

I want to quote the great American author, David Foster Wallace. If you know Wallace's work, you don't expect to hear it at church. I want to read a little bit from his now infamous [2005 commencement address at Kenyan](#) (Click on the link). He opens the address with a proverb.

You can see the importance of this particular proverb. What Wallace is doing with this commencement address is to get these newly formed graduates to just imagine that the most important realities about the world are often the ones we miss the most. Wallace stated, "The point of the fish story is merely that the most obvious, important realities are often the ones that are hardest to see and talk about."

So for all of us, we sense that we, too, are swimming in waters that we may or may not be conscious of. These waters for the two young fish were what was sustaining them, what was forming them, what was shaping them into who they are. And yet they were completely unaware of the water. We all exist in a world in which we are swimming in water. We may not even be aware of it or the way that these waters are shaping us. Some of the most important realities of ourselves, our own identity, are the very water we swim in, and we may not even be aware of it.

Later on, towards the end of the address, starting with "Because here's something else that's weird but true..." What Wallace is getting at is he's really tapping into what it means to be human. As humans, we worship things. Again, a secular author identifies this within us. There is something, although the secular-minded individual may not use the word worship, they still go to the altar of whatever it is. He says, when you then worship something that's finite, that will, at some point, let you down.

The author of Ecclesiastes would say eternity has been placed inside our hearts. And so we are created to experience and encounter the eternal divine God. When we worship things less than that, placing them into the role of God, they will, of course, let us down and start to distort our souls. What we find is in the modern world, the very water we're swimming in, is a world in which all of these things we seem to seek out and find meaning in ultimately let us down; they fail us.

What's the result? Just look around the world. We're exhausted. We're a tired people. We're more polarized than ever. We're filled with fear, anxiety, abuse, and oppression. And all of these different things are distortions because we have elevated things that were never meant to be at the same level as God. This is the water we swim in. It's the very air. It's the default setting.

I agree with Wallace. The insidious thing about these forms of worship is they happen unconsciously. To wake up is to be a worshipping thing. You will worship something. What is it that you will worship? In our

culture, we worship fame and influence, yet digital addiction is draining the life out of our relationships.

We worship sexuality yet increasingly feel empty, alone, and void of deep connection. We worship power yet live in a polarizing fear, abuse, and hostility towards others. We worship success and achievement, yet we live at a pace that's slowly eroding the very core of who we are. The water we swim in by just waking up is doing something to us because, and here's the truth that maybe Wallace misses, what we worship, we slowly become. What we worship, we will continually be shaped and formed by. We will be, to use church language, disciplined into its own understanding of the world. If then, we are tired, we're fearful, we're angry, we're polarized, I think it begs the question—is there another way? Is there another way to live? Where we don't have to become of the water around us.

Is there a way where we can become more aware of the very waters we swim in and the way they're shaping who we are at our core? Yes, of course, the answer is yes.

Mark 1 should be familiar verses if you've been around CPC. "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God" (Mark 1:14). Remember, the good news is the word gospel. He's proclaiming the gospel of God. So what we see next is Jesus' summary of the gospel. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (v. 15). Everything Jesus was on about was baked in this one verse, which we could all get to lunch a lot quicker if I just preached in one sentence too.

The Kingdom of God has come; repent, which again, let's do a little work on that word. It is to rethink, reorient, and reimagine everything about the way the world works because something else has come. He says to repent and rethink everything in light of the fact that the Kingdom of God has arrived.

We don't give Mark enough credit. The biblical authors were brilliant. They were very, very intelligent. And so, when we now transition to verse 16, Mark is exemplifying or illustrating exactly what it means to repent and believe the good news. [Mark 1:16-18](#)

Now think about it; they, as fishermen, would've been in their family line of business, which means at this point in their story, they were on their path for the rest of their lives. They were just going about the family business. We'll learn in a second here, that the sons of Zebedee had hired workers, which means they were not necessarily wealthy, but they were wealthy enough to have hired co-workers in their labor. So they had a decent kind of life. Probably a sort of what we would equate to a middle-class life, which in the first century, the drastic stratosphere

between the wealthy and the poor was so vast that it would've been rare to have someone living in the middle-class.

