

“THE COMMON RULE”

WEEK 1 – Introduction

*****WATCH:** *“The Common Rule Intro” video (approx 10 min.)*

Video Location: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYx6oUex-ixn3FYR1o_PYZ9QQUPVb1Sf
Or search YouTube for “The Common Rule Small Group Video Series”

Video Take-Away’s:

FACT:

*Most people think of freedom as the absence of any limitations.
The Biblical definition of freedom is the presence of the right limitations.*

QUESTION:

What resonated with you in the story from this first video?

Key Quotes from the Video:

“Your mission might stand for one thing, but your habits might stand for something entirely different. Usually your habits win.”

“Only in retrospect did I realize that, while the house of my life was decorated with Christian content, the architecture of my habits was just like everyone else’s. And that life had been working for me—until it collapsed.”

“My body and heart were being converted to the anxiety and busyness I’d worshiped through my habits and routines.”

“Our habits form us. They form our identities, they form our loves, and thus they form our whole lives.”

“If we ignore this vast portion of our life, we’re basically saying to Jesus, ‘You can disciple my conscious mind, you can disciple what I say I believe but not my subconscious patterns of action & what I actually do & love on a daily basis.’”

“True discipleship to Jesus will mean we will submit our head, our heart & our habits to His teachings.”

Digging Deeper...

(The following are excerpts from “The Common Rule” book and additional Justin Whitmel Earley videos.)

ON HABITS...

“I had no idea how much the smallest and most ordinary habits actually impact our souls in the most significant and extraordinary ways.”

In the video, Jason comments: *“My body and heart were being converted to the anxiety and busyness I’d worshiped through my habits and routines.”*

In other words, we become like whatever we worship. (Read Psalm 115:8 in The Passion Translation)

Habits are like ‘liturgies’ - a liturgy is a pattern of words or actions repeated regularly as a way of worship. A ‘habit’ is a behavior that occurs automatically, repeated over and over, often unconsciously.

Notice how similar the two words – ‘liturgy’ and ‘habit’ are.

“They’re both something repeated over and over that forms you; the only difference is that a liturgy admits that it’s an act of worship.

For example...

“Take your work schedule or your social media scrolling, for example. Think about your internet history or how you spent your mornings last week. Think about what you usually eat for lunch or the time you spend with family versus the time you spend looking at a screen during a normal day. These things define vast portions of our lives, and while we would like to think we’ve carefully chosen them, most often we haven’t even given them a second thought. Most often we just swim along with what those around us are doing...Habits form much more than our schedules: they form our hearts.”

“Our habits often obscure what we’re really worshipping, but that doesn’t mean we’re not worshipping something. The question is, what are we worshipping?”

In the book “The Common Rule” (p.9), Jason uses the following table to show how his habits were functioning like ‘liturgies’ that were forming wrong beliefs in his heart, which were forming him into an anxious, busy, overwhelmed person.

Habit	Liturgy of Wrong Belief
Wake up exhausted again, because I never get to bed on time.	I am not a creature; I am infinite. My body will be fine. I am a god.
Look at work emails on my phone before getting out of bed.	I can miss a quiet time, but I can’t miss a quick response. Unless I’m well regarded in the office, I’m not worth anything.
Grab breakfast on the go, while everyone else in my family scrambles to get somewhere late. At the office, eat lunch at my desk.	Being too busy is normal, and maybe even desirable. I’m important if a lot of people want my time. To stay important, I need to stay busy, and that means being late all the time.
Keep all computer notifications turned on, and keep my phone on and in sight while I work.	I need to know what’s going on out there. The most recent thing is the most important thing. The best way to love my neighbors is to stay updated on dramatic headlines and new memes, not to do focused work.
If a manager asks for something late in the day on an unrealistic deadline, always say yes. If a social invite comes up, always go for it.	I will become the best version of myself by expanding my options, so I can’t say no. I may be tired and busy, my family may be exhausted by my unpredictability, but if I don’t preserve choice, I can’t be who I really am.
Even when I sense all of the above is getting out of control, even when the best word to describe life is “scattered” or “busy,” resist any rules that would restrict technology use and work schedules.	To limit myself is to restrict my freedom. And I’m not fully human without my freedom of choice in every moment. The good life comes from choosing what you want.

Discussion:

What resonated with you in the story from this first video?

[Video] - "My life, even though I had a mission, looked like all the other law students' lives looked. I was chasing after things like everyone else...Only in retrospect did I realize that, while the house of my life was decorated with Christian content, the architecture of my habits was just like everyone else's. And that life had been working for me—until it collapsed."

Is there anything about Jason's story of his 'breaking point' that you relate to?

[Video] - "Most people think of freedom as the absence of any limitations. The Biblical definition of freedom is the presence of the right limitations."

*Discuss examples of how 'no limitations' can actually restrict our lives.
Discuss examples of 'limitations' that actually bring freedom to our lives.*

"Our most important worship occurs in our most ordinary habits...Our most ordinary routines are liturgies of worship to something; the question is – to what?" -

Look back at the Table of 'Habits' & 'Liturgies'. Do you relate to any of them?

[Book] - "Paying all our spiritual attention to the message of Jesus while ignoring His practices has not only led people like me into devastating life crises, it has also created Christians whose practical lives are divorced from their actual faith."

*If you're a Jesus-follower, are there any ways your 'practical life'
might be saying something different from your faith?
If you're not a Jesus-follower, are there any ways your 'practical life'
might be saying something different from what you believe?*

PRACTICE:

*This coming week: take note of your day to day / weekly routines.
What is one habit from your daily or weekly routine that you have never noticed
before? Be ready to share it with the group next week.*

To ponder...

*"We, for our own sake, tried to become limitless, and the world was ruined.
Jesus, for our sake, became limited and the world was saved."*

“THE COMMON RULE”

WEEK 2 – Daily Habit 1: Kneeling Prayer

*****WATCH: “The Common Rule Daily Habit #1” video (approx 6 min.)**

Video Location: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYx6oUex-ixn3FYR1o_PYZ9QQUPVb1Sf
Or search YouTube for “The Common Rule Small Group Video Series”

Video Take-Away’s:

FACT:

A Duke University study showed that 40% of our daily actions aren’t really the products of conscious choices, but the products of unconscious habit.

