already, there won’t be room for anything else. Even God can’t get anything else in. So it becomes essential to cut something out.”

Paul Tournier

Living a life that reproduces the life of Jesus to the world around us takes practice. It is not as hard as you might think as you will see throughout this Focus Season. Each week creates space to be present with God or others. The Creator of all things wants us to slow down and spend time with Him. He wants to show us who we are even when some parts of ourselves are not pleasant.

This week, we will consider how our lifestyle prevents us from developing a loving attachment to God and others. For our practice this week, we will have a time of solitude, which will create space to review your schedule. Here are a few tips as you prepare:

- Pick a time and a place where distractions, including your phone, can be minimized or ignored. We encourage an hour, but any amount of time will help. If you are exhausted from life, consider setting aside a day for solitude. The additional time allows for activities, like taking a nap or reading a book, to restore your strength.
- Select a place that you enjoy maybe a comfortable chair at home or your favorite coffee shop.
- Reflect on your schedule. Consider bringing a calendar to help you review your commitments. If your calendar is on your phone, turn off the

notifications to eliminate distractions and focus on being in God's presence.

Solitude Guide:

1. Start by reading Psalm 40:1-8. Spend a minute or two in silence.
2. Acknowledge God's presence and invite him to speak. Give your soul time to be quiet before Him. If your mind wanders, keep directing it back to God with our breath prayer from Psalm 62:5, "Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in him."
3. Review your schedule and commitments.
 - Which activities are absolutely necessary? Which are important, but optional? Which are unnecessary, unproductive, or harmful? Are there activities that harm your relationships? Are there things you ought to be doing, but have been squeezed out because of your busy schedule?
 - Consider what activities bring joy or are life-giving. Invite God to help you discern.
 - Ask God if any of the activities do not please or honor Him. Sit in silence. Note any impressions you have, but these impressions need to be checked against God's character in a trusting relationship.
 - Ask God what activities please Him. Wait for Him to answer. Note any impressions.
 - Reflect on what activities could be removed from your schedule. What hard decisions might you need to make to create space for God and healthy, life-giving relationships?

4. Select two of these questions and write out your answers to God. Be intentional to pay attention to your pace. Don't rush or grasp for answers. Consider taking a walk as you ponder the questions. When wrapping up the answers to your questions, note any implications or actions that surface through the questions.
 - Why do I maintain a hurried pace? What am I trying to accomplish or prove?
 - What is important to God?
 - Who does God say I am?
 - Who am I?
 - What makes me worthwhile?
5. Write a plan to implement the desired changes in your schedule or mindset. Identify a person to be a sounding board for the changes if needed.
6. Close your time writing out a prayer with gratitude for God being present with you. Share how you are feeling about the changes. Ask God to help overcome any fear you might have.

► **Family Corner:** Set a timer for one minute or longer, depending on the age of your kids. See if everyone can sit completely still and quiet for the entire minute. After the timer goes off, talk about how it felt to be quiet and still. Was it easy or hard? Why or why not? Read Psalm 37:7 together and set a goal to try your one minute of silence again later this week, this time asking God if He has anything He'd like to speak to you during your silent time.

SLOWING

SOLITUDE JOURNAL

PRAYER OF EXAMEN

Intro:

The word “Examen” is a new word to many people, but it’s really pretty simple—it’s an old word from church history that simply means “to examine.” (As you might have guessed.) The truth is, in our overstimulated world, many people live their lives day by day, without any real reflection on how we are living in relation to God, ourselves and our family and neighbors.

The consistent practice of examen allows us to take a step back from auto-pilot and make regular course corrections. This week, we’ll learn a simple way to regularly set aside time to consider God’s great love for us, his desires for us and the direction of our own lives. As we slow down and take stock, we will become more aware of God’s presence with us daily, to hear gracious conviction and allow the Fruit of the Spirit to grow more and more in us.