Yet in this moment of Jesus coming along and saying follow me, in an instant, they dropped their nets and followed him. They walked away from essentially the rest of their life. [Mark 1:19-20](#) Jesus called them, and they left their father in the boat with the hired men and followed him. Same thing. Jesus proclaims the Kingdom of God and immediately begins to call people, and they're walking away from the very life they knew to follow him. Let's look at [Mark 2:13-14](#).

There's our word—follow. What's interesting is Levi is different than the others. Levi appears to be a tax collector. Now the tax collectors work for the Roman Empire. So there is the fishermen on this spectrum of life, and the tax collector on this other side of life. And yet both of them, when they hear Jesus' call, leave those lives to follow in a different direction. They walk away from their life to follow Jesus.

Now we have to ask the question. At this point in the story, Jesus isn't the Jesus that you and I know. Jesus is really just a nobody prophet from the small town called Nazareth. And yet something about him is provoking people to leave everything they know to follow him. Why are they dropping their net? Well, I think it has to do something with who Jesus is in particular, even though he's not quite at the status that we know him to be yet. There's something about this invitation that we often miss.

Notice a couple of things before we move on. Notice that the invitation of Jesus is not about dying and going to heaven someday. It's not even, at this point, about the forgiveness of sin. It's just, "Come, follow me." It's not about getting your theology in line and having that all properly set up, so you pass some exam. No, it is the call of Jesus to follow. Now, those things come along with it. Dying and heaven and all of that comes along with it. The forgiveness of sins, of course, comes along with it. The call of Jesus comes along with it. But that's not the initial call. It is not less than those things. It's actually more. What Jesus does here is invite them to follow him, to leave "the water they swam in," the normal way of life, and then step into a different way. [Mark 8:34-37](#)

Jesus, in Mark 8, is detailing this contrast between the crowd and the disciples. And remember, Mark has been playing on this. We saw this during the summer where he uses these two categories of people as a literary device to invite you all, as the reader, into the text. And he says, "Are you a part of the crowd, or are you a part of these disciples?" Mark showed Jesus bringing together the crowd who are with Jesus from a distance (they're open to hearing from him, but they haven't followed the way the disciples have) and the disciples. Jesus says, "*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me*" ([Matthew 16:24](#)).

When we say "follow him," it is verbiage we use in the church a lot, but we've lost its understanding. Because if we're honest, often we rip it out of its first-century context, and we miss what's actually happening. For the disciples to follow Jesus, to respond to the invitation to discipleship is for them to quite literally follow Jesus. They left their worlds, and they

began to follow literally in the footsteps of Jesus. According to Jesus, this is what it means to be a disciple. This is the invitation of Jesus.

The invitation is not to just believe, but rather it marries that idea of belief and action. That to believe is to step into the very path of discipleship. That's the invitation of Jesus—come and follow me.

See, what we have to notice is how literal the disciples take this invitation. The call was to follow Jesus. It was to, Jesus says in Mark 8, deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him. So there are a couple of things going on with that idea. To deny yourself is to decenter you as the core cornerstone of your life. And then Jesus, to the disciples, marries that idea of denying themselves with this idea of taking up their cross. Now the cross in the first-century world that Jesus is speaking of was a brutal device. It was a device constituted by the Romans.

They put it into effect for anyone that would defect from the Roman Empire or would speak out against the Empire's way of living. They would be put on a cross and killed so that everyone who was looking would know or think that they had a counter allegiance to the way of Rome. And if you cross Rome, this is what happens.

So Jesus then comes into the scene where these first listeners would have seen people crucified. They come, and Jesus says, "Listen, if you want to follow me, you deny yourself. You take up your cross." This is Jesus's way of saying you lay aside every other allegiance to come and follow me.