QUESTION:

What kind of habits – for better or worse – are framing your day?

Key Quotes from the Video:

“Habits always frame our day; most of them are unnoticed.”

“Rule of Life: A pattern of habits designed to form a community in the love of God and neighbor. The ‘common rule’ is a kind of rule of life for communities.”

“Kneeling prayer is about reframing our day by punctuating it with moments of submission, (kneeling), slowness (stopping to pray) and dependence (you’re asking the Creator of the universe to take control of what you can’t).”

“I deliberately ignore these counter-narratives of who I am and Who God is and I say to them, ‘You do not define reality; actually a God Who loves me and Who’s guiding this day does.’”

“Kneeling Prayer is doing something to our brains (pausing), to our bodies (kneeling), & our soul (acknowledging God & His Love).”

Step 1: Write out some short prayers (examples in book p.45); Step 2: Set reminders at morning, noon and night for kneeling prayer; Step 3: Practice the habit of kneeling prayer

“These little prayers have become a trellis and all kinds of love for God and neighbor are starting to grow on them.”

Digging Deeper...

(The following are excerpts from “The Common Rule” book & other sources)

ON A ‘RULE OF LIFE’

“A ‘Rule of Life’ is a set of habits you commit to in order to grow in your love of God and neighbor.”

“The word ‘rule’ actually comes from the Greek word that means ‘trellis’. A trellis is a support system for a vine or plant that enables it to grow upward and bear fruit. For a grapevine to produce good grapes it must have a trellis to support and guide its growth or it will slump to the ground. When this happens the fruit tends to rot before it ripens. Grapevines in the wild will use just about anything — a tree or even a rock—as a trellis. It is part of their nature to seek structure. Like a trellis, a rule of life supports and guides our growth. It supports our friendship with Christ so that we bear the fruit of his character and are able to offer his nourishing life to others. The purpose of the rule, in this sense, is not to be harsh or confining. It is to cultivate fruit. It serves as a pattern for life that enables us to experience the presence of Jesus in each moment of our lives, empowering us to become people who embody his love to others.” - Ken Shigematsu

The Common Rule involves 4 Daily + 4 Weekly practices

- practices you do by yourself + practices you do with others
- practices that involve the love of God + the love of neighbor
- practices that remind us to ‘embrace’ (reminding ourselves there is much good in the world God has made; God’s presence—not His absence—is the primary fact of the world)
- practices that remind us to ‘resist’ (we acknowledge that evil & suffering are real; these practices don’t shield us from the world but turn us towards our world with God’s love & healing life)

ON KNEELING PRAYER in the MORNING, MIDDAY & BEDTIME

“Words create new realities. Small words have enormous impact.”

“Just as God framed the world in love, so we can use the words of prayer to frame each part of our day in love.

“Too often I frame the day in ‘legalism’ (the belief that the world hangs on what I do and that God and people love me based on how I perform). Legalism seems to be the default setting for human beings. We will always wake up to some kind of prayer that makes the world about us (“I really don’t want to get up...Why did I stay up so late?...Please don’t let anyone find out about last night...I have so much to do today!”)—unless we create new habits of gospel prayers.”

“In morning prayer, we frame the first words of the day in God’s love for us; we uproot the weeds of legalism that grow if we do nothing.”

“Midday kneeling prayer is a habit that reframes the workday in love; it resets the paradigm to see work as a way to love and serve God and others, not the way to be loved by God or served by others.”

“We pause to pray, to purposefully frame the evening in rest, to rest in God’s mercy and care for us at the end of the day.”

Discussion:

[Video] - Jason comments at the beginning: *"Habits always frame our day; most of them are unnoticed."*

Were there any previously 'unnoticed habits' you discovered in your day? Week?

[Video] - Jason tells the story about the jasmine plant that went out of control until it had a structure to guide it and help it grow. He expands on this in "The Common Rule" book:

"Our lives are something like a jasmine plant, and our days and weeks are something like the trellis. At best, we're made to grow upward, blossom beautifully and fill the earth with all the rich fragrance of God's uncountable glories. Yet we are fallen. We are twisted. But that doesn't mean we don't grow; it means we grow sideways in ways we weren't meant to, often twisting into something that kills us and hurts those around us. Should we do nothing, we will still grow. But we're likely to grow into habits that are destructive, not only to us but also to those around us."

Are there any aspects of your life that are like the jasmine plant – anything that is, or feels, 'out of control', 'sideways', 'twisted' or hurting others?

[Video] – Jason shares how his days are often punctuated: mornings (anxiety); afternoons (so much yet to do & it's not going to happen); evenings (confusion, 'does this matter at all?')

What typically punctuates your mornings? Afternoons? Evenings?

He goes on to say:

[Video] - *"I deliberately ignore these counter-narratives of who I am and Who God is and I say to them, 'You do not define reality; actually a God Who loves me and Who's guiding this day does.'"*

Think about a typical day for you: What would your day look like (in practical ways) if it was defined by the true narrative of a God Who loves you & is guiding your day?

Look up the following scriptures to discover the power of our words & prayer...

- Proverbs 18:21 (read in different versions)
- Genesis 1:1-3
- James 3:4-5
- John 14:12-14

PRACTICE:

Try the daily habit of kneeling prayer.

Sample prayers (from the book "The Common Rule" p.45)

- **Morning** – *"Spirit, I was made for Your presence. May this day be one I spend with You in all that I do. Amen."*
- **Midday** – *"Jesus, I was made to join Your work in the world. Please order the rest of my day in love for the people You have given me to serve. Amen."*
- **Bedtime** – *"Father, I was made to rest in Your love. May my body rest in sleep, and may my mind rest in your love. Amen."*

“THE COMMON RULE”

WEEK 3 – Daily Habit 2: One Meal with Others

*****WATCH:** *“The Common Rule Daily Habit #2” video (approx 6 min.)*

Video Location: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYx6oUex-ixn3FYR1o_PYZ9QQUPVb1Sf
Or search YouTube for “The Common Rule Small Group Video Series”

Video Take-Away’s:

FACT:

*42% of meals are now eaten alone, and the number is on the rise.
Think about how counter-culture it is to eat a meal together with others & invite others into that.*

QUESTION:

How does your relationship with food affect your relationship to community, for better or for worse?