This Week’s Breath Prayer: (Pray 5x daily)

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.” [Psalm 139:23, 24]

1. **Debrief** your time of solitude for reviewing your schedule. What did you learn from reviewing your schedule and evaluating the pace of life? Are there changes that you want and are making to your schedule?

2. One key aspect of the Prayer of Examen is being aware of God's presence. How have you seen God working in your life or around you recently? Pastor Abby has called these "God-sightings" with our kids. How does making time daily to become more aware of God's presence in our lives impact our understanding of God?

3. Psalm 139:23-24 is a prayer asking God to help us see His perspective on our lives. How do you feel about consistently/daily making this request of God?

“Self-examination is a practice that facilitates spiritual awakening—an awakening to the presence of God as God really is and an awakening to ourselves as we really are. When practiced rightly, it leads us into a greater sense of God's constant loving presence in our life, it fosters a celebration of our created self, it offers us a safe place to see and name those places where we are not like Christ, and it opens us up to deeper levels of spiritual transformation.”

Ruth Haley Barton

The Prayer of Examen walks through your day inviting God to illuminate moments that his presence was clearly seen or felt and where our character fell short of the fruit of the Spirit. During this prayer, we enjoy and celebrate the life-giving parts of our day and how God is working in our lives.

We also face the darkest parts of ourselves to ask God to transform our lives. For those who have experienced trauma, we recommend using the Immanuel Journaling listed after the Prayer of Examen for this practice to let the Holy Spirit guide working through the hard parts of your story.

Each night, spend 15-20 minutes walking through one of these structured prayers. Note any impressions you have, but these impressions need to be checked against God's character in a trusting relationship.

The Prayer of Examen from *Sacred Rhythms*:

Prepare: Start in silence, allowing yourself to be still and remembering God's love for you.

Invite: Invite God to go with you in search of evidence of his presence throughout your day and search for insights about yourself.

Review the Day: Remember the events of the day, including your spiritual practices, meals, appointments, interactions with others, and significant events at work.

Reflect on where God might have been speaking to you, guiding you, or showing you love.

Give Thanks: Thank God for each part of your day, for his presence with you in the midst of it, for those moments when you sensed a growing freedom from sin and a greater capacity to love God and others. If there are any unresolved issues or questions pertaining to the events of the day, express these to God as well, and allow yourself to experience gratitude for God's presence with you even in places that feel dark or confusing.

Confess: Using Psalm 139:23-24, our breath prayer, invite God to bring to mind attitudes, actions or moments when you fell short of exhibiting the character of Christ or the fruit of the Spirit. As God brings different areas to mind, reflect on what contributed to the situation and what might enable you to respond differently in the future.

For people who have experienced trauma or abuse, introspection could result in facing overwhelming emotions related to the most difficult parts of your story. We recommend skipping down to the Immanuel Journaling practice designed for people working through the impact of trauma in their life.

Ask forgiveness: Also express your willingness to take any concrete steps needed to allow Christ's character to be more fully formed in you. Be assured of God's forgiveness (I John 1:9) and his power to transform your character. Ask God if there is anything you need to do to make things right relative to the situation you have confessed.

Seek out spiritual friendship: Seek out a trustworthy Christian friend and tell them what you are discovering about yourself, your confession, and your resolve to pursue transformation in this area.

ALTERNATIVE PRAYER: Immanuel Journaling:

1. Start with a moment of silence to be present with God and rest in his love.
2. Start with Gratitude.
 - Write a prayer of gratitude to God.
 - Pause and write God's response to your prayer.
3. Next, use these sentences to continue the prayerful conversation with God.
 - I can see you
 - I can hear you
 - I can understand how big this is for you
 - I am glad to be with you
 - I can do something about what you are going through
4. Read aloud with a trusted friend. Hearing God's love through the journaling conversations becomes a tangible expression of God's love and concern.

Go to the sermon resources to download the worksheet version for this journaling process. The full description of Immanuel Journaling is described in *Joyful Journey* by Jim Wilder.