What good is it if you gain everything but lose your soul? What good is it if you achieve all those things you're chasing after, and yet you're left with a broken soul? Jesus says, "What good is it?" What good is it if you gain all the power in the world, yet you forfeit your soul? What good is it if you gain all the fame and the success, yet you lose your soul? What good is it if you arrive at that status in your career, and yet you are eroded at your core because you've lost who you are? What good is it if you follow a life that leaves you feeling exhausted, tired, fearful, and angry, and yet you've lost your soul? What good is it?

Jesus is making this profound invitation where he's saying, "There is a different way." In church, we understand this at a gut level. We all feel the weight of the modern world where it's go achieve, earn, accumulate, accomplish—all of these sorts of things. We just swim in these waters thinking they're the way life is. And Jesus says, "What if there's a different way." He says, "What if you chase after those things and you gain them, yet you've lost your soul? Jesus, when he was walking around the first century, invited these disciples in. I think the reason they dropped their nets, the reason Levi walked away from a career that would've done him just fine, is because they had a core level of understanding that they had something to lose—their soul had been taken from them. And Jesus is saying, "Come follow me."

You know, one of the categories we don't often think of Jesus in is that of a rabbi. If you were in the first century and you wandered into a synagogue, you would've heard Jesus' teaching, and you would've placed Jesus in the category of a rabbi. A rabbi really is the Hebrew word teacher. The role of a rabbi would be to carry, what they would call, a

yolk. A set of teachings about how they understood the Bible of their day, which would be the Torah and the prophets and those of old.

They would go around and teach their yolk to people. They would have people that we would know as disciples. The disciples would follow behind these rabbis to learn their teachings, to take on their very way of life. Jesus didn't invent the disciple. It actually dates way back to ancient Greece, where you have Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, all disciples of one another's teachings as they were passing on their own philosophy. This concept of discipleship is nothing new when we arrive at Jesus.

Now Jesus goes about it quite differently because, essentially, discipleship was the top level, the culmination of the Jewish education. And what you would do is everyone would start at a grade level, kind of like elementary school, and they would learn the Torah. They would memorize, most likely, the first five books of the Bible, which takes months to read. So that's pretty good, but they'd start there, and then many would fall away, but the best of the best would move on to a second stage where they would then memorize the whole Old Testament.

Most everyone was done at that point, and they would go back to their family business, being a fisherman. But the best of the best of the best, like the top, the upper echelon, the one percent, the Ivy League school, would go on and seek out a rabbi. They would go to a rabbi and say, "I want to disciple under you." And they would begin rigorous testing.

At some point, the rabbi would either dismiss them because they didn't make the cut or he would tell them that they could come and follow. But Jesus flips it around. He actually, from what we can tell, goes around inviting anyone and everyone. He seeks out disciples, and he says, if you're just willing to come and leave your allegiance as in taking up your cross, you can come follow me. And he invites everyone to follow.

Now let's do a little work on this word, disciple. Because it's a word that we're familiar with, but we often miss. The word in Greek is *mathitís*. What it means at its core is learner, student, follower, or, my personal favorite—apprentice. To be a disciple is not just to sit in a lecture hall. That's what we've seen in these first few passages. It's not following in the sense that we have a colloquial understanding of it. Like, I follow you on social media, and it's awesome. It's much different than that. It's a literal following.

I really do think the best English equivalent that captures the idea of a disciple is the word apprentice. Even that word or idea is a little unfamiliar to us in the Bay Area, but to be an apprentice is much more than just a student. When you apprentice under someone, you are acquiring information, but even more so, you're connecting the information to a way of life in a way of living. Think about an electrician. When you're an apprentice to an electrician, the goal is not just to learn a bunch of stuff about wires. The goal is to wire a house. It's to actually live out that calling. That's what an apprentice does. An apprentice follows in the steps of their master teacher, and they begin to understand that teacher, not only their set of teachings but their way of life. They begin to absorb it.