Key Quotes from the Video:

“What is the centre of gravity of our daily routine? Is it our work schedule? Activities? Is it our general busyness or something else?”

“To make the table our centre of gravity is to make community our center of gravity.”

“The table is where life happens; where a household learns to love.”

“Our routines are built around something. Building our lives around a common table is a move away from the individualist life and towards communal life.”

“This isn’t an inward habit or just about the ‘family’. One of the important things about the table is the ‘extra chair’.”

“In our modern moment, the table may be the frontier for evangelism.”

“The table is not only the place where we build community with the insiders; it’s also the place where we welcome the outsiders in.”

Digging Deeper...

(The following are excerpts from "The Common Rule" book & other sources)

ON MAKING THE TABLE 'CENTRE'

"In general, our culture puts busy schedules at the center of life and then tries to fit meals in around them. This is different from putting the table at the center and prioritizing our schedules around that. In our culture of busyness - the solitary feeling of individual productivity and accomplishment is the necessity; time to stop to eat with others is a luxury."

"The daily habit of one meal a day with others is a way of moving the table back to the centre of who we are and ordering our day around the kind of people we were created to be: dependent and communal human beings."

"We were created to hunger because we were made to feast on God's generosity."

"We may say that the table is the center of gravity for loving neighbor. The daily habit of eating at least one meal with others is important precisely because it asks us to rearrange our priorities around the communal table and to acknowledge that we are made for food and for each other; it calibrates us for relationship instead of for loneliness and busyness."

"Opening the household table on a regular basis creates an undercurrent of the Christian life that mimics the adoption ethic [that is central to our salvation – we have been 'adopted into God's family']. The family is open, not closed."

"Cultivating the rhythms of the table must not pull us away from the outsider. A redeemed table is one that invites outsiders in."

Look up the following scriptures to discover more about the significance of the table

- Acts 2:42-47
- Luke 22:28-30
- Romans 12:13
- Mark 2:15
- Revelation 3:20

Discussion:

[Video] - “What is the centre of gravity of our daily routine? Is it our work schedule? Activities? Our general busyness or something else?”

*What would you say is the current ‘centre of gravity’ of your daily routine?
What impact does that ‘centre’ have on the rest of your life?*

*How does your relationship with food affect your relationship
to community, for better or for worse?*

[Video] – “To make the table our centre of gravity is to make community our center of gravity.”

Discuss the benefits of making ‘community’ our ‘centre of gravity’.

[Video] - “The table is where life happens; where a household learns to love.”

*How is this so?
Discuss the ways the values of love are communicated over food.*

[Book] – “One of the main things our neighbors who don’t know Jesus need is simply to trust a Christian. That begins at the table—a table lovingly set with good conversation and an extra chair.”

Discuss how the table can become a place of ‘growing trust’ for those who don’t know Jesus.

*What are some of the challenges you might face in practicing this habit?
Discuss creative solutions around those challenges.*

PRACTICE:

Eat one meal a day with others & see what happens.

To ponder...

*“Remember – your habits will never change God’s love for you,
but God’s love for you can and should change your habits.”*

“THE COMMON RULE”

WEEK 4 – Daily Habit 3: 1 Hour with Phone Off

*****WATCH:** *“The Common Rule Daily Habit #3” video (approx 6 min.)*

Video Location: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYx6oUex-ixn3FYR1o_PYZ9QQUPVb1Sf
Or search YouTube for “The Common Rule Small Group Video Series”

Video Take-Away’s:

FACT:

*A University of Virginia study showed that even a phone turned off and face down on the table reduced participants’ satisfaction in their conversation at the table.
We’re more distractible than we think.*

QUESTION:

What is one place in your life where you think you could love God or neighbor more, simply by being more present?

Key Quotes from the Video:

“We live in an age of distraction; a time where inattention and distraction is just the norm. This habit is meant to reclaim the daily practice of ‘presence’.”

“Presence is at the heart of everything. The story of the Bible is in many ways a story of presence.”

“The Fall of humans is the loss of our ability to be present with God and others.”

“Our spiritual DNA longs for presence. But how often are our phones the reason we are around each other, but not present with each other?”

“Your presence to the people who are not in the room is far less important than your presence to the people who are inside the room.”

“Ways to Start: Try an hour off in the morning to be more present at work. OR Try an hour in the evening to be more present with people in your house.”

Digging Deeper...

(The following are excerpts from "The Common Rule" book & other sources)

ON BEING 'PRESENT'

"We were made for presence, but so often our phones are the cause of our absence. To be two places at a time is to be no place at all. Turning off our phone for an hour a day is a way to turn our gaze up to each other, whether that be children, coworkers, friends, or neighbors. Our habits of attention are habits of love. To resist absence is to love neighbor."

"Only when we know who we are can we turn to love others, not use others. Only then can we actually listen to them. As Kyle David Bennett writes in his book on how the spiritual disciplines are for the love of the world, 'How can we love our neighbor if we never allow her to reveal herself because we are always chattering?'"

"As image bearers of God, we have a powerful presence to give to others. But unlike our omnipresent God, we have a limited presence. To long to be omnipresent is a false, bent longing to be God himself. It is not the way we were made to be. And like all efforts to be God, it will break us."

"Attention is our precious commodity. Our life is defined by what we pay attention to. This means our life is defined by which of the many cries for our attention we heed."

***"Turning your phone off with family and friends** – The goal is to regularly cut off the ability to be reached by everyone and anyone, so that in those limits we can be fully present to someone."*

***"Turning your phone off at work** – Are we actually doing good work for our clients, our customers, our supervisors? Are we giving them the one thing that produces a great product or service: our undivided attention?"*

***"Turning your phone off to seek silence** – When the distractions fade away and the roar of silence begins, we're confronted with the question that haunts us: Who are we really, now that no one is looking?"*

"Remember that the phone isn't neutral. We can't use it the right way without habits that protect us from the wrong way. When we do nothing, they tilt us toward absence."

