

HICKORY RIDGE



COMMUNITY CHURCH

Practices of a Disciple

Making Room for Jesus to Form Us

HICKORY RIDGE COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Becoming Like Jesus

Jesus calls people to follow him. That invitation begins with grace, not achievement. We do not earn a place in God's family by becoming disciplined enough, knowledgeable enough, or spiritually impressive enough. We receive salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit gives us new life.

But grace does not leave us unchanged. Jesus saves us and then forms us. He teaches us to think as he thinks, love as he loves, live as he lives, and join him in his work. The New Testament describes this as a lifelong process of being transformed into the likeness of Christ.

At HRCC, we describe our mission as reaching people, representing Jesus, and revealing his Kingdom. That mission requires mature disciples. We cannot faithfully represent Jesus if we are unwilling to learn his way of life. We cannot reveal his Kingdom merely by attending church gatherings or agreeing with Christian ideas. We must become people whose character, relationships, priorities, and actions increasingly resemble Jesus.

The practices in this guide are ordinary ways we make room for that formation:

- Scripture and Prayer
- Life with Other Believers
- A Spirit-Led Life
- Serving Others
- Generosity

These practices do not produce transformation by themselves. Reading the Bible, saying prayers, attending a group, serving on a team, or giving money cannot force God to change us. They are not religious payments offered in exchange for God's favor. They are ways of remaining connected to Jesus and participating intentionally in what the Holy Spirit is doing in us.

Jesus compared life with him to branches remaining connected to a vine. A branch does not strain to manufacture life. It receives life by remaining connected to its source, and that living connection produces fruit over time. In the same way, Christian practices help us remain attentive, available, responsive, and rooted in Christ. See *John 15:1-11*.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is not a challenge to master five practices at once. It is an invitation to examine the rhythms that are already shaping you and to take an honest next step.

Move slowly. Read one section at a time. Look up the Scripture references. Pay attention to the practices that feel life-giving and to the ones you tend to avoid. Ask what your resistance may be revealing. Then choose a next step that is specific enough to practice and modest enough to sustain.

Whenever possible, work through the guide with another believer. Tell someone what you are trying, ask what has helped them, and invite them to check in with you. Discipleship is personal, but it is never private.

Practices Are Means Not Measures

Spiritual practices are means of grace, not measures of worth. They give us repeated opportunities to receive from God and respond to him. They should not become a scoreboard for comparing ourselves with other Christians.

Two people may need different rhythms in the same season. A new parent, a caregiver, a student, and a retiree will not organize their days in the same way. A practice that is sustainable for one person may be unrealistic for another. Faithfulness is not sameness.

The goal is not to build an impressive routine. The goal is to remain with Jesus and become responsive to him. Healthy practices should gradually make us more loving, truthful, patient, courageous, generous, and available to others. If our routines make us proud, harsh, isolated, or anxious, something has gone wrong.

Begin with Grace

You will miss days. You will lose focus. Some seasons will feel fruitful, while others will feel dry or disrupted. None of this surprises Jesus. When a rhythm breaks down, return without drama. Confess what needs to be confessed, receive grace, and begin again.

Christian maturity is usually built through thousands of ordinary returns to Jesus.

Scripture and Prayer

Jesus forms us as we listen to his word and respond to him in prayer. Scripture and prayer belong together. In Scripture, God addresses us. In prayer, we bring our whole lives before God and answer him.

Without Scripture, prayer can shrink into a conversation with our own desires, fears, and assumptions. Without prayer, Bible reading can become merely academic. Together, they create a living rhythm of listening and responding.

Receiving Scripture as God's Word

The Bible is not a random collection of inspirational sayings. It is the trustworthy story of God's work to create, rescue, renew, and dwell with his people. Its many books, genres, authors, and historical settings come together around God's redemptive purpose, fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Scripture tells us who God is, who we are, what has gone wrong with the world, what God has done in Jesus, and how God's people are called to live. It comforts us, corrects us, exposes us, gives us hope, and trains us for faithful action. See *Psalm 119:9-16, 105; Luke 24:25-27; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Hebrews 4:12-13*.

Reading Scripture as a disciple means coming ready to be addressed. We do not stand over the text as judges who keep only the parts we immediately understand or prefer. We listen humbly, ask honest questions, and allow Scripture to challenge our habits and assumptions.

