

AFTER COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAM

Session 3 – Spiritual Journey

How do we pursue holistic, lifelong discipleship after college?

Though this session focuses on discipleship, spiritual disciplines and spiritual formation, consider having students read Chapter 3 of After College on adversity in preparation for the session. We live out our faith journeys through life's adversity and this chapter can serve as a helpful backdrop to the entire conversation of this session.

Objectives:

- At the end of the session, students will be able to describe accurate expectations for their spiritual journey in their next step.
- At the end of the session, students will be able to identify and practice spiritual disciplines and habits that will help them grow.
- At the end of the session, students will be able to develop flexibility and resilience in their faith and deepen their trust in God.

Lesson Outline

(Total Length: 90 minutes)

TIMING	CONTENT	MATERIALS NEEDED
10 minutes	Walk in Questions	Snacks/Food, Nametags, PPT, Projector/Screen
15 minutes	"Waze" to Follow Jesus	PPT
5 minutes	Alumni Testimony	PPT, Alumni Testimony
10 minutes	Encouragement from Abraham's Story	PPT, Bible Project Video
15 minutes	Spiritual Disciplines & The Art of Habit	PPT
15 minutes	Crafting & Adopting A Rule of Life	PPT, Rule of Life Handout
10 minutes	Discipleship & Finding a Mentor	PPT
5 minutes	Individual Reflection	PPT, Ambient music, Notebooks
5 minutes	Closing Comments & Announcements	

Context For Facilitators:

The spiritual disciplines that students have developed during this season to cultivate faith are the same ones they can take with them into their next step. While the practices don't necessarily change, context does. The sheer number of opportunities to grow spiritually will be different. Especially during the "neutral zone" time of leaving their current context and trying to establish a new community. During the transition, doubts may arise as former students wrestle with questions like, "Is my faith my own? Do I really believe? Where is God in the transition?" We should encourage students that these questions are normal. It's important for students to evaluate how much of their faith has been shaped by social momentum; however, it's equally important to help students see that InterVarsity isn't just some social club that keeps them on track spiritually during college -- we grow in our faith *with* others and *because* of others.

If former students want to remain on a steady spiritual course after they depart, they will need to own their faith, find like-minded co-laborers, and seek spiritual discipleship. Steven Garber, who spent years researching what happens *during* the college years that keeps student faithful beyond them, identified these three things: conviction (students developed a worldview that makes sense of their deepest pain and greatest joy), character (students met someone who incarnated that worldview and invited them to "come and see" how they live), and community (students found likeminded sojourners with whom they could test out their worldview and make it their own). Hopefully, our students have developed a Christian worldview, gleaned from mentors, and experienced rich community during their time in InterVarsity. These form the bedrock for faithfulness beyond community college and continue to ground us, as disciples, going forward.

Faithfulness cannot be pursued alone nor can we disconnect it from our ordinary lives. One of the biggest challenges for former students (for all of us!) is learning to pursue faithfulness in the mundane. Often, students are surprised by how hard it is to follow Jesus in the everyday moments of eating re-heated spaghetti, folding laundry, or checking email. They are eager to change the world, but struggle to get up with their alarm, keep the bathroom clean for their housemates, or do the dishes. As we discuss spiritual disciplines, it can be just as important to look at the habits (healthy and unhealthy ones) that shape us. Often, we're completely unaware of how much we – and those around us – are formed by our everyday habits. One of the best ways to prepare students for spiritual formation during their next step is to help them take an honest look at their current formation: the disciplines, habits, and “cultural liturgies” that shape their lives.

If students want to pursue faithfulness, it will require intentionality. We can help our students by closing the gap between what they might expect and what might actually happen. We can encourage them to persevere, trusting that God has new and good things in store. We can cast vision and help students make a plan for life-wide, lifelong faithfulness – a journey of following Jesus in all of the ordinary ways he has prepared in advance for us!

Section 1: Mapping Our Spiritual Past, Anticipating Our Spiritual Future

Walk in Questions (10 Minutes)

As students walk in, invite them to enjoy the food spread and engage each other with the prompts below. Place questions on a large screen or as “table prompts”.

1. When is the last time you felt spiritually alive? Describe.
2. Who or what has been helpful to your spiritual growth? How?
3. Talk about a time when you’ve felt spiritually dry or stalled in your faith journey? Describe.
4. Who or what has been unhelpful or unhealthy to your spiritual growth? How?

Encourage students to find someone they don’t know and share with that person, or have students split into small groups of 3 or 4, making sure students who know each other include those who are new.

“Waze” To Follow Jesus (15 Minutes)

Have you ever heard of Waze? It’s a community-based “real-time” navigation tool that helps drivers anticipate roadblocks or high-traffic areas and choose alternative routes. Waze allows users to see what’s coming so they can plan to take a better route.