Discussion:

[Video] - *"We live in an age of distraction; a time where inattention and distraction is just the norm."*

***What is it about our phone that we are so easily distracted by it?
If you've already established some practices to break your phone's 'distraction power',
share your experience with the group.***

[Book] – *"Use your phone one way, and it fuels the life of love and presence you long for. Use your phone the other way, and it robs you of everything you were made for."*

***Give examples of ways our phones can fuel a life of love & presence.
Give examples of ways our phone robs us of what we've been made for.***

Look up the following scriptures to discover more about the significance of 'presence'

- Matthew 1:23
- Revelation 21:3
- Matthew 28:20

[Video] - *"The Story of the Bible is in many ways a story of presence. Sin has turned a people meant for presence into a people of absence. God has spent the rest of the story tracking His people down."*

Give examples from the Bible of the ways God revealed His desire to be 'present' with humanity.

[Video] - *"The Fall of humans is the loss of our ability to be present with God and others."*

What do you think it means to be 'present with God'? With others?

What specifically about your phone makes it difficult for you to be present?

What is one place in your life where you think you could love God or neighbor more, simply by being more present?

PRACTICE:

*Try turning your phone off for 1 hour each day; aim for the same time each day.
Set a reminder to remind yourself to turn off your phone 😊*

To ponder...

*When we cultivate inner rhythms of silence, we become attentive to
the voice of conscience, to the voice of God's love for the world,
and to the voice of our neighbor's need.*

“THE COMMON RULE”

WEEK 5 – Daily Habit 4: Scripture Before Phone

*****WATCH:** *“The Common Rule Daily Habit #4” video (approx 6 min.)*

Video Location: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYx6oUex-ixn3FYR1o_PYZ9QQUPVb1Sf
Or search YouTube for “The Common Rule Small Group Video Series”

Video Take-Away’s:

FACT:

*The share of North Americans who read for pleasure is now at an all-time low.
Think about how radical it is just to be someone who reads every morning,
especially reading the scriptures about God’s love for us.*

QUESTION:

What is the first thing you do every day? What’s your typical morning routine?

Key Quotes from the Video:

“My head was asking my phone, ‘What do I need to do today?’ but in the same moments, under the radar my heart was asking my phone a much more profound question, ‘Who do I need to become in order to be lovable?’ – The answer? Perform. Do more. Work faster.”

“Beginning our day in the drama and palace intrigue of morning news...is very different than beginning our day in the epistles which are designed to speak the word of God’s sovereignty over the chaos of the world’s kingdom and give us peace.”

“The human heart is an identity vacuum. And first thing in the morning it’s going to be asking, ‘Who do I need to become today in order to be lovable?’ And the idea of this habit of scripture before phone is to answer that question rightly.”

Tips for getting started:

- *Consider getting an alarm clock*
- *Consider putting your phone on ‘do not disturb’ until a later hour of the morning*
- *Consider getting a Bible reading plan, try to go through each reading before you look at your phone*

“Once you know who you are in God, you can turn to the world to offer love. But when you don’t, you will turn to the world looking for love. And that order makes all the difference.”

Digging Deeper...

(The following are excerpts from “The Common Rule” book & other sources)

ON ‘WHO AM I?’ AND ‘WHO AM I BECOMING?’

“I am not, in my natural state, nearly so much of a person as I like to believe: most of what I call “me” can be very easily explained. It is when I turn to Christ, when I give myself up to His Personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own.” - C. S. LEWIS

“Who am I? And who am I becoming? These are the questions our morning routines are inevitably asking and answering for us. But no words except the words of Scripture can bear the weight of a response to these questions.”

“We become what or who we reflect, which is to say we become what we pay attention to. We can’t become ourselves by ourselves. The way we discover ourselves is by staring at someone else. This can be dangerous. Staring at another broken shard of glass only makes us more broken. But when we turn our eyes toward Jesus, only there do we finally see the kind of person we were made to be like.”

“In his death and resurrection, Jesus gave us his place in the universe, heirs to the King of the new heavens and the new earth. Our most true sense of identity is found only in the story of who we are becoming, and that story is found in the words of the Bible. We can become ourselves only by gazing on that story, but every morning there are other stories competing for our identity. The Common Rule habit of Scripture before phone is intended to cultivate the habit of resisting those stories and embracing the true story.”

“I often turn to work and career in the search for my identity. I hope that by achieving success I will finally become someone who is approved of. This means—as an identity reflector—I have to look at other people’s faces, and my identity is tacked to whether they look happy with me and my work or not. The habit of checking work emails first thing every morning encouraged this misguided search for identity because it started my day with the questions: What do I need to do to make someone else happy with me? How can I justify my existence in the world today?”

“Aligning our identity to the King—over the country—is radically different. Only when we’re secure in our identity as children of the coming King, who will right all wrongs, can we read the news for the sake of our neighbors’ needs instead of for the sake of our own inadequacy. Only then are we able to repent, and not just blame another side.”

“The more I use social media, the more I realize that the great danger is not in simply overusing social media, it is in living through social media. The problem is not so much the way it wastes time, it is the way it frames time. Without limits, we begin to see our whole life through it. We see our whole day through a possible post.”

“Daily immersion in Scriptures resists the anxiety of emails, the anger of news, and the envy of social media. Instead it forms us daily in our true identity as children of the King, dearly loved.

“Cultivating the habit of Scripture before phone means looking in the right place to ask who you are. You open the Bible, and you find you are with your dad. You find your name written on its pages. You find you are loved. Then you begin to reflect that love, just as you were made to.”

Look up the following scriptures to discover more about the significance of God’s Word in our lives

- Matthew 4:4
- Jeremiah 15:16
- John 17:17

Discussion:

What is the first thing you do every day? What's your typical morning routine?

[Video] - "My head was asking my phone, 'What do I need to do today?' but in the same moments, under the radar my heart was asking my phone a much more profound question, 'Who do I need to become in order to be lovable?' – The answer? Perform. Do more. Work faster."

In what ways does interacting with our phone first thing in the morning influence in a negative way, the question our heart is asking, 'Who do I need to become in order to be lovable?'

[Video] - "Once you know who you are in God, you can turn to the world to offer love. But when you don't, you will turn to the world looking for love."

What are some ways, even in our normal daily routine, that we are actually turning to the world, looking for love?

[Book] – "Our most true sense of identity is found only in the story of who we are becoming, and that story is found in the words of the Bible. We can become ourselves only by gazing on that story, but every morning there are other stories competing for our identity."

What are some of the other 'stories' competing for our identity?

[Book] – "'If we wake every morning to social media, we will be formed in its lens on life and all the envy and self-righteousness that goes with that. But fortunately there's a different way. The Bible tells a story of us, not as people who were made to see and be seen or judge and be judged, but as children who were made to love and be loved. Only when we feel that in our bones can we use social media to love neighbors instead of trying to get their love.'"

Give examples of the differences between using social media to 'love neighbors' and using social media to try to get their love.

PRACTICE:

Practice the daily habit of scripture before phone – maybe going through a plan or reading through the Psalms or Proverbs or other

To ponder

Each morning presents us with these questions: Who am I? And who am I becoming? Each morning, the Scriptures answer the same, as God says, "You are my child, and you are becoming like Me." That is something to stand the day on.

“THE COMMON RULE”

WEEK 6 – Weekly Habit 1:

1 Hour of Conversation with a Friend

*****WATCH:** *“The Common Rule Weekly Habit #1” video (approx 6 min.)*

Video Location: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYx6oUex-ixn3FYR1o_PYZ9QQUPVb1Sf
Or search YouTube for “The Common Rule Small Group Video Series”

Video Take-Away’s:

FACT:

A recent study showed that chronic loneliness reduces life expectancy to the tune of smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

QUESTION:

*What is one time in your life where vulnerability really changed things?
(Either you were changed or the other person was changed.)*

Key Quotes from the Video:

“This rhythm allows us to embody the gospel of Jesus to each other. This is not just about conversation; it’s not even just about friendship. It’s about the ways we become vulnerable to each other and how the Gospel is reflected in that.”

“Even Adam was lonely with God in the Garden until God gave him his first friend in Eve.”

“How much more so do we need friends in a time & place that encourages us to curate our every moment on line & show off our best to the world, and yet simultaneously allows us to have a completely secret life on the internet. How badly in this kind of world do we need a real friend, to hear our secrets, that we spend our lives otherwise so desperately trying to hide.”

“What is the Gospel? The says that we are all messed up, but God loves us anyway. A friend is someone who knows how messed up we are, but loves us anyway. This is why vulnerable conversation on a weekly basis with friends as a gospel infused practice.”

“We need to create a regular repeated rhythm of being vulnerable with friends because we live on a cultural slant. There’s a ‘tilt’ to modern life: to become busy people who used to have friends.”

“Let’s be a beautiful gospel counter-culture to this culture, that bears witness to the goodness of friendship. To do this you need to make it habit.”

Friendship = Vulnerability + Time

Digging Deeper...

(The following are excerpts from "The Common Rule" book)

ON BEING KNOWN

"We were made for each other, and we can't become lovers of God and neighbor without intimate relationships where vulnerability is sustained across time. In habitual, face-to-face conversation with each other, we find a gospel practice; we are laid bare to each other and loved anyway."

"God is a fellowship. That means we are made in the image of fellowship. We did not come from loneliness, as if some needy god needed lesser beings to sing its praises. We came from friendship."

"Without the work of real conversation where your deepest hopes are admitted and your greatest secrets are discovered, relationships remain the mere common interests of acquaintances."

"Vulnerability and time turn people who have a relationship into people who have a friendship. That's what friendship is: vulnerability across time. The practice of conversation is the basis of friendship because it's in conversation that we become exposed to each other."

"Texting and online chatting have threatened true friendship because they allow us to plan and curate the versions of ourselves that we bring to our discussions. When we're removed from facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice, and when we have time to consider and edit our replies, we don't face the risk that face-to-face conversation naturally brings. So we don't risk being known as someone less than perfect."

"How do we create a life of friendship when we have neither the courage nor the time to talk? The answer is to practice courage and prioritize time. We need the courage to be vulnerable in a world that is scared, and we need to make it a priority to take time in a world that is distracted. The habit of a weekly hour in conversation can cultivate both."

"Here is the power that lies in vulnerable friendships: together we beat back the darkness by exposing it to light. When the darkness of our lives is exposed by the light of vulnerable conversation, we participate in opening our darkness to the power of the gospel."

"Why do we arrange our geography and our schedules in a way that makes putting consistent time into friendships so hard? For me, the reason was career. I wanted the best job, but I began to wonder whether a life with the best job was worth a life without a best friend."

"Opening outward is the truest direction of friendship. The circle grows. Here one plus one equals three or even four. The circle is complete, but it is somehow still open. Love defies mathematics and geometry. If friendship is a practice that reminds us of what the gospel is, it is also a practice that puts the gospel on display to the world. In a culture of loneliness and individualism, there is no better witness to the Trinity than embodying a counterculture of real friendship."

Look up the following scriptures to discover more on friendship

- Genesis 2:18
- John 15:15

Discussion:

*What is one time in your life where vulnerability really changed things?
(Either you were changed or the other person was changed.)*

[Video] – “How badly in this kind of world do we need a real friend, to hear our secrets, that we spend our lives otherwise so desperately trying to hide.”

What are some (maybe non-typical) ways we try to hide?

[Book] – “Friendships embody the power of the gospel in a unique way, because in friendship we live out the truth of the gospel to each other. What is the gospel besides that Jesus knows how broken we are and sticks around to love us anyway? What is a friend except someone who knows how broken we are yet sticks around to love us anyway?”

Do you have an example of this from your own life – someone who knew your brokenness yet stuck around to love you anyway? How did the experience change you?

Read John 15:13.

How might this verse be applied to this Common Rule habit?

[Book] – “Often great conversations come from someone who has mastered the art of good questions. If that isn’t you, consider brainstorming with your friends to come up with some good questions you can regularly ask each other.”

Take some time as group to do this – come up with some questions you could regularly ask during the ‘1 hour conversation with a friend’.

[Book] – “While the habit of weekly conversation begins in intimacy, it ends in openness. The goal of gospel friendships is not just to enjoy the fruits of friendship together, but also to offer them as nourishment to the world.”

Discuss ways that current friendships / friendship circles could become ‘nourishment’ to others.