That does not mean every passage is equally simple. The Bible contains poetry, narrative, prophecy, wisdom, letters, parables, law, and apocalyptic visions. Some passages require patience, historical context, and help from mature teachers. Humility includes admitting when we do not yet understand something.

Read in Context

Individual verses matter, but they belong to paragraphs, books, and the larger story of Scripture. Removing a sentence from its context can make the Bible appear to say things its authors never intended.

As you read, ask:

- What kind of writing is this?
- Who was speaking or writing, and to whom?
- What happened before and after this passage?
- What problem, question, promise, or situation was being addressed?
- How does this passage connect to Jesus and the larger story of redemption?
- What would a faithful response look like?

You do not need advanced academic training to read the Bible faithfully, but you do need patience. Read whole sections rather than isolated fragments. Compare translations when wording is unclear. Use trustworthy study tools. Listen to the wisdom of the church rather than assuming your first impression must be correct.

Read to Meet Jesus

The purpose of Scripture is not simply to collect religious information. Jesus confronted people who studied the Scriptures carefully but refused to come to him for life. See *John 5:39-40*.

Every passage does not mention Jesus in the same way, but the whole biblical story leads toward him and finds its fulfillment in him. The Gospels show us his words, actions, character, death, and resurrection. The rest of the New Testament helps us understand what his life and victory mean for the church and the world. The Old Testament gives us the story, promises, patterns, questions, and longings into which Jesus came.

Ask not only, *"What does this passage say?"* but also, *"What does this reveal about God? How does it lead me toward Jesus? What kind of person is the Spirit forming me to become?"*

Read for Obedience

Information matters, but discipleship requires response. Jesus compared the person who hears his words and acts on them to someone building a house on rock. James warned against hearing the word without doing what it says. See *Matthew 7:24-27* and *James 1:22-25*.

Obedience does not mean forcing every passage into an immediate task. Some passages invite worship. Some call for repentance. Some give wisdom that must be considered over time. Some deepen our understanding of God's character. Some strengthen us to remain faithful in suffering. But faithful reading always leaves us open to response.

Before you finish, ask: Is there something to trust, confess, receive, practice, repair, or share?

A Simple Way to Read

Use this pattern when you need a place to begin:

1. Choose a manageable passage. A paragraph or short section is often better than several rushed chapters.
2. Read it slowly. If possible, read it twice.
3. Notice what is actually present. Pay attention to repeated words, movement, questions, commands, promises, and surprises.
4. Understand it in context. Ask what the author was communicating to the original audience.
5. Bring it to Jesus. Consider what it reveals about God, the gospel, and life with Christ.
6. Respond. Turn what you have read into prayer and choose any clear next step.

The point is not to complete every step perfectly. The pattern simply slows us down enough to listen.

Prayer Is Life with God

Prayer is honest relationship with God. We speak, listen, wait, ask, confess, thank, lament, and worship in his presence. Prayer is not a technique for controlling outcomes. It is not a performance meant to impress God or other people. It is the practice of turning toward the Father through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus taught his disciples to approach God as Father, to honor God's name, seek his Kingdom, depend on him for daily needs, receive and extend forgiveness, and ask for protection from evil. The Lord's Prayer gives our prayers both confidence and shape. See *Matthew 6:5-13* and *Luke 11:1-13*.

We can pray about everything. God is not embarrassed by grief, confusion, anger, disappointment, or need. The Psalms teach us to bring the full range of human experience into God's presence. Honest lament is not unbelief. It is pain expressed within relationship.

Ways We Pray

Christian prayer includes many kinds of response:

- Worship: recognizing who God is and giving him honor.
- Thanksgiving: naming God's gifts and faithfulness.
- Confession: agreeing with God about our sin and receiving forgiveness.
- Surrender: offering our plans, desires, bodies, and decisions to God.
- Petition: asking God to provide, heal, guide, protect, and intervene.
- Intercession: carrying the needs of others before God.
- Lament: bringing sorrow, injustice, disappointment, and unanswered questions to God.
- Listening: becoming quiet and attentive before God, while testing what we perceive through Scripture and wise Christian community.

You will naturally return to some forms of prayer more than others. Growth often requires practicing the forms we tend to neglect.

When Scripture and Prayer Feel Dry

Not every encounter with God will feel powerful. Feelings matter, but they are not the only measure of faithfulness. Friendships are built through ordinary presence as well as memorable moments. The same is true in our life with God.