This is why you're more like your parents than you'd like to admit. Because, in some sense, we didn't necessarily say, "I want to come and follow my parents." We were just given them. But you are, on some level, an apprentice of your parents. You absorbed their way of life to where it begins to come out of you. You absorbed their teaching; you speak like them. You talk like them. You probably have similar habits as them because that's how learning works. There is the old adage that far more is caught than taught.

Jesus is saying, "Come follow me, become my apprentice." But what are we an apprentice of? We are apprentices to the Kingdom of God. That's what Jesus is on about. He says, "Repent and believe the Kingdom of Heaven is here." And then he immediately invites disciples to follow him because if the Kingdom of Heaven is here, that reorients the whole of who we are. He's saying you have to unlearn the very water you're swimming in, so you can swim in these waters.

Because we have been discipled, not to deny ourselves and take up our cross but rather, to live into a particular vision of the "good life." And that vision of the good life has been habituated into us, to where we naturally, unconsciously, as Wallace picked up on, live into that vision of the good life. It shapes our actions, habits, daily rhythms, community, and the whole of who we are. And if we are going to unroot those things that lead to fear, anxiety, polarization, stress, and anger and all those things, we will need a rabbi to teach us a different way to live. We will need to immerse ourselves with our rabbi so that we can then understand what it is to go about that.

Now every apprentice in any genre has two goals. The first and fundamental goal is the one we've seen very clearly in the text. It is to be present to your rabbi. I mean, fundamentally, if you are going to follow a sort of master teacher, you just have to be with them. If you're going to apprentice under a plumber, under an electrician, or whatever it is, you're going to have to spend a lot of time with them. That's what the disciples did. Their first goal was to be present with their rabbi. Because it's in that presence that we begin to absorb their teachings, their way of life, their habits, their routines, everything about them because that will begin to shape us.

You need a vision of what it's like to do those things. A silly example is if I want to be a better golfer, which I do, I'm going to want to spend time with people who know what they're doing. If it's just me and a YouTube video, I stand maybe a little chance, but not much. I'm going to need to spend time with someone because it's one thing to know everything you can about golf. It's a whole other thing to book a tee time, stand up on the first tee box, and try, then spend four hours figuring out the game. And so what Jesus is saying is to come and follow him, learn what it means to live into the reality of the Kingdom of God. Immerse yourselves, be present with him. So the first goal of any apprentice is to be present to their rabbi.

The second goal is to then participate in the work they're doing. Again, it is one thing to learn about a particular craft or trade, but it's a whole other thing to do it. The goal of an electrician's apprentice is so that one

day they can wire a house without their rabbi being right next to them. So they can then go about that work.

The same was true of the disciples in Mark 3, which we didn't go into. He called more disciples. He said the goal was for them to be with him and that to go on preaching the good news and cast out demons. That's exactly the work that Jesus had been doing earlier in Mark. The goal is to be present with your rabbi and then participate in the work they are doing.

Or, as we've been saying around CPC for three or four years now, the goal is to be a transformed person, transforming the Peninsula because that's what Jesus is on about. The work that he's doing is the Kingdom of God. Now our role will look much different. We're not the savior; we're not the Messiah. Let's be clear on that. But we can learn to love our enemies. We can learn to love our neighbors as ourselves. We can learn that it can be better to give than to receive.

We can take on a new way of life that actually does lead us into a different type of water where we no longer are pursuing things that leave us empty, broken, and exhausted, but rather lead us to what Paul in Galatians would say as the fruit of the Spirit, which is a life marked by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. Is there something that your heart is aching for in that? Jesus says come follow me. Disciple under me; be present to me. So that one day, as you grow and develop, you can begin to participate with God in the very work that he's doing.