PRACTICE:

Find an hour this week, get together with a friend, be vulnerable and talk

To ponder

The darkness rages in us, but honest conversation is a practice of light.

“THE COMMON RULE”

WEEK 7 – Weekly Habit 2: Curation of Media Intake

*****WATCH:** *“The Common Rule Weekly Habit #2” video (approx 6 min.)*

Video Location: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYx6oUex-ixn3FYR1o_PYZ9QQUPVb1Sf
Or search YouTube for “The Common Rule Small Group Video Series”

Video Take-Away’s:

FACT:

The average user watches about 500 hrs a year of streamed media.

QUESTION:

*What do you appreciate about how modern stories are forming you?
And what is one way you are concerned about how modern stories are forming you?*

Key Quotes from the Video:

“Stories form a huge part of who we are. But because of recent technology shifts, while we used to have to go out and find stories, now they come and find us. And they shape us in all kinds of ways we don’t expect. We need a new virtue: the ability to choose stories well.”

What is ‘curation’? – the process of selecting that involves ‘limiting’ your options.

“Stories shape the world. They teach us what it means to be human, to live the good life, to love. We need to be careful with stories precisely because they are so important.”

“We should be picking stories that make us dream of a more just world; we should be picking stories that are so well told, so beautiful, that we rejoice in God and His creation and the people He has made. And we should be watching them together; we choose much better when we watch in community rather than when we watch alone.”

How to start:

- *Pick an hour limit – might be 4 hours, 2 hours, 10 hours; how many hours you choose isn’t as important as picking a limit and sticking to it. It’s ‘limit’ that forces us to choose & curate carefully.*
- *Try writing down what you watch – We drastically underestimate how much time we spend watching screens*

“Remember: The reason we are doing this is not to be different; it’s not to watch less; it’s not to stop wasting time; it’s that we become the stories we watch. So we need to choose carefully. We need to choose them on purpose.”

Digging Deeper...

(The following are excerpts from "The Common Rule" book)

ON STORIES AS FORMATION

"We don't just watch stories; we live in one. We are characters in the most epic narrative of all time, and it is real. It is a story unfolding in actual time, and the stories we watch are all trying to explain to us what this real story is about. They help us figure out how to live in our own story."

"That's why stories—more than any ethics lecture or Sunday school lesson—shape our idea of what the good life is, where the world is going, and what it means to be human. They tell us what is beautiful, what is just, and how we should live with each other. This is why we don't just watch stories. We become them."

"The 'streaming story' refers to the audio and video content that are not only continually accessible but also targeted to find us even when we're trying to give our attention to something else. Stories are not only far more accessible than ever before, they are also far more invasive, as the writers often have all kinds of ulterior motives."

ON CURATING STORIES

"The good life doesn't come from the ability to choose anything and everything; the good life comes from the ability to choose good things by setting limits. Limits are where freedom is found."

"The new world of the streaming story means that we must urgently cultivate the virtue of curation. The point is picking some time limit that forces curation. You can't watch or listen to everything that everyone else is; you can't even watch or listen to everything you want to. But you can and should watch some things, even many things. But you also must curate them, lest someone else who does not love you curates them for you."

***"Curate for Beauty"** - When we don't curate for beauty and instead feed a desire for distraction or pick based on messages alone, we miss out on the essential human need to feel the world deeply. Focusing on messages isn't bad at all, it is just incomplete. It isn't enough to hear truth in words; you have to feel truth in your soul."*

***"Curate for Justice"** - Curating for justice means looking for stories that tear us up over the way the world is broken and that make us fall in love with the way the world should be. Every good story tells us what we should do about the brokenness."*

***"Curating for Community"** - Our stories should be pushing us out of isolation, not into it. The vast quantity of addictive media poses a real danger. It captures our hearts with really good stories but at the cost of spending our lives on the couch."*

"The habit of curating media is a habit of neighbor love because stories send us out into the world as certain kinds of people. Curating beautiful stories means we live in a slightly more beautiful world. Curating just stories means we collectively attune our sense of justice and turn our eyes to the vulnerable. Curating for community means resisting isolation and moving out toward our neighbors and friends."

Discussion:

[Video] – “Because of recent technology shifts, while we used to have to go out and find stories, now they come and find us. And they shape us in all kinds of ways we don’t expect.”

Name the different types or forms of ‘stories’ we’re exposed to; that ‘come to us’.

*What do you appreciate about how modern stories are forming you?
And what is one way you are concerned about how modern stories are forming you?*

[Video] – ““Either we curate our stories or the world of stories will curate us.”

What do you think this means?

[Book] - “The ‘streaming story’ refers to the audio and video content that are not only continually accessible but also targeted to find us even when we’re trying to give our attention to something else. Stories are not only far more accessible than ever before, they are also far more invasive, as the writers often have all kinds of ulterior motives.”

Can you name examples of ‘streaming stories’?

[Video] – ““We should be picking stories that make us dream of a more just world; we should be picking stories that are so well told, so beautiful, that we rejoice in God and His creation and the people He has made. And we should be watching them together; we choose much better when we watch in community rather than when we watch alone.”

Share examples of ‘stories’ (print, media, movies, etc) that would fall in any of the categories mentioned in the above quote; explain how you think they fit in those categories.

PRACTICE:

Practice curating media intake to an hour limit. Don’t beat yourself up if you don’t stick to your limit; just notice what you aim for and what you got.

To ponder

We are guaranteed to be formed in consumption unless we ruthlessly pursue curation.

“THE COMMON RULE”

WEEK 8 – Weekly Habit 3: 24 Hour Fast

*****WATCH:** *“The Common Rule Weekly Habit #3” video (approx 6 min.)*

Video Location: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYx6oUex-ixn3FYR1o_PYZ9QQUPVb1Sf
Or search YouTube for “The Common Rule Small Group Video Series”

Video Take-Away’s:

FACT:

There are a lot of health benefits to fasting, but in Jesus’ main teaching on fasting He begins with, “When you fast...” – an assumption that His followers fast.

QUESTION:

If you were going to fast from something this week, what would it be and why?

Key Quotes from the Video:

“Restraint uniquely opens us up to feast on the real ‘food’ of life and that is God Himself.”

