

# **Formation: The Art & Science of How We Change**

**Volume VI: Resistance**



**PRACTICE GUIDE**

At the beginning of each year, our church family spends time in a series we've called Formation: The Art & Science of How We Change. Many of us want to change and mature as followers of Jesus, but simply don't know how to kickstart the process. We are plagued by all these grand visions of the type of people we could be—the type of people we want to be—we just don't know how to get there.

That's where a little something called practice comes in. Practice helps us bridge the gap between what we want to be, and what we are. Between what we know and who we are. Practice is what the Holy Spirit uses to make us into who we were supposed to be all along. Jesus said it well:

*Whoever hears these words of mine and puts them into practice will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.*

*– Matthew 7:24*

Us becoming who we want to be happens largely through what we “put into practice.” In the words of James K.A. Smith, “the things you do, do things to you.”

This year, we are talking about how resisting the world, the flesh, and the devil helps us in our desire to grow and mature as followers of Jesus. This booklet is intended to help you practice just that. And our prayer is that the Spirit uses it to accomplish what only he can accomplish.

# Resisting the World: The Practice of Abstinence

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*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

*—Romans 12:2*

The Scriptures often use “the world” to describe the value system of our surrounding society; the attitudes and behaviors that our culture tends to celebrate, pursue, and reward. The pull towards the world comes in many forms—some of them detectable by us, and some of them that fly under our radar. From excessive partying to career success to radical individualism, the world and its allure is ever-present. So how do we practically resist that allure?

Our answer? Abstinence. Not to be confused with sexual abstinence, the spiritual practice of abstinence is simply choosing to abstain from something in your life, for predetermined length of time. This practice is often employed by many church traditions during the season known as Lent. During that season, some people will choose to “abstain” from certain food or drink, or things like television or social media, for the purpose of focusing their attention on God himself.

During this series, we would like to advocate for a particular type of abstinence as a way of resisting the spiritual power of the world and its values. For most people, the draw towards “the world” comes in the form of the most regular exposure we have to it. Outside of daily interactions with friends, coworkers, and classmates that don’t know Jesus (which we can’t reasonably “abstain” from), the most regular exposure most of us have to the “world” is through various forms of media. Media like:

- Cable TV
- Streaming services (Netflix, Hulu, Disney+, etc.)
- Movies (in-home, or in theaters)
- Social media (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Twitter/X, Facebook, etc.)
- Music
- Audiobooks, podcasts, etc.

For many of us, one or more of these avenues provide the most consistent exposure to and temptation towards the world. Consciously or subconsciously, they incline us to value things the world values, chase things the world chases, and give our time and energy to things the world considers important. **So as a way to resist the allure of the world, we are encouraging you to pick one or more of those things to abstain from.**

# The Practice:

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*For no less than thirty days, pick one or more forms of media to abstain from.*

Once you determine what item(s) you plan to abstain from: figure out the best way to block or inhibit your access to it, alert your family and/or LifeGroup members that you are abstaining from it, and ask them to hold you accountable for the length of time you've determined.

Spend time praying that God would use that abstinence to help you resist the pull towards the world and its values, and grow an affection in you for the things of God.

# Resisting the Flesh: The Practice of Fasting

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*And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

*– Galatians 5:24*

The Scriptures often use the term “flesh” to describe our base instincts; the state of relying primarily on our own desires, capabilities, or effort—rather than on God’s power and wisdom. Our flesh describes our selfish wants and tendencies, apart from God’s intervention or influence. Our flesh can present itself in a wide variety of ways, from sinful sexual desire to envy to greed to argumentativeness and conflict, to any number of other things. *Galatians 5:19-21* provides a good sampling of things that are “fruit” of living by the flesh:

*The acts of the **flesh** are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

So what practice can help us resist the power of our flesh? One answer is that of fasting: abstaining from food for a predetermined length of time. By periodically choosing

to deny yourself an indulgence as basic as food, you are training yourself to say “no” to your flesh (and more significantly, that you can say “no” to your flesh). For more information on how this works, listen to [week 2](#) of our [Formation V: Fasting](#) series from January 2023. But in short, fasting helps us learn the ability to more regularly say “no” to our flesh.

# The Practice:

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*For no less than thirty days, pick one day each week to fast from food and non-water beverages for between twelve and twenty-four hours.*

As you fast, spend time praying that God would expand your ability to say “no” to your flesh to other areas of your life as a result.

*(Note: Fasting is likely an unfamiliar practice for many modern Christians. So if you plan to participate in this practice, we would strongly recommend downloading and reading our [Fasting FAQs document here.](#))*



# Resisting the Devil: The Practice of Lie & Truth Journaling

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*Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

*– James 4:7*

In the Scriptures, the devil is presented as a liar and accuser. He is the one who opposes God and his people, in large part through deceptive ideas and beliefs. Whenever and wherever we are prone to believe lies about ourselves or our world, there's a good chance Satan had something to do with it (or bare minimum, is pleased by it). Satan is most interested in getting us to believe things that aren't true about ourselves, about God, and about our world. So how do we resist the power of these lies?

One way is through something we've called lie & truth journaling. The way it works is fairly simple. On a sheet of paper or in a journal, make two side-by-side columns. In the left column, spend time writing any "lies" you are inclined to believe about yourself, about God, or about your world.

Like this:

<b>LIES I BELIEVE ABOUT MYSELF</b>	
I am alone.	
Life would be better if I had more money.	
God must be out to get me.	
If something feels right to me, it probably is right.	
My sin puts me beyond the reach of God's love.	

Then, in the right column, spend time directly combatting those lies with truths from the bible. They can be general truths, but it helps if they use specific language from specific verses in the bible. Like this:

LIES I BELIEVE ABOUT MYSELF	TRUTHS FROM THE BIBLE TO BELIEVE
I am alone.	<i>Those who know your name trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you. -Psalm 9:10</i>
Life would be better if I had more money.	<i>...life does not consist in an abundance of possessions. -Luke 12:15</i>
God must be out to get me.	<i>And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. -Romans 8:28</i>
If something feels right to me, it probably is right.	<i>There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death. -Proverbs 14:12</i>
My sin puts me beyond the reach of God's love.	<i>For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. -Romans 8:38</i>

*For every lie you are prone to believe, combat it with a corresponding truth.*

# The Practice:

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*For no less than fourteen days, spend a few minutes each day lie & truth journaling.*

If you struggle to think of corresponding truths, ask a LifeGroup member or another follower of Jesus to help you. Consider even spending time with your LifeGroup working through specific lies you are prone to believe, having people proclaim corresponding truths, and praying over each other for help believing the truths over the lies.

Additionally, you may consider memorizing the verses that correspond to the lies you most frequently are prone to believe, as a way to “wage war” against the lies.



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