When you feel distracted, reduce the size of the practice. Read five verses attentively instead of five chapters resentfully. Pray one honest sentence. Sit quietly for two minutes. Use a Psalm when you cannot find your own words. Ask another believer to read and pray with you.

When you feel nothing, do not pretend. Tell God the truth about your boredom, grief, frustration, or doubt. Faith does not require manufacturing emotion. It keeps turning toward God because he is worthy and trustworthy.

A Starting Rhythm

Try this rhythm for four weeks:

- Choose a consistent time and place for ten to fifteen minutes of Scripture and prayer at least five days each week.
- Read through one Gospel in manageable sections.
- Write one sentence about what you noticed and one sentence of response.
- Keep a short prayer list with names and current needs.
- Once each week, spend a longer period reviewing what God has been showing you.

If you already have a strong rhythm, do not add activity merely to feel productive. Ask whether your present practice is producing attention, obedience, and love. Deepen the quality of your response before increasing the quantity of material.

Reflect and Respond

- What currently shapes your attention before Scripture does?
- Do you tend to read for information, inspiration, or transformation?
- Which kind of prayer comes most naturally to you? Which do you avoid?
- What would make a daily rhythm realistic in your present season?

My next step:

The person I will invite to encourage me:

Life with Other Believers

Jesus does not form isolated disciples. He gathers a people. The New Testament describes Christians as members of one body, living stones in one house, brothers and sisters in one family, and citizens of one Kingdom. These images are not decorative. They tell us that following Jesus joins us to others.

Life with other believers is more than attending the same event. It means learning to worship, receive, forgive, serve, tell the truth, carry burdens, share resources, and pursue the mission of Jesus together.

We Need One Another

Each of us has blind spots. We can justify our own habits, misread our motives, and confuse preference with wisdom. Other believers help us see what we cannot see alone. They encourage us when we are discouraged, correct us when we drift, and remind us of truth when suffering makes truth difficult to remember.

This is one reason the New Testament contains so many *"one another"* instructions: love one another, honor one another, forgive one another, carry one another's burdens, encourage one another, confess to one another, pray for one another, and serve one another. *See John 13:34-35; Romans 12:9-18; Galatians 6:1-2; Ephesians 4:1-3, 25-32; James 5:16.*

These commands cannot be obeyed at a distance. They require relationships strong enough to carry both joy and difficulty.

Gather Faithfully

The earliest Christians devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, shared meals, and prayer. They worshiped together and shared life in their homes. *See Acts 2:42-47.*

Regular church gatherings re-center us in the story of Jesus. We worship with voices other than our own, hear Scripture with people who may be different from us, receive Communion, pray for one another, and remember that faith is larger than our private experience.

Gathering is not passive consumption. We do not come only to evaluate music, teaching, programs, or convenience. We bring our attention, encouragement, generosity, service, and presence. Even when we do not have a formal role, our presence strengthens the body.

Faithful gathering also includes smaller settings where people can know one another more personally. A Sunday gathering can unite a whole church, but it cannot carry every kind of relationship. Groups, teams, meals, prayer gatherings, and friendships give us room to ask questions, share needs, and practice mutual care.

Allow Yourself to Be Known

It is possible to be surrounded by people and remain hidden. We can present a carefully managed version of ourselves, speak only in generalities, and avoid relationships that might challenge us.

Christian community invites honesty. This does not mean telling everyone everything. Wisdom and appropriate boundaries matter. It means developing trusted relationships in which we can name what is true: where we are grateful, confused, tempted, wounded, afraid, or in need of help.

Being known requires courage, and knowing others requires care. When someone shares honestly, we listen without rushing to fix them. We protect confidence unless safety requires help. We resist gossip. We pray, follow up, and remain present.

Encourage and Correct with Love

Encouragement is more than being pleasant. It strengthens another person to continue in faithfulness. We can name evidence of grace, remind one another of God's promises, celebrate growth, and speak hope into discouragement.

Love also tells the truth. At times, another believer may need to question a choice, confront harmful behavior, or call us back to what is right. Correction should be humble, specific, and aimed at restoration. It should never be used to shame, control, or display superiority. *See Matthew 7:1-5; Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1; Ephesians 4:15.*

Mature disciples learn to receive correction without immediate defensiveness. We can listen, ask questions, take time to pray, and seek additional wisdom. Not every criticism is correct, but every criticism can be considered.