“The big danger is, we live in an age of plenty and this excess numbs us. It numbs us to the suffering and to the beauty of the world. To cultivate the habit of fasting is to have our eyes and our hearts opened up to all of this – the good and the bad.”

“To fast is to suffer. Fasting is a way to re-sensitize us to the serious reality that we live in a world that suffers.”

“To cultivate the practice of fasting is to reject the terrible fairytale that everything is fine. To fast is to enter into suffering alongside Christ and remember how much we long and how much our neighbors long for Christ to redeem all things.”

“When we live in the lie that everything is fine, we are tempted to believe the lie that we don’t need a savior.”

“Nothing but the love of God can fill the pain of our emptiness.”

“Fasting reveals the inner need that only God can fill.”

Digging Deeper...

(The following are excerpts from "The Common Rule" book)

ON FASTING

"We were made to feast. Not in order to become full, but because we are full. We are to celebrate that fullness by feasting. Feasting to fill the emptiness is not feasting; it is coping. After the Fall of humanity, our relationship with food was broken. One of our greatest temptations is to rehearse the Fall again and again through food. We eat to try to fill our emptiness."

"Fasting is a way to resist the original sin of trying to eat our way to happiness and to force ourselves to look to God for our fullness. In that sense, to fast is to lean into the truth of the world: we are empty without God."

"In fasting, what begins with experiencing the emptiness of our stomach ends in experiencing the emptiness of the world. In the Bible, fasting is not just to reveal and clarify our own need for God. It is to lean into the suffering of the world itself and to long for God to redeem it."

"The weekly habit of fasting, then, is a way to lean into both the emptiness of the world as it is and prayer for the coming fullness of the world as it will be."

"Fasting is bizarrely countercultural because it runs the opposite direction of the North American dream. In pursuit of the dream, we tell each other that we can move upward in the world through sheer individual effort and that we're going to finally be happy when we get there. In fasting, we deliberately move downward into emptiness—and even more, we admit that we can't eat or work our way to happiness. We need God for that."

"And that's the first point of the practice of fasting: seeing who you really are."

"Slowly but surely, my posture in relation to the world is recalibrated. I'm not here to get what I want; I'm here to love other people."

"In emptying ourselves, we practice becoming like Christ, who emptied himself. We practice sharing in his sufferings."

"Fasting is a way to lean past our own emptiness and into someone else's. It's a practice of empathy, of willingly walking into pain for someone else. It's an imitation of Christ, limiting ourselves for the sake of someone else."

Look up the following scriptures to discover more on fasting

- Matthew 4:2
- Matthew 6:16
- Deuteronomy 8:3
- Philippians 2:4-7

Discussion:

If you were going to fast from something this week, what would it be and why?

[Video] – “We are culturally predisposed to eat, drink or sleep away our pain.”

What are some ‘non-typical forms’ of pain we might be trying to eat, drink or sleep away without even realizing that’s what we’re doing?

[Book] – “One of our greatest temptations is to rehearse the Fall again and again through food. We eat to try to fill our emptiness.”

What are some examples of the ‘emptiness’ we humans experience and what types of ways do we try to fill that emptiness?

[Book] – “And that’s the first point of the practice of fasting: seeing who you really are.”

How does fasting reveal ‘who we really are’?

Do you have a positive fasting experience? How did it change you?

PRACTICE:

Practice a 24 hour fast from something. It could be food, sugar, social media – pick something you will miss; the idea is to lean into the lack.

To ponder:

To live without fasting is to live without knowing who you truly are.

“THE COMMON RULE”

WEEK 9 – Weekly Habit 4: Sabbath

***WATCH: “The Common Rule Weekly Habit #4” video (approx 6 min.)

Video Location: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYx6oUex-ixn3FYR1o_PYZ9QQUPVb1Sf
Or search YouTube for “The Common Rule Small Group Video Series”

Video Take-Away’s:

FACT:

*As a culture, people used to demonstrate their status by showing off their leisure time;
now we show off our status by showing off how busy we are.
Think about how Sabbath is a very counter-cultural practice.*

QUESTION:

What would your ideal Sabbath look like? How would it involve worship? How would it involve rest?

Key Quotes from the Video:

“What we’re doing in Sabbath is, we’re confronted by a new identity. In order to cultivate the habit of Sabbath, you have to reduce the idea of your importance. You’re going to have to get comfortable with the idea that the world will make it for one day, without you on email, without you posting new content; your family is going to be fine if you postpone errands.”

“To lean into the practice of Sabbath, is to lean into the centre of the Christian faith – that we are saved because of something Someone else did—this is the message of grace.”

“Sabbath will look different across jobs and life-stages. Sabbath takes practice. You really have to work to find that rest.”

“A man who works with his mind should sabbath with his hands, and a man who works with his hands should Sabbath with his mind.” – Rabbi Abraham Heschel

“Worship & rest will look different for different people. Don’t think so much about what you shouldn’t do; think about what you should do.”

“Sabbath is communal. We need other people to Sabbath with you. We need people to help us create these rhythms and remind us that the most important work in the world was Jesus’ work on the Christ and that was finished so we can rest.”

Digging Deeper...

(The following are excerpts from "The Common Rule" book)

ON SABBATH-ING

"None of us like our limits. Like Adam and Eve in the garden, we are not content to be like God; we want to be God. The weekly habit of Sabbath is to remind us that God is God and we are not."

"We may take weekends, but our days away from work are often spent furiously trying to accomplish other things: new hobbies, new travel, more hangouts, more side hustles."

"But the rest that our souls need is not simply a nap. It's the rest that comes with realizing we don't have anything to prove anymore. We don't have to prove we're important. This is why we live in a culture that can't accept Sabbath; we do not believe that work is from God and for our neighbor. Instead we believe that work is from us and for us. It's something we pursue to become who we want to become. Our careers define us."

"This is what we're doing when we prove our busyness to ourselves and each other; we're trying to show that we matter, that the world wants us, that the world depends on us."

"If you don't choose to rest, then reality will make you rest—often in the form of sickness, injury, or emotional breakdown."

"Proper Sabbathing is much more about doing than not doing. It's about doing restful things."