We believe, at CPC, that the future of the vision that we've been in for a little while now is to organize our church life around these two goals. We really believe that we can, as apprentices of Jesus, learn what it means to follow him in a way in which we can be transformed and then do the transformative work around us. We are moving forward in the next four years, reorganizing what we do around these two things. [Click to watch the video](#) or go to cpc.org/rule.

You know, one of the things we love about where God is leading us is the recognition of the word practice. Because it looks different for us than it did for those in the first century. We can't just necessarily drop our nets and walk behind Jesus. We approach presence with Jesus in a much different way.

In a couple of weeks, we're going to talk more about how to do that. We do that through the cultivation of habits and rhythms, where we open our lives up to the work of the Holy Spirit. But it takes practice. The disciples who walked with Jesus, who spent every waking moment with Jesus for three years, were a mess and couldn't figure it out. We'd be foolish to think we are going to figure it out in the next four years. It takes practice. It takes work. It's hard, and it's difficult, and it's challenging, but Jesus says, "Come follow me." He doesn't say, "Come have it figured out."

So as that video noted, the elders launched this vision called the beyond the horizon vision in 2018. It starts with, "In the next ten years, CPC will engage in spiritual formation at a magnitude that will propel us into thoughtful and gracious cultural engagement on the San Francisco

Peninsula to ignite both personal and societal transformation. And then out of that, we launched the four pillars: worship, spiritual formation, equipping, and cultural engagement.

We said that these are the ways in which we are going to go about doing the call to engage in formation at that magnitude. And then, what's been beautiful, is as we rolled this out and talked about it, what's emerged is this helpful language of being a transformed people, which is really where worship and spiritual formation land, transforming the Peninsula. And so those two have become shorthand for how we believe God is calling us in this next phase of ministry.

But I'd suggest that when the pandemic hit, it caused us to pause and rethink what we were doing. And I'd suggest that as we've assessed this, [everything in white there](#) (click on the link), those white blocks have really been the WHAT. Like, what does it mean to engage in formation? Well, it means we worship, and we are formed, and we equip one another, and we engage culture. But we haven't really dug into the How. Our question now is, how do we engage in spiritual formation at that magnitude? I believe it's through practicing presence and participation. It's about becoming the people of God through presence and participation with Jesus. So out of that, we see these two goals, that we've talked a lot about. In the video, we talked about four practices that help enable us to engage in presence and participation, and this phrase, called a Rule of Life, was also mentioned.

Now notice that it isn't rules. It's not about rules. It's not about legalism. This idea of a rule of life is actually deeply embedded in church history. It's from the Latin word, *regula*, which means line or path. The best example we can give is a rule of life to the follower of Jesus is what a trellis is to a vine. It's a structure that just helps the vine get picked up off the ground and allows the fruit to flourish. The goal is not the trellis. The goal is for the vine to flourish. In the same way, the goal is not necessarily our rule of life, but it's about taking on time-tested practices that the church has been doing for thousands of years, by the way, in order to open our lives up to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Well, those four practices, which will become our shared rule of life, attentiveness, renewing the mind, hospitality, and vocation, which I think as you walked in, [you got this card](#) (click on the link) that details it a little bit. I want to go over each one of these because what we plan on doing in mid-October is to launch our first practice: attentiveness, where we are going to spend six months cultivating habits that help us to be present to Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Attentiveness: So the first practice is that of attentiveness, and we practice attentiveness to God in contrast to a world of distraction and hurry. We do so by cultivating habits of silence and solitude and Sabbath. This is kind of the fundamental beginning point because I would suggest that I, and maybe you as well, are simply too busy to follow Jesus. So habits of silence and solitude and Sabbath force us to slow down and become aware of who we are before God. If we are to be attentive to our rabbi and be present to our rabbi, we are going to have to become aware of him and slow down. So we practice attentiveness in contrast to a world of distraction and hurry.