Practice Forgiveness and Repair

Community creates joy, but it also creates friction. People misunderstand, disappoint, overlook, and wound one another. A healthy church is not a church where conflict never happens. It is a church where people learn to handle conflict in the way of Jesus.

We begin by examining our own hearts. We speak directly to the person involved rather than building a case with everyone else. We listen before assuming motives. We confess specifically, without excuses. We forgive as people who have received forgiveness from Christ.

Forgiveness and trust are related but not identical. Forgiveness releases personal vengeance and refuses to keep collecting a debt. Trust may need to be rebuilt through truth, repentance, changed behavior, and time. In situations involving abuse, danger, criminal behavior, or serious patterns of harm, seeking help and establishing strong boundaries are not failures of forgiveness.

Share Ordinary Life

Some of the deepest formation happens in ordinary moments: eating together, helping someone move, sitting in a hospital room, watching children, celebrating a milestone, repairing a mistake, or continuing a friendship through an inconvenient season.

Hospitality is not entertaining impressive guests. It is making room for people. A simple meal, cup of coffee, phone call, or open chair can become a place where someone experiences the welcome of Jesus. *See Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:1-2; 1 Peter 4:8-10.*

A Starting Rhythm

Try this rhythm for four weeks:

- Gather with the church each week unless illness, travel, work, or another real limitation prevents it.
- Participate in one smaller setting where conversation and mutual care are possible.
- Each week, contact one person for the purpose of encouragement, not because you need something.
- Share one honest need with a trusted believer and invite prayer.
- If a relationship is strained, prayerfully identify the next faithful step toward repair.

Reflect and Respond

- Where are you currently known, not merely recognized?
- Do you find it harder to ask for help or to receive correction?
- Is there a relationship in which you need to confess, forgive, clarify, or listen?
- What would faithful participation in church community look like in this season?

My next step:

The person or group with whom I will practice it:

A Spirit-Led Life

Christian life is life in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit brings us to new life, lives in everyone who belongs to Jesus, assures us that we are God's children, forms the character of Christ in us, gives gifts for ministry, guides the church, and empowers us to bear witness. See *John 3:5-8; Romans 8:9-17; 1 Corinthians 12:4-13; Galatians 5:16-25*.

Living by the Spirit is not an advanced form of Christianity for unusually spiritual people. It is the ordinary calling of every disciple.

Present and Empowering

The Spirit is not absent from a Christian until a later spiritual experience occurs. Everyone who belongs to Christ has the Spirit. Salvation itself is the work of the Spirit, who makes us alive and joins us to Jesus.

At the same time, the New Testament speaks of believers being filled, empowered, led, and gifted by the Spirit. Jesus promised power from on high so that his followers could bear witness, and the book of Acts shows the Spirit repeatedly equipping the church for mission. See *Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-8; Acts 2:1-4; Acts 4:29-31*.

We therefore receive the Spirit's indwelling presence with gratitude and continue asking for his fullness and power. We do not treat yesterday's experience as a substitute for present dependence.

For a fuller study of baptism in the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, and spiritual gifts, see *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Supplemental Guide*.

Begin with Surrender

A Spirit-led life begins with availability. We offer our bodies, plans, desires, words, money, relationships, and decisions to God. We ask the Spirit to reveal what resists Jesus and to give us power to obey.

Surrender is not passivity. The Spirit does not erase our minds or personalities. He enables willing participation. Paul could say both, "*Walk by the Spirit*," and, "*Keep in step with the Spirit*." These are active images of responsive movement. See *Galatians 5:16-25*.

A simple daily prayer is: "*Holy Spirit, fill me today. Make me attentive to Jesus, responsive to your direction, and available for your work*."

Learn to Recognize His Direction

The Spirit leads in ways that are consistent with the character of Jesus and the truth of Scripture. He may bring a passage to mind, create conviction, awaken compassion, give wisdom, direct attention toward a person, or prompt us to speak, wait, pray, serve, confess, or act courageously.

Not every strong feeling is the Spirit's leading. Our desires, fears, habits, and assumptions also speak loudly. That is why discernment matters.

When you sense a direction, ask:

- Is it consistent with Scripture?
- Does it reflect the character and way of Jesus?
- Does it produce love, truth, holiness, courage, and humility?
- Is it wise, or is it reckless and self-serving?
- Can it be tested with mature believers?
- Does it honor the freedom and dignity of other people?