► **Family Corner:** "God sightings" is a term we use to describe ways you've seen God at work in our day-to-day lives. A God sighting could be something like an answered prayer, a truth from God's Word that stood out to you, a worship song that was particularly meaningful, or something you noticed in God's creation. A God sighting can also be something you're thankful for. At the dinner table this week, spend time talking about your God sightings from the day and give thanks to God together for them.

EXAMEN	PRACTICE: PRAYER OF EXAMEN
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EXAMEN	PRACTICE: PRAYER OF EXAMEN
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JOY

Intro:

This week we will focus on a relatively new Soul Training exercise—Cultivating Joy through Gratitude. Our brains thrive on joy. When we have it, things just work better. When we experience a deep sense of joy, we can recover better from negative emotions like sadness, anger and anxiety better. Joy helps us form deep and healthy relationships.

Joy doesn't come from external things like money, comfort or success. Joy is a relationship term. Jim Wilder says that joy is that feeling you get when someone looks at you and you can see in their face that they're happy to see you. But you can't get joy just from trying harder to be joyful. The doorway to joy is gratitude—first gratitude to God for his goodness and mercy and second, gratitude for the relationships we have in our lives.

This week, we'll learn some ways of practicing gratitude that allows us to remember that God loves us and is happy to be with us. For many, it's a bit of a stretch to believe, but it's true that God delights in his children and came in the person of Jesus to prove it.

This Week's Breath Prayer: (Pray 5x daily)

“I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing the praises of your name, O Most High.” [Psalm 9:2]

1. **Debrief:** How did God speak through the Prayer of Examen? What insights did you gain about God, yourself or a situation you faced? How were you able to see God working in your life?
2. Pastor Kory shared about the connection between gratitude and joy. Have you seen these build on each other in your own life?
3. Jim Wilder says that joy is foundational to building strong relationships. Why do you think that is? Have you found this to be true for you?

“Shared joy is perhaps the most powerful relational experience that exists. Joy is always relational and the more that it is shared, the more it multiplies and amplifies other good emotions. When we lack sufficient relational joy, we will always turn to other cravings to try to fill the void.”

Marcus Warner

Joy flows from gratitude and provides the foundation for building healthy relationships. It even helps us to stay connected to others during difficult circumstances. We want to focus on building our capacity for joy through practicing gratitude. In *The Other Half of Church* by Jim Wilder, they developed a thirty-day joy exercise. The instructions for this practice have been based on this model to intentionally cultivate joy.

Cultivate Gratitude Memories:

1. Start a list of memories that bring joy or a smile to your face. Ideally, your list would grow to ten gratitude memories.
2. Create a short name descriptor of each memory.
3. Spend time reliving the memory. Reflect on these questions as you relive the memory:
 - a. Who is with you?
 - b. Where are you?
 - c. Why is this moment so special?
 - d. What might God be communicating through this memory?
 - e. How could this memory be a glimpse of the beauty of God and His love for you?
4. Let the joy from the memory renew you. Acknowledge how you see God at work in the memory.

Gratitude for Five Minutes

1. Each day, spend five minutes reliving gratitude using your list of grateful memories. Let these memories renew your awareness of God's presence and love.

Building Your Capacity for Joy:

1. Three times a day spend five minutes with your list of gratitude memories for thirty days. It could be the first thing in the morning, at midday, and the last thing you do at night before going to bed. Another option could be before or after each meal. Consistency is key.
2. At some point in the thirty days, you will likely feel a shift where you feel different when you wake you or notice when you slip out of joy in your life.

► **Family Corner:** At dinnertime, go around the table and have each person share something they're grateful for. Where possible, dig a little deeper into each (e.g., For one who is thankful for food, ask about their favorite food. For one who is thankful for a grandparent, ask about a special memory they have with that grandparent.). After each person has shared their point of gratitude, pray together and thank God for each one. Try doing this together once or twice a week for the rest of the month.