Renewing the Mind: The second practice that we'll launch six months later is renewing the mind in contrast to a world of noise, competing narratives, and addictions. And we do so by cultivating habits of fasting and scripture. It's in these habits that we begin to name the water around us that we're swimming in. We then bring the habit of scripture into our practices so that our minds can be transformed. As Paul from Romans 12 states, we are transformed by the renewing of our minds where we begin, not just to think, but to live in a way that recognizes the water we swim in. And recognize how the Kingdom of God will challenge us to live differently than that.

Hospitality: The third practice now moves into us participating in the very work of God. And the first is this: we practice hospitality in contrast to a world of hostility, division, and isolation. Now think far more than Martha Stewart here. This isn't about a beautiful centerpiece. The early church flipped the Roman world upside down by inviting people over for dinner and opening up their houses.

What would it look like for us to practice a similar hospitality? We're in a world of division and hostility. We just meet people where they are. We welcome them to our tables, and then we just graciously live and tell them about Jesus because we have been transformed by him. It's not about picketing or sandwich board signs or any of that. It's about saying that there's a different way. So what would it look like to practice hospitality in a world of hostility?

Vocation: And then lastly, we practice vocation and contribution, in contrast to a world of compulsive consumption. We live in a world that believes or operates out of a framework that just says, do, do, do and produce, produce, produce so that you can consume, consume, and consume. What would it look like for us to practice vocation, where we recognize the way in which God has strategically placed us, wired us, gave us the gifts of whatever your calling is—teaching preschool, coding software, designer, banker, lawyer? Whatever those roles are, what if God placed you in those capacities to contribute to the flourishing of the world to bring about shalom? What if that is the ministry God's given you? What if where you spend the most amount of your time was a part of a broader plan that's bringing about shalom to the Bay Area?

So we practice that it is not by consumption but contribution, recognizing we're contributing to God's goods world. We live open-handed with our things, talents, and time because we recognize it's not about us. It's not about what we can gain. It's about that it's better to give than to receive.

These four things, and they may morph and change over time, are what we believe we are called to organize the life of our church around. And I'm so excited about where God's leading us.

I want to end with this text in Matthew 11 because when we see these four practices, we see this massive calling that Jesus is inviting us into.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

And if you're like me, this may feel like a lot. But let's read what Jesus taught in [Matthew 11:28-30](#).

Remember, Jesus is a rabbi. This idea of a yolk is a teaching. It's his set of teachings for understanding how the world operates. He says, "Come to me all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." We, as modern Bay Area residents, read this and think that he's sending us on an all-expenses-paid vacation because we need to disconnect. If we are to rest, we need to stop and do nothing.

But Jesus says, "Come all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." And how is he going to give you rest? "Take my yolk upon you and learn from me." That word learn is from the exact same root as the word disciple, *mathitis*. He says, "Come disciple under me, and I will give you rest."

These things are not a burden, but rather he's saying, "Come to me, be transformed from the inside out. So that life in the Kingdom of God begins to just fall out of you." Do you want to learn how to love your enemy? You can't do it on the spot. You can't wait until your enemy hates you and think you're just going to muster enough willpower and then love your enemy.

If you want to learn to love your enemy. Jesus is going to have to do a deep work in you. And then it's going to transform you. You're might have an anger problem so that when your enemy does something, or your co-worker says this or that, you flare up. Jesus says, "Let's deal with that."

When we do that internal transformation, when the Holy Spirit renews you from the inside out, you become the kind of person for whom it's easier to love your enemy than to hate them. What Jesus is after is rest for your soul. Jesus wants to heal us from the inside out because we're caught up, we're swimming in waters that are leading us astray. Jesus says, "Let me take that burden from you."

Jesus says that his yolk, his teachings, are easy. In the sense that it's going to take some work. It'll take some time, but you can become the kind of person for whom following Jesus brings rest to your soul. Because his yolk, his teaching, all these things that we're talking about, is easy. His burden is light. He's not after draining you. He's after liberating you. He's after releasing you to live the kind of life, to swim in the very waters you were created for. That's what God's after.

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