The more consequential the decision, the more patiently it should be tested. The Spirit is capable of confirming his direction. Urgency alone is not proof.

Fruit and Gifts Belong Together

The fruit of the Spirit describes the character the Spirit produces: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Spiritual maturity is seen in this growing resemblance to Jesus. *See Galatians 5:22-23.*

The gifts of the Spirit are abilities and manifestations given for the good of others and the building up of the church. They include many forms of speaking, serving, leading, helping, healing, discernment, wisdom, faith, and Spirit-enabled prayer. *See Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12-14; 1 Peter 4:10-11.*

Fruit without gifts can become private virtue with little outward service. Gifts without fruit can become impressive activity that harms people. The Spirit forms both character and capacity. Love is the essential context for every gift.

Make Room for Spiritual Gifts

Paul encouraged believers to desire spiritual gifts, especially those that build up the church. We should not be afraid of the Spirit's work, nor should we become careless or unteachable about it.

Begin by asking God to use you. Pay attention to needs. Serve where you can. Invite mature leaders to help you recognize patterns of grace and effectiveness in your life. Try opportunities that stretch you. Receive feedback without requiring every attempt to succeed.

Gifts are not badges of importance. They are ways the Spirit supplies what the body needs. No believer has every gift, and no believer is unnecessary.

Pray for Others with Faith and Humility

A Spirit-led life makes us available to pray for people. We can ask whether someone would welcome prayer, listen to their need, invite the Spirit's help, and pray simply in Jesus' name.

We pray with confidence because God is good and powerful. We pray with humility because we do not control how or when God responds. We should never manipulate emotion, exaggerate what happened, or place blame on a suffering person. Love remains the measure of faithful ministry.

If you sense that God may be bringing something specific to mind, offer it humbly rather than announcing certainty you do not possess. Language such as, *"I wonder whether this may be for you,"* leaves room for discernment. The person receiving prayer should remain free to test and decline what is shared.

Keep Being Filled

Paul told believers to keep being filled with the Spirit. *See Ephesians 5:18.* The Spirit-filled life is not sustained by chasing constant intensity. It grows through repeated surrender, worship, prayer, obedience, community, and willingness to serve.

Some moments will be dramatic. Many will be quiet. The same Spirit who empowers bold witness also produces patience in conflict, self-control in temptation, endurance in suffering, and faithfulness in hidden places.

A Starting Rhythm

Try this rhythm for four weeks:

- Begin each day with a brief prayer of surrender and invitation.
- Pause at least once during the day and ask, *"Holy Spirit, what are you doing, and how can I respond?"*
- When a person or need comes to mind, pray rather than merely noticing.
- Each week, take one concrete risk of obedience: encourage, serve, share your faith, pray with someone, confess, or respond to a need.
- Ask a mature believer where they see the fruit and gifts of the Spirit developing in you.

Reflect and Respond

- Do you relate to the Holy Spirit primarily as an idea, an experience, or a person who is present with you?
- What most often keeps you from responding when you sense a prompting?
- Which fruit of the Spirit currently needs the most attention in your life?
- Where might the Spirit be inviting you to serve with greater courage?

My next step:

The person who can help me discern and grow:

Serving Others

Jesus is Lord, yet he took the place of a servant. He welcomed people others ignored, touched people others avoided, fed the hungry, washed his disciples' feet, and gave his life for the world. Christian service begins with receiving his love and learning his posture. See *Mark 10:42-45; John 13:1-17; Philippians 2:3-11*.

We do not serve to prove our value. We serve because, in Christ, our value is already secure. We join the ministry of Jesus and use what God has entrusted to us for the good of others.

Every Disciple Is Called to Serve

Ministry is not work performed only by pastors or unusually gifted volunteers. Leaders equip God's people for works of service so that the whole body grows. See *Ephesians 4:11-16*.

Every believer has something to contribute. The Spirit distributes gifts throughout the church, and God prepares good works for us to do. See *1 Corinthians 12:4-27; Ephesians 2:10; 1 Peter 4:10-11*.

Some service is public and visible. Much of it is ordinary and unnoticed: preparing a room, listening to a hurting person, caring for children, repairing something, bringing a meal, giving a ride, making a phone call, cleaning up, organizing details, praying faithfully, or noticing someone who feels alone.