HESED RELATIONSHIPS

Intro:

It has often been said that love is not a feeling, it's a decision. Or, like the great philosophers DC Talk sang, "Love is a verb." While the point is well-taken, it's not actually true. The love described in the Bible IS a feeling of sorts. The word the Bible uses for love is the Hebrew word *hesed* and its Greek counterpart, *agape*.

Hesed is often translated as "loving-kindness", but at a deeper level, it's seen in the covenant commitment of God to his people. Biologically speaking, this kind of love can be described as "attachment." Picture a baby's attachment to his mother. That's *hesed*. It's the kind of love that causes someone to run into a burning building to save his beloved. While love is not a verb, this kind of loving attachment drives the kind of actions that everyone recognizes as love of the deepest order.

The reason we are focusing on *hesed* is that we believe—because it has been proven time and again—that character grows best in a multi-generational environment of covenant love. It's a community where people are attached to God and to each other, where young people regularly see models of Christian character in the older generation. It's where we experience loving and gracious correction that moves us toward Christlikeness. This week, we want to put words to what is already happening in small groups and other places in our church, building a community where *hesed*—covenant love—is abundant and transformation is the norm.

This Week's Breath Prayer: (Pray 5x daily)

Just as the Father has loved Jesus, Jesus has also loved me, so now remain in His love. [John 15:9]

1. **Debrief:** What was one of your favorite gratitude memories? Have you seen an impact in your group through intentionally sharing your stories that bring joy together?
2. Pastor Kory describes different ways descriptions of love have fallen short (decision, action or even emotion). How have these descriptions challenged your understanding of love?
3. Which of the three ways (decision, action, emotion) do you naturally think about love in your relationships? How does thinking about love as *hesed* change how you show love?
4. Jim Wilder says that low *hesed* communities are transactional, performance-oriented, friendly and have weak attachments. Have you been part of groups or organizations that fit those descriptions? What was your experience in these communities or groups?

“Let’s lead people into a formative encounter with the living Christ at the table and then cultivate the extension of his presence into the rest of our lives. This is the beginning of faithful presence.”

David Fitch

Understanding *hesed* is a foundational part of building a culture that sees lives transformed. *Hesed* can be cultivated through enjoying meals together, singing and worshipping together, and even by showing appreciation for one another just to name a few.

For the practice this week, have a meal together as feasible for your Small Group meeting, incorporating the kids. Bring a favorite dish and recipe to share with each other. Be sensitive to each other’s allergies. Find a way to invite God’s presence into the meal through praying or sharing grateful moments. Start your gathering with a meal and enjoy each other’s company before diving into the Focus Season discussion.

Another way to build *hesed* is through singing together. If it doesn’t work to share a meal this week, pick another week to eat together. This week, sing some hymns or worship songs together. When we acknowledge God’s presence in our gatherings, we begin to see his presence in other areas of our lives as well.

Another alternative is taking time to share and show appreciation for each other and what each person brings to your Group. Celebrate each other’s unique qualities and contributions.

Spend a few minutes before going to bed to acknowledge how you saw God working within your Small Group gathering. Give God thanks for the people who are walking alongside you in this season.

CONTAGIOUS TRANSFORMATION

Intro:

Last week, we learned that personal transformation only happens in healthy community. But we don't automatically know how to live in a healthy community. The reason is that we are all subject to our own sinful nature. Add to that the fact that we have all been raised in families and in a society that doesn't always teach us the skills to live in a healthy community. If healthy community is where lives are transformed into Christ-likeness, then the church must be intentional about creating that kind of community. We want the church to be a place where being like Christ is contagious.

This Week's Breath Prayer: (Pray 5x daily)

Lord, empower me to “love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.” [Romans 12:10]

1. **Debrief:** Share what you are grateful for being a part of your Small Group.
2. Share the story of a season or situation where you grew or experienced transformation. What was the catalyst for this transformation?
3. How have your relationships brought a healthy change in your life?