"An ideal Sabbath looked like this: sleep in, worship, long lunch with friends, go home and rest, maybe nap, maybe make love, go out and explore some part of the city we hadn't been to yet or take a walk in a park, and bring a book that is pure pleasure reading."

"What all these things had in common was not that they involve "not doing" but rather that they involved doing worshipful or engaging activities. They were things that drew us closer to God and others. The rest I needed was not only more sleep, but it was also the rest that comes with unfolding in good friendships or sitting still in God's creation."

"To rephrase Rabbi Heschel's quote: someone whose work is parenting may Sabbath with email writing. Someone whose work is email writing may Sabbath with parenting."

"Trying to Sabbath brings almost everyone to the same realization: 'I can't get it all done'; Sabbath is supposed to make us feel like we can't get it all done because that is the way reality is."

"Sabbath helps me see how small I am. When I don't see that, I'm always prone to misunderstand the reality of who is dependent on who. The belief that we sustain the world and God doesn't is at the core of our unrest."

Look up the following scriptures to discover more on Sabbath

- Matthew 12:1, 12
- Mark 2:27
- Luke 4:16
- Hebrews 4:10-11

Discussion:

How do we use busyness as a 'status symbol'? What are some different 'forms' of busyness?

What would your ideal Sabbath look like? How would it involve worship? How would it involve rest?

[Book] – “We believe that work is from us and for us. It’s something we pursue to become who we want to become. Our careers define us.”

It might not be a career we look to for our identity. What other things might we look to to define us?

[Video] – “Sabbath reinforces the stubborn reality that we can’t actually finish it all.”

*Typically, we might associate the statement above with ‘work’ (our job).
Are there examples of other activities or elements of life that this would apply to as well?*

Read Genesis 2:1-3.

*God rested on the 7th day; what ‘day’ was this for man?
What is the significance of this order?*

PRACTICE:

*Try one Sabbath this week. It doesn’t have to be ideal;
Just pick a day, get some friends and try it together.*

To ponder:

Sabbath is a Gospel practice because it reminds us that the world doesn’t hang on what we can accomplish, but rather on what God has accomplished for us.

“THE COMMON RULE”

WEEK 10 – Epilogue – On Failure & Beauty

*****WATCH: “The Common Rule Epilogue” video (approx 6 min.)**

Video Location: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYx6oUex-ixn3FYR1o_PYZ9QQUPVb1Sf
Or search YouTube for “The Common Rule Small Group Video Series”

Video Take-Away’s:

Key Quotes from the Video:

“The reality is, in practicing these habits, you’ve been experiencing a lot of failure. For some people failure is a reason to not do anymore or not even start in the first place, because failure gets in the way of success.”

“Stumbling doesn’t mean you’re not headed to a beautiful goal.”

“When you look at your behavior – successes or failures – the world begins to dim. But when you look at the beauty of God, Who He is, what He’s made and done and is doing for us, then the whole world begins to brighten, including our successes and failures.”

“Is it legalistic to live according to habits like these? I would like to suggest that our hearts are always legalistic; we’re always yearning to find some way to justify our existence in the world by something we do. The reality is, that habits can actually help lift us out of that; they lift our gaze out of those and up towards the beauty of God.”

“When it’s your goal – to see the beauty of the Lord – you don’t care if you’re tripping along the way because you’re not looking down at your feet anymore; you’re looking up at Him. This is the essence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

“The Gospel is that because Jesus lived, died and rose again—your life is not characterized by what you’ve done, but Who He is.”

Digging Deeper...

(The following are excerpts from "The Common Rule" book)

ON FAILURE

"Failure is not the enemy of formation; it is the liturgy of formation. How we deal with failure says volumes about who we really believe we are. Who we really believe God is. When we trip on failure, do we fall into ourselves? Or do we fall into grace?"

"No habits can be pursued for the purpose of success or productivity or a new and better you. They must be done for the vision of beauty. If the goal is self-help, failure will destroy you. But if the goal is beauty, failure makes that goal shine all the more brightly."

ON TURNING DAYS INTO LIVES

"In response to the work of God, give your whole body. Your whole life. After all, didn't Jesus present his whole body—his whole life—as a living sacrifice for us? 'Imitate him.' This is the idea. Paul went on to say, 'Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed' (Romans 12:2). The common root is formation. If the question is 'How does a human being offer a whole life to God? How do we live coherently?' the answer is formation, a word that connotes process."

"What we so often overlook in our abstract hunt for beautiful lives is the striking plainness of the moments that make up the days that make up our lives. What we often overlook in our heroes are the one million tiny (but so carefully chosen) habits that got them there. By overlooking them, we overlook the way the most ordinary habits of limitation create the most extraordinary lives of meaning."

"The connection between the ordinary and the extraordinary is through very small habits."

"We will never build lives of love out of anything except ordinary days..."

"Any life is characterized much more by its failures than its successes...a great life comes not by the way you avoid failure, but by the way you handle failure."

"Consider kintsugi pottery: Kintsugi is the Japanese art of repairing a broken bowl by inlaying gold or other precious metals. The new bowl is stronger than the old one. The scars are the design. Your attention is drawn to the cracks and how they are mended. That is what you're supposed to see. The beauty is in the brokenness."

Look up the following scriptures for further encouragement

- Psalm 27:4
- Psalm 90:17
- Proverbs 24:16
- Romans 12:1-2

Discussion:

[Video] – “For some people failure is a reason to not do anymore or not even start in the first place, because failure gets in the way of success.”

How do you typically respond to personal failure?

[Video] – “Life is not about my success or failure. It’s not about what we have done—it is about what God has done; it’s about the beauty of the Lord and dwelling with Him.”

How would this truth, if truly grasped, change the way you go through life?

[Video] – “our hearts are always legalistic”

Give some examples of how our hearts are legalistic.

[Book] – “In response to the work of God, give your whole body. Your whole life. After all, didn’t Jesus present his whole body—his whole life—as a living sacrifice for us?”

What would it look like for you to ‘give your whole body, your whole life’ to God?

PRACTICE:

To ponder:

The kind of habits worth cultivating—little habits of love, not carried out for success, not carried out to prove who you are, but cultivated because of a longing to love God and neighbor. That is a more beautiful life, one worth the constraints, one worth the failures.”