Jesus sees hidden faithfulness.

Start with Love Not Position

It is helpful to understand your gifts, but you do not need a perfect description of your calling before you can serve. Sometimes a need is clear before your role is clear. The Good Samaritan did not pause for a spiritual-gifts assessment. He saw a wounded person and responded with compassion. See *Luke 10:25-37*.

Begin with the people and needs already in front of you. Ask:

- What needs attention?
- What can I do?
- What has God already placed in my hands?
- Who could I strengthen, relieve, welcome, or equip?

Over time, patterns will emerge. You may notice that certain kinds of service bring unusual effectiveness, joy, compassion, or confirmation from others. Those patterns can help reveal your gifts and calling.

Serve as Part of a Body

Individual initiative matters, but Christian service is not a solo project. Teams allow different gifts to work together, create accountability, protect continuity, and help people learn from one another.

Serving with others also exposes our character. We discover whether we can receive direction, communicate, arrive prepared, share credit, handle frustration, and remain faithful when the work is not exciting.

Reliability is spiritual. People are affected when we repeatedly arrive late, fail to communicate, or leave tasks unfinished. Grace does not make commitments meaningless. It teaches us to speak honestly about what we can carry and then follow through.

Serve the Church and the World

The church needs people who will contribute to its shared worship, care, formation, hospitality, administration, and mission. Serving within the church strengthens the body so that it can represent Jesus faithfully.

Service must also move beyond church programs. Jesus sends us toward our neighbors, workplaces, schools, community institutions, and people in need. We reveal his Kingdom through mercy, justice, hospitality, excellence, generosity, truth, and practical love.

Not every act of service will include a sermon, but Christian service should remain connected to Jesus. We serve in his name, with his character, and in hope that people will encounter his love.

Receive as Well as Give

Some people find it easier to serve than to be served. Constant giving can become a way of maintaining control, avoiding vulnerability, or building identity around being needed.

Jesus allowed others to care for him. The members of his body need one another. Receiving help with gratitude gives someone else the opportunity to use their gifts and reminds us that we are not self-sufficient.

Healthy service includes both contribution and dependence.

Serve from Rest Not Exhaustion

Need is endless, but our bodies and responsibilities have limits. Jesus sometimes withdrew from crowds to pray. He did not respond to every demand immediately. *See Mark 1:35-39; Luke 5:15-16.*

Faithful service requires wisdom. A season of sacrificial effort may be necessary, but chronic exhaustion is not proof of devotion. We should learn to say both yes and no honestly, share responsibility, rest, and resist the belief that everything depends on us.

Burnout can come from overwork, but it can also come from resentment, isolation, unclear expectations, or serving from insecurity. When service becomes consistently joyless or harmful, talk with a leader. The answer may be rest, support, clearer boundaries, a different role, or renewed attention to Jesus.

Finding a Place to Serve

Use this process:

1. Pray for willingness before clarity.
2. Notice needs in the church and community.
3. Consider your experience, abilities, relationships, and spiritual gifts.
4. Ask others where they see strength and grace in you.
5. Try a specific opportunity for a defined period.
6. Invite feedback and evaluate the fruit.
7. Continue, adjust, or try something different without shame.

Calling is often clarified through faithful participation rather than discovered in advance.

A Starting Rhythm

Try this rhythm for four weeks:

- Choose one consistent way to contribute to the life or ministry of the church.
- Perform one intentional act of service outside the church each week.
- Before serving, pray for the people involved, not only for the task to go smoothly.
- After serving, ask what produced life, what was difficult, and what you learned.
- Thank one person whose hidden service has strengthened you.

Reflect and Respond

- Where are you already serving faithfully?
- Where do you tend to wait for recognition, permission, or ideal conditions?
- What needs around you match something God has placed in your hands?
- Do you need a new opportunity, a healthier boundary, or renewed faithfulness in your current role?

My next step:

The leader or teammate I will contact:

Generosity

Generosity is the practice of holding everything God has entrusted to us with open hands. Our money, possessions, time, abilities, homes, opportunities, and attention all come from God and can be used for his purposes.

Generosity is not an occasional feeling. It is a way of life formed by the generosity of God. The gospel announces that God did not remain distant from our need. He gave himself to rescue and restore us. Because we have received freely, we learn to give freely.

God Is the Owner

Christian generosity begins with stewardship. We are managers, not ultimate owners. What we possess is real and must be handled responsibly, but it is entrusted to us by God.

This changes the question from, *"How much of my money should I give to God?"* to, *"How does God want me to use everything he has entrusted to me?"*

Stewardship includes earning honestly, planning wisely, providing for responsibilities, avoiding destructive debt, enjoying God's gifts with gratitude, saving appropriately, giving generously, and remaining ready to respond to need. See *Proverbs 3:9-10; Matthew 6:19-34; 1 Timothy 5:8; 1 Timothy 6:17-19.*

Giving Is Worship

When we give, we acknowledge that God is our provider and that his Kingdom matters more than accumulation. Giving loosens the grip of materialism and trains our hearts to trust.

Jesus taught that our hearts follow our treasure. See *Matthew 6:19-24*. Our spending and giving reveal what we value, but they also shape what we value. Regular generosity directs attention and affection toward God.

Giving should not be manipulated by shame, pressure, or exaggerated promises of financial return. Paul taught that giving should be willing and cheerful, not reluctant or compelled. See *2 Corinthians 9:6-11*.

Cheerful does not mean emotionally effortless. Sacrificial giving may require real decisions and changed priorities. It means we give freely, trusting God rather than being coerced by people.

Giving to the Local Church

From the earliest days of the church, believers shared resources so ministry could continue and needs could be met. They supported those who taught and led, cared for people in distress, and sent the gospel beyond their own communities. See *Acts 2:42-47; Acts 4:32-35; 1 Corinthians 9:7-14; Philippians 4:14-19; 1 Timothy 5:17-18.*

At HRCC, we support the ministry and mission of our church through regular financial giving. Our shared generosity supports worship, discipleship, care, community ministry, facilities, staff, missionaries, and the practical work required for the church to serve faithfully.

We do not give to purchase God's favor or pay for religious services. We give as worship and as participants in the shared mission of the church.

A Pattern for Christian Giving

Scripture gives us a pattern that is:

- Grateful: a response to God's generosity toward us.
- Regular and intentional: planned as part of our financial lives rather than left only to occasional impulse.
- Proportional: connected to what we have received.
- Sacrificial: willing to place God's purposes ahead of personal comfort.
- Local: supporting the church family and ministry we call home.
- Cheerful and generous: given willingly, with hope for what God will do through it.

The tithe, or ten percent, is a long-established biblical benchmark for God's people. Christians differ in how they explain the relationship between Old Testament tithing and New Testament giving, but the tithe remains a clear and useful starting point. It gives generosity a concrete shape and challenges the assumption that we will give whatever happens to remain after every other desire is satisfied.

For some, ten percent will require a gradual plan. For others, it may no longer represent sacrifice or generosity. The goal is not to meet a number and stop listening to God. The goal is faithful stewardship, open-handed trust, and growing participation in God's work.

Generosity Beyond Money

Financial giving matters precisely because money matters. But generosity is larger than money.

We can be generous with:

- Time: giving attention rather than offering only what is convenient.
- Possessions: sharing tools, vehicles, meals, clothing, space, and resources.
- Homes: practicing hospitality and making room for people.
- Skills: using professional or practical abilities to strengthen others.
- Opportunity: opening doors, making introductions, and helping others grow.
- Encouragement: noticing good, expressing gratitude, and speaking hope.
- Forgiveness: releasing debts we are tempted to keep collecting.

Generosity notices both immediate needs and long-term dignity. Sometimes love gives directly. Sometimes it listens, partners, teaches, advocates, or creates opportunity. Wisdom asks not only, "*What can I give?*" but also, "*What will genuinely help?*"

Practice Simplicity and Contentment

Generosity is difficult when desire has no limit. Our culture trains us to compare, upgrade, and assume that more will finally make us secure. Scripture teaches contentment: the ability to receive what God provides with gratitude and to resist being ruled by what we do not have. See *Philippians 4:10-13* and *Hebrews 13:5-6*.

Simplicity is the intentional refusal to let possessions and consumption dominate our lives. It may involve buying less, waiting before purchases, reducing clutter, repairing rather than replacing, sharing what we own, or choosing a lower-cost option so resources remain available for generosity.

Simplicity is not hostility toward beauty or enjoyment. God gives good gifts to be received with gratitude. It is freedom from the demand that we continually acquire more.

A Starting Rhythm

Try this rhythm for four weeks:

- Review your recent spending and giving without shame or avoidance.
- Choose a regular amount or percentage to give to the local church and schedule it intentionally.
- Create a small generosity fund for needs and opportunities that arise.
- Give away or share something useful that you are not using.
- Practice one act of hospitality or generosity that costs you time and attention.
- Thank God specifically for what he has provided.

Reflect and Respond

- What do your current financial patterns reveal about trust, fear, gratitude, and desire?
- Is your giving intentional, or does it depend mainly on impulse?
- What would a faithful next step toward proportional giving look like?
- Which resource other than money is hardest for you to hold with open hands?

My next step:

The practical change I will make:

Building a Sustainable Rhythm

The purpose of this guide is not to fill every empty space in your schedule. It is to help you establish a way of life that keeps you attentive and available to Jesus.

A sustainable rhythm is sometimes called a rule of life. The word "*rule*" here does not mean a law used to earn God's approval. It comes from the idea of a trellis: a structure that gives a living vine room to grow. A rule of life is a simple, prayerful plan for arranging recurring practices around what matters most.

Start with Your Real Life

Do not build a plan for an imaginary version of yourself. Begin with your actual responsibilities, energy, limitations, work schedule, family, health, and season of life.

Ask:

- What practices are already present and life-giving?
- Where am I consistently hurried, distracted, isolated, or depleted?
- What responsibility has God clearly entrusted to me in this season?
- What is one missing rhythm that would help me remain attentive to Jesus?
- What do I need to stop, reduce, or reorganize to make room?

The strongest plan is not the most ambitious one. It is the one that can become faithful, flexible, and honest.

Choose Daily Weekly and Monthly Rhythms

Daily practices keep us attentive in ordinary life. Weekly practices interrupt the pace of work and reconnect us to worship, community, and service. Monthly or seasonal practices create space for review, generosity, rest, and adjustment.

Use the ideas below as a starting point, not a required formula.

Daily

- Scripture and prayer at a consistent time
- A brief morning prayer of surrender
- A midday pause to notice the Spirit's direction
- Gratitude and review at the end of the day

Weekly

- Worship with the church
- Meaningful conversation with another believer
- A regular place of service
- Planned financial giving
- A period of rest that is not organized around productivity

Monthly or Seasonally

- A longer time of prayer and reflection
- Review of finances and generosity
- Hospitality or a shared meal
- Evaluation of commitments, boundaries, and service
- A conversation with a trusted believer about spiritual growth

Make the Plan Specific

"Pray more" is a sincere desire, but it is difficult to practice. A specific plan names when, where, and how you will begin.

Instead of "read the Bible more," try: *"On weekdays, I will read the Gospel of Mark for fifteen minutes at the kitchen table before checking social media."*

Instead of "get connected," try: *"I will attend the Tuesday group for the next six weeks and introduce myself to the leader."*

Instead of "serve somewhere," try: *"I will contact the ministry leader this week and try one serving opportunity this month."*

Specificity is not legalism. It turns desire into a practice that can be attempted, reviewed, and adjusted.

A Thirty Day Starting Plan

For the next thirty days, choose one modest rhythm in each area.

Scripture and Prayer

I will:

When and where:

Life with Other Believers

I will:

With whom:

A Spirit-Led Life

I will:

How I will remain attentive:

Serving Others

I will:

My first contact or opportunity:

Generosity

I will:

The practical change required:

Review without Condemnation

At the end of thirty days, review the plan with curiosity rather than condemnation.

- What helped me pay attention to Jesus?
- Where did I experience resistance?
- What produced love, freedom, courage, or faithfulness?
- What was unrealistic in this season?
- What needs to continue, change, or stop?
- What might Jesus be inviting me to practice next?

Share your review with another believer. Let them celebrate growth, help you recognize blind spots, and encourage a wise next step.

Keep Returning to Jesus

Practices are useful only when they keep leading us back to Jesus. He is not waiting at the end of a perfect routine. He is present now.

Come when you are focused and when you are distracted. Come when obedience feels joyful and when it feels costly. Come when you have practiced faithfully and when you need to begin again.

The goal is not a flawless plan. The goal is a life increasingly open to the presence, character, and work of Jesus.

He is faithful to complete what he has begun in us. *See Philippians 1:6.*