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

Romans 15:5-8

The goal of Soul Training is to develop more fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control) in our lives and in our community. Over the last several weeks, we have slowed down to evaluate our schedule, grown in our awareness of God’s presence and ourselves through Examen, cultivated joy and *hesed* in our lives and our Small Group communities. Through these practices, we become a contagious transformational church family where the Holy Spirit reproduces his life through ours.

Our training does not end with the Focus Season. How we structure our lives can strengthen or weaken our attachment to God and others. For our practice this week, we will set aside some time to develop a "rule of life"-a plan for how we will structure our lives that allows us to grow in our love for God and others. The practice this week builds on the time of solitude reviewing our schedule.

First, a rule of life orders your life in such a way for the love of Christ is central in our lives. A Rule of Life is not meant to be a list of rules, but a way to make room for the presence

of Christ. It may seem like a chore at first, just like when you learn a new skill, but in time it will become “second nature.” The purpose of having a rule of life is to create a life-giving rhythm to stay connected to God and others. When your life changes, your rule of life will shift as well. The practices need to be sustainable and realistic for your season of life.

Creating a Rule of Life provides the structure to form our habits to become mature and complete to fulfill our purpose to love God with all our being and our neighbor as ourselves. Please carve out 30 minutes to an hour to walk through this process to be intentional in how you set the rhythm of your life.

Creating a Rule of Life:

1. Start with a moment of silence. Acknowledge God’s presence. Read John 15:1-12 to focus your mind on anchoring these Rule of Life practices in being in God’s presence.
2. Identify the practices that you are already doing to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit. These practices could be ones that we have covered in previous Soul Training series including Scripture, Prayer, Fasting, Serving, Worship, Sabbath, Celebration, and Biblical Hospitality.
 - How have they helped you stay connected to God or helped shape your character to be more like Jesus?
3. Now, let’s evaluate opportunities to grow in cultivating the fruit of the Spirit.
 - What regular activities or habits either have no value or pull you away from being anchored in Jesus?

- What emotions or desires do you experience regularly that need to be trained to be more like Jesus? Which practices can help you do that?
 - What current habits or activities will you need to give up (or lessen) to do this? How often do you need to do them to be helpful?
4. Write one or two practices that you would like to start doing. Be specific about what you like to practice. Plan a trigger for this practice. For example, I will have my prayer time with my first cup of coffee. Stacking the practice with something else that you are already doing builds greater consistency in implementing the practice. Another way to build consistency is to replace the practice with something that you would like to stop doing.
 5. Write a prayer of gratitude to God for his grace and ask for his assistance to live out these practices. Acknowledge your desire for his presence to be a consistent part of your days.
 6. Share your Rule of Life practices with your Small Group. Regularly check in with each other to keep pursuing our Soul Training Goals together.

► **Family Corner:** Invite your kids into the process of developing a Rule of Life for your family. Invite them into prayer with you, then talk about the practice(s) you might want to start as a family. When will you incorporate this practice? How can everyone in the family take part in it together? Write down your Rule of Life practice and hang it someplace where you will be reminded of it often.

TRANSFORM	PRACTICE: RULE OF LIFE
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RULE OF LIFE

Wrap-Up:

A central focus as a witness of Jesus from Lesslie Newbigen is “to reproduce the life of Jesus in the life of the world.” As we wrap up the Focus Season on Soul Training, we want to be intentional about how we live so that our community becomes a place where the life of Jesus is constantly and consistently being reproduced in our lives and gatherings.

Crafting a Rule of Life helps us order our life in such way to make that possible. John Mark Comer describes it as, “a way to organize all of your life around the practice of the presence of God, to work and rest and play and eat and drink and hang out with your friends and run errands and catch up on the news, all out of a place of deep, loving enjoyment of the Father’s company.”

As Groups, let’s take this next week to share how we desire to be intentional to become a people cultivating life in one another.