Let’s pretend that you have already “travelled down the road” of their first year after community college, and it’s your job to inform others of the potential roadblocks and barriers to healthy spiritual life after they transition. In pairs, brainstorm some of these “warning” situations as well as positive pathways for spiritual growth after community college using the following questions. *Display questions on PPT.*

- What situations might result in you or your peers giving up on walking with God? Describe. What factors might contribute to indifference or drifting from faith?
- What situations might tempt you or your peers to coast, “phone-it-in,” or just get by? Describe.
- What alternative route would you suggest? What factors, attitudes, or actions might help you or your peers overcome difficult situations or get on a different “road” forward?
- What situations have helped your friends that have transitioned to life after community college continue walking with God? Caused your friends to stop walking with God?

Some of you can think of stories of friends and their faith stories after community college. We can learn a lot from those who have gone before us – both pitfalls to avoid as well as positive pathways to consider. Let’s examine a couple more stories that we can learn from.

Section 2: Learning From The Lives Of Others

Alumni Testimony (5 Minutes)

Invite a recent alumnus to come back to campus to share their transition story. Have the former student share for 3-5 minutes (something they prepare in advance), and/or ask them about their spiritual journey after community college. *This could be a live interview or a recorded zoom call that you playback during the session.* Here are some potential questions you could ask:

- What habits/spiritual disciplines have been important to you after community college?
- Have those spiritual disciplines changed over time?
- Have you found a mentor/someone to disciple you? What was that process like? How has it helped?
- How would you describe your relationship with God?

- If you could share one tip about spiritual journey after community college what would it be?

Encouragement From Abraham's Story (10 Minutes)

We learned from session 1 that God called Abraham “to go” – to leave everything that was familiar in order to follow God to the place He would show him (Hebrews 11:8). God’s command comes with a promise and provision, but it doesn’t mean it was easy street for Abraham.

Let’s look at Genesis 12-24. In these thirteen chapters decades are recorded of God’s relationship with Abraham. [Watch The Bible Project Video on Genesis 12-50 \(0:00-4:20\)](#). There are a number of twists and turns of Abraham’s journey – moments of detour, doubt, and confusion.

Walking with God post-college is, as Eugene Peterson writes, “*A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*.” Walking with God can feel like a long journey with little direction at times. From these chapters, we see that Abraham has to exercise faith because he doesn’t receive moment-by-moment direction from God; God only speaks directly to him a handful of times over 35+ years. But when He speaks, He continually reminds Abraham of His character (of who God is), and Abraham’s call (walk with me): “I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless” (Genesis 17:1).

We can hold onto scripture, God’s character, and His promises in times of transition. We can trust that God is always pursuing us, providing for us, and making promises to us. We can also look to spiritual disciplines – practices that have guided people of faith for centuries.

Section 3: Gaining Tools, Applying Them to Real Life

Spiritual Disciplines & The Art of Habit (15 Minutes)

Spiritual disciplines are an important tool in helping us through the difficult part of our journeys. Spiritual Disciplines are the personal and communal actions that help us love God and people. What are some of the spiritual disciplines that you are familiar with? Let’s make a list together. Let’s try to go beyond quiet times, prayer, scripture study. *Allow space for response.*

What Spiritual Disciplines Are and Aren’t

- Spiritual disciplines are actions we *do*—actual practices—to build our reliance on God and help us love Him and others.
- The disciplines are not a checklist. In and of themselves, spiritual disciplines don’t make us righteous. They are pathways to pursue life in Christ. They don’t earn us favor; they’re not a performance, and they’re not a means to success. Spiritual disciplines create space to meet God in honesty for transformation.
- Spiritual disciplines are soul training. Some are practiced alone (such as prayer, meditation, fasting, or retreat), while others are practiced in community (prayer, worship, service). Hopefully students can point to places during their time at InterVarsity where they’ve practiced these disciplines. You can ask students: What new challenges or opportunities might the next phase present for you and your practice of these disciplines?

One way to think about spiritual disciplines is as a form of habit. A habit is a behavior that occurs automatically, over and over, often unconsciously. A Duke University study suggests that as much as 40% of the actions we take every day are not the products of choices but of habits.

For example, think about your social media scrolling or media consumption. Think about your internet history or how you spend a typical morning. Think about time you spend with family/friends versus the time you spend

looking at a screen in a given day or week. We like to think that we have carefully chosen these things, but have we? These habits not only form our schedules, they form our hearts.

Education v. Formation. Education is what you learn and know – things you are taught. Formation is what you practice and do – things that are caught. So, one way to think of habits are as liturgies – patterns of words or actions repeated regularly as a way of worship. Show and highlight table 1 from Common Rule. His habits were assimilating him to the usual way of life in America, especially the freedom liturgy at the end.

I'm sure you don't resonate with any of these...but I know I do. The author of the book summarizes by saying, "My life was an ode of worship to omniscience, omnipresence, and limitlessness. No wonder my body rebelled."

We assume that the good life comes from having the freedom to do whatever we want. But what if the good life doesn't come from having the ability to do what we want but from having the ability to do what we were made for? What if true freedom comes from choosing the right limitations, not avoiding all limitations?

We, for our sake, tried to become limitless and the world was ruined in the fall. Jesus, for our sake, became limited, and the world was saved.

Crafting & Adopting A Rule of Life *(15 Minutes)*

What is a Rule of Life?

