**Thirty-Five – Week 1**

**Introduction – Jim Burgen**

**September 5, 2021**

**Group Creed**

We come together as a Group with the goal of Spiritual Formation--encouraging one another to become the same kind of person that Jesus is, so that we can live out every part of our lives inside of His Kingdom.

**// Bible References**

Mark 12:29-31; Proverbs 4:23; James 2:17-18

**// Message Summary**

This week Jim kicks off new and transformational series called 35 and challenges us to develop a rhythm of daily practice for our spiritual growth. Growth in any area of life takes time. And the things we engage in repeatedly over time will form us, as we learned last week from Ben’s message. If the goal is muscle formation you might expect a training program to include time at the gym lifting weights, some cardio, and a diet rich in nutrients for muscle growth. Likewise Jim introduced the idea that training applied to the four dimensions of our lives: heart, soul, mind, and strength produces spiritual growth and formation of the person. Practiced over time we not only survive but thrive in life – growing in God and in community with others.

**// Biblical & Historical Context**

The earliest histories of the church tell of people gathering in small groups to follow the way of Jesus. The bible tells us that they ate together, prayed and provided for one another materially and spiritually (Acts 2:42,44-45). We can imagine that over time their days took on a regular rhythm and order. A new member or a child born into the group would naturally be taught or trained, learning how to contribute to the work that provided for and sustained the community. Life for community members was governed by this daily order of worship, study, work, and rest and punctuated by certain celebrations. Some communities would separate from the larger society and become known by the rules or orders they followed, or by the name of prominent leaders. These became the Benedictines, the Cistercians, the Franciscans and other holy ‘orders’ or groups of people choosing a monastic way of life, separate from the rest of society.

But we don’t have to live in a monastery or convent to train ourselves and our families to follow Jesus. What is needed is a simple structure or rule that makes time for worship, study, work, rest and celebration to become regularly exercised in our lives. Don’t get hung up on a rigid definition for the word rule. The original meaning was a thin strip of wood stuck in the ground along the row of grape vines in order to train the new vine to grow upward, like a trellis providing guidance and support during the growth of the immature plant.

Our 21st century society offers an infinite number of things we could chase after. To choose a life centered on Jesus and His command to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and love our neighbor as ourselves we must necessarily eliminate other things from our lives. God’s plan for abundant life involves our surrender to His rule in every part of our lives physical, mental, emotional and spiritual as we grow up to maturity in Him.

**// Community Questions**

1. As new groups are forming and new people may join, take a minute to review the “rules” your group follows: starting and ending on time, respectful attention, building trust and confidentiality, allowing everyone a chance to listen and share, and not giving advice unless requested.
2. It’s that time of year! Seasons are changing, school is starting back up and for many that means getting back to (or starting new) routines for ourselves and our families. Talk about some daily routine you practice individually or with your family?

**// Discussion Questions**

1. What are some habits or routines you are not now consciously aware of, such as making coffee in the morning, the route you take driving to work, getting children ready for school?
2. Read Mark 12:29-31. What part of Jesus’ command stands out to you?
3. What do you think about your life in terms of the four quadrants: heart, soul, mind, and strength *or* emotional, spiritual, mental and physical? Are they equal or do you tend to focus more on one area or another?
4. Jim talked about these not as independent silos but as inter-connected in our health and wellbeing. How might one area affect the other areas? Share some examples:
   1. Have you experienced a time when you were so physically tired that you found it difficult to think clearly?
   2. Have overwhelming emotions such as grief over a significant loss ever affected your physical schedule for eating or sleeping.
5. Do you find it easier to establish regular habits for one area or another? Why might habits for spiritual formation seem more elusive?
6. Proverbs 4:23 talks about guarding the heart? How do spiritual disciplines protect, guide or guard our hearts?

**// Challenge**

Following Jesus in His way for a better life may mean training ourselves to re-order our lives according to a plan for practicing spiritual habits. Over the next 7 weeks take up the 35 day challenge as a group. Include time in your group next week to discuss how you have practiced each of the disciplines Jim and Ben will teach about. Help each other with accountability and encouragement.

Pray during the week, simply asking God to strengthen you for this challenge.