A Rule of Life is one way to examine and carefully choose our habits. It is a way of being intentional about the personal rhythms and guidelines that shape our days. It's a simple statement of the regular rhythms we choose in order to present our bodies to God as our "spiritual act of worship" (Rom 12:1).

By creating a rule of life, we are able to get a handle on habits, and ultimately our time. When our habits are constructed to match our worldview, we become people that don't just know about God and our neighbor, but someone who actually loves God and neighbor.

The Habits of the Common Rule

The Common Rule is made up of eight habits, four daily and four weekly.

The Daily Habits Are:

- Kneeling prayer 3x a day.
- One meal with others
- One hour with phone off
- Scripture before phone

The Weekly Habits Are:

- One hour of conversation with a friend
- Curate media to four hours
- Fast from something for 24 hrs.
- Sabbath

Each habit corresponds to two spectrums. The first spectrum is love of God and love of neighbor. The other contrasts embrace and resistance.

Love of God: Four of the habits are pointed toward opening our eyes to who God is, accepting the love he freely offers, and returning the gaze that has always been fixed on us.

Love of neighbor: Four habits are meant to be practiced with others and for their sake. They encourage us interrupt our busy schedules for the sake of rhythms of community.

Embrace: Embrace is a reminder that there is much good in the world God made. In these habits, we try to train our bodies and our hearts to love God as he actually is and to turn to our neighbor as we made to do.

Resistance: When we practice resistance, we acknowledge that evil and suffering are very real, though they aren't how the world was made to be. We see that should we do nothing; we will be taught to love the very things that tear us apart. These habits aren't supposed to shield you from the world but turn you toward it.

We're going to give you a handout that describes each of the habits in more detail and provides space to help you think through what a rule of life might look like in your life. After the session, I'd like you to consider what habits/spiritual disciplines you'll want to build or adopt to help you thrive spiritually.

Discipleship & Finding a Mentor (10 Minutes)

As you consider discipleship you might consider this simple framework: Pursue a Paul, Be a Barnabas, Train a Timothy. Here are some questions to consider in thinking about this framework:

- Who has poured into you spiritually during your time at InterVarsity? How might this change during your next season?
- The name Barnabas means "son of encouragement". How have you been an encouragement to your peers during your time at InterVarsity? How will you continue to "be a Barnabas" in your next step? To friends from community college? In your new community?
- Who have you invested in and trained during your time here? How will you find a "Timothy" during your next season? How can you make your next step about serving others and not about your own needs?

Facilitator should share their own experience of seeking (and hopefully finding) mentorship here.

Note: If students are transferring to a new institution, it would be wise to use some time here to gather information so that you can help them get connected on their new campus.

Section 4: Next Steps

Individual Reflection (5 Minutes)

Turn on ambient background music.

Now, let's enter into a time of reflection based on the questions on the screen. Let me encourage you to journal your responses to these questions.

- What current spiritual disciplines will continue to help you during your next step? What new disciplines and habits will you need to prioritize?
- What habits will you start, continue, or stop doing to pursue spiritual health and growth?
- What truth will you need to remember?

Take a minute to turn to a partner and share at least one concrete step from your journaling.

Closing Comments (5 Minutes)

Remember the practices you want for your future-self should begin here and now. Sometime in the next week share with 1 or 2 other people one (or more) action(s), you want to take while you are still here. These could be new disciplines you plan to start implementing or current habits you plan to ditch. Discuss what you plan to do,

and how you will accomplish it. Describe a specific game plan, including how you will go about finding resources and support, if needed, or where in your calendar you plan to make the change.

I'd also encourage you to set up accountability pairs. You have the opportunity to help each other persevere by making a decision now that you will check on each other later. Even today before you leave, pull out your phones and schedule a time to check-in. I'd suggest one month after classes are done as well as three months after classes finish. Typically, the start of a new semester is when transition hits hardest. As you make a plan to check-in on each other, be sure to include, in their calendar notes, details about what you plan to ask each other when you follow-up.

Before our next gathering, you have a couple of tasks:

- Announce whatever reading you'd like them to do to prep for the next session.
- Homework: Schedule check-ins with someone for after classes finish.

Benediction: Let us see that habits shape the heart. Let us stop fearing that limits are a threat to our freedom. Let us see that the right limitations are the way to the good life. Let us build a trellis for love to grow on. Let us craft a common rule of life for or time, one that will unite our heads and our habits, growing us into lovers of God and neighbor we were created to be.

Additional References:

Here are some additional resources to recommend to students or use for further prep of this session:

- [What are spiritual disciplines?](#) Interview with Don Whitney
- [Spiritual Disciplines List](#)
- [The Common Rule Book](#) by Justin Whitmel Earley
 - [The Common Rule Overview Video](#)
 - [The Common Rule Website](#)
- [You Are What You Love](#) by James K.A. Smith
- [The Power of Habit](#) by Charles Duhigg
- [Spiritual Multiplication in the Real World](#) by Bob McNabb
- [The Fabric of Faithfulness](#) by Steven Garber
- [Liturgy of the Ordinary](#) by Tish Warren Harrison
- [Relationship Web PDF](#) by Johnny Pons
- [Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us](#) by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun