



The book of Acts tells the story of the earliest followers of Jesus. Before they came to be called Christians, they were called the *hodos*. This was a Greek word that meant way, journey, or road. People saw the the earliest Christians as those who were choosing to live in a particular way.

Today, we long to recapture the heart of those early Christians who were known through the distinctive ways they lived as followers of Jesus. We have an earnest hope that Austin Mustard Seed would be more than just a group of people who like each other and get together for a service on Sunday.

What follows is the Common Life of the Austin Mustard Seed Church community. It is a modern take on a rule of life — our way of walking alongside one another as followers of Jesus in North Central Austin in the early 21st century.

This is what we hope will come of it as we join together in these rhythms and practices:

- It is our **covenant** — a way of committing to stand alongside others for something significant.
- It is our **formation** — a way of growing our souls and relationships into who we were created to be.
- It is our **witness** — a way of shared living that invites those around us to recognize a more true approach to life.

And so we invite you to join in “living the Common Life”. It is a yearly commitment, tuned to the church calendar, to join alongside one another in sharing in the rhythms and practices of the Austin Mustard Seed community. It is a joined way of continuing to live as disciples of Jesus together.

The habits of our Common Life are defined by our shared rhythms and practices. You can find them below, along with some questions to help think through how they might look in your own life. Have more questions? Jump to the last section which offers answers to the most common questions.

Rhythms

Rhythms are regular activities and within the life of our community for the **gathered** congregation. They are critical to who we are as a vibrant congregation, so we **cultivate** them

through our structure, inviting those who are part of the church to participate in these rhythms together on an ongoing basis.

Liturgy

A weekly reorientation to our sacred story.

Liturgy is our primary weekly rhythm. We gather on Sundays to come around the Lord's table, reminded that at the center of who we are, and primary to the Christian story, is Jesus' work on the cross and the resurrection that is still happening. We sing, pray, and reflect together as a means to remember and re-enter the story together. We come both to give what we can offer to others and receive what others have to offer us.

Liturgy means work of the people. It is not something to come and watch, or even to come and attend. It is a time for us to participate and share in alongside one another.

For those who are living the Common Life, liturgy is a sacred weekly engagement on your calendar. It becomes a priority to come and join our church community as we remind ourselves of this story of God's work in this world, and to reorient ourselves to that story.

There are many roles to fill in our rhythm of liturgy: reading prayers, caring for kids, singing or playing an instrument, serving Eucharist, setting up, etc. But for all of us, whether or not we have a recognized role on any given week, we come to be present. We come to be with one another as we turn again toward seeing God's work in our week to week.

As one who is living the Common Life, what does it look like for you to participate in our liturgy?

For those with a family, what does it look like for your children to participate in this rhythm alongside you?

Fellowship

An intentional commitment to sacred relationships

Fellowship is a word used so much in church circles that it loses some meaning, but it is an idea full of richness and beauty. Fellowship is a community of kinfolk marked by the knowing relationships of those journeying alongside one another. We create physical and temporal spaces throughout the week for people to come together in small or medium sized groups to enter into one another's stories. We listen, we risk, we encourage, and we pray together.

The core Christian understanding of the nature of God is that of relationship. We recognize that God exists as a trinity of three persons in relationship with each other. An ancient word for this is perichoreosis, which translates to 'moving in and around'.

Because the very nature of God is that of relationship, so we understand what it means to be someone who lives the Common Life. We commit to living in relationship with others who are living as disciples of Jesus. We place ourselves in relationships with others where we can ask the two core questions of following Jesus: 1) What is God inviting me into?, and 2) What am I doing to respond to that invitation?

What regular expression of fellowship will you participate in with others from our church community?

For those with a family, what does it look like for you to create space for your kids to also learn how to live with sacred relationships of learning how to follow Jesus together?

Neighboring

Creating opportunities for our neighbors to flourish

A healthy Christian community will look both inward and outward, moving toward one another in fellowship while also being sent out together to demonstrate the Kingdom of God. We are called to seek the peace and prosperity of our local and global neighbors, and work alongside them for the good of all. We curate an awareness of what is broken around us, and we move into those spaces together. We build times into our monthly community rhythms to serve together, both in smaller groups and as a congregation. We form relationships with organizations that we can come alongside to learn about needs in our community and about how to best respond to them.

A fundamental narrative of the Bible is found in Genesis 12 as God calls a man named Abram to begin a lineage of people who would follow and live a certain way. The result, God says, would be that “all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

There is an outward impulse for those who seek to follow the Judeo-Christian understanding of God. Throughout the Bible, it is never framed only as something we benefit from, but something we do for the benefit of others.

So, too, our community lives as a people who strive to be good neighbors locally and globally. We look for opportunities and needs where we can serve for the greater good. Those who are lovers of our Common Life join one another in movement toward the broken parts of our neighborhoods.

What areas of need or opportunities do you see in our city where we can be good neighbors?

What might it look like for you to invite those you have fellowship with, or our entire church community, to come alongside you in addressing these needs or opportunities?

For those with a family, how can you invite your children to be hands on in the work of being good neighbors?

Practices

Our Practices shape who we long to be as we are **dispersed** throughout the week. If our Rhythms are what we cultivate, then our Practices are what we **celebrate**. As a congregation we teach and tell stories about these practices in order to incorporate them into each of our lives. They won't appear on a church calendar but they are very much part of how we live in common with one another.

Sabbath

Making space for not laboring

We remember the Sabbath as a regular practice of rest, celebration, and connection with God and creation. We set aside days, hours, and moments for unlabor, to depart from work and be reminded that our primary sustenance comes not through our doing, but through the ongoing creative work of a good and loving God. This is, perhaps, our most prophetic practice to a culture obsessed with doing and accomplishing. We believe that the Gospel is best shared by a community living alternative stories of the Kingdom of God, and we see Sabbath as a way to pull the Kingdom of God from the not yet into the now.

The Jewish writer Abraham Joshua Heschel describes Sabbath as “an example of eternity.” It is a day where we live as if God had already restored everything to how it was intended to be.

Austin is a city that works hard and plays hard. We are consistently pulled toward this story, but Sabbath is an act of resting hard. We see Sabbath as a prophetic act to resist the non-stop pace of our culture.

As those who live the Common Life, we create weekly space for rest, to live for a chunk of time with no need to accomplish anything. We remind ourselves, and those around us, that we are not God.

What is a regular time you can give each week to practicing Sabbath?

What does/will your practice of Sabbath look like?

For those with family, how can you include your children in a shared Sabbath practice?

Hospitality

Making space for strangers

We give of ourselves and create space for Others, for those who are not part of our congregation. We move toward those who aren't like us, not with an agenda, but with an understanding that all are made in the image of God, and we can learn about the nature and character of God from all. We live with margin, intentionally inviting others into the time and space that we have to see how God might be at work in these relationships.

Story after story about Jesus is marked by an interaction with someone others would avoid. Jesus chose to create time and space to interact with people who weren't in the same socio-economic circle as he was: sinners, tax collectors, foreigners, outcasts, oppressors, and religious leaders alike.

While it is beautiful for us to have the safety and care that comes from living in fellowship with one another, we also grow and learn when we are in relationship with those who live, look, and believe differently than we do. Those who live the Common Life are intentional about making room for strangers, making space and time to come to know those we have proximity with.

How will you create space in your weekly or monthly schedule to spend meaningful time with someone who isn't in your normal circle?

Who are people you already regularly interact with that you can move toward knowing so that you can see the Image of God at work in them?

For those with a family, how can your children be part of your practice of hospitality? (Or as might often be the case, what can you learn from how your children already practice hospitality?)

Vocation

Making space to pursue our calling

As those created in the image of God, we are most human when we are reflecting the nature and character of God. Primary to God's nature is the ongoing work of creation, selfless giving of new life motivated out of love. For each of us, there is a vocation that matches our unique mix of giftings and passions with who God created us to be. As we listen to God and self, we learn our vocation, move into it to offer our fullest presence to the world. It may be within a career, or it may be alongside it, but we recognize our primary work is defined by who God has called us to be, not by what we do.

The Christian way of living is not just one that looks forward to joining God in heaven someday, but partnering with God's ongoing work in the world today. We see God continuing to work in this world in the following ways:

- **Redemptive Work** // God's saving and reconciling actions
- **Creative Work** // God's fashioning of the physical and human world
- **Providential Work** // God's provision for and sustaining of humans and the creation
- **Justice Work** // God's maintenance of justice
- **Compassionate Work** // God's involvement in comforting, healing, guiding, and shepherding
- **Revelatory Work** // God's work to enlighten with truth.

We give time and attention to understand who we are and what makes us come alive. We learn to say no to some things, so that we can say yes to what we can do best, offering what we have so that we too can be part of these ways God is working in the world.

How does your career or your passions lineup with God's work in the world?

Where do you see a deep need of the world waiting to be addressed in a way that you are capable of responding?

For those with families, what opportunities can you give your children to discover their own sense of giftedness and passions?

How to Share With Others in this Common Life

The Common Life is a shared creative effort. Each participant has the opportunity and the responsibility to bring it to life. We are excited to see how people will apply to their own lives, and inspire others to do this same. Here are five ways to get started:

1. Ask a friend to join you. Find another person, and commit to meet with them on a regular basis to discuss how the Common Life is shaping your life.
2. Discuss in your MWG. Set aside time in regular Midweek Group gatherings, perhaps once a month or once a quarter to brainstorm as a group how you can help each other live out the Common Life.
3. Share during Prayers of the People. During the prayer time at Sunday Liturgy, share Thanksgiving about how the Common Life has blessed you, or a Prayer about your needs in implementing the Common Life.
4. Discuss during Sunday Lunch. While enjoying Sunday lunch, take a moment to share what you are experiencing as you live out the Common Life.

5. Participate in Common Life reflective gatherings. A few times a year, we'll create space to reflect as individuals and as a community on how we are growing from our Common Life experience.

FAQ

Do I have to participate in the Common Life to be part of Austin Mustard Seed?

No. If you want to be a part, you are a part. This shared rule of life is for those who feel called to take a deeper level of commitment to our shared hopes and to putting these hopes to concrete practice alongside others in our community.

Are there limits to who is allowed to participate in this Common Life?

No one will be told if they can or can't be part of the Common Life. It is an invitation to a community of people to live alongside one another in the peculiar Way of Jesus. But that said, each participant should take into account these critical areas:

1) First and foremost, this is about a community that proclaims Jesus is Lord, and so we intend to live this way to be disciples of Jesus. While all of us share some mixture of passionate belief and hopeful skepticism, participants in the Common Life should be able to affirm the ancient Christian creeds and the narrative of beliefs found on the aMS website: <http://austinmustardseed.org/about/beliefs/>

2) Because this is a intentional commitment to live alongside others, participants should be engaged in relationships within our community prior to joining in the Common Life. We'd suggest that you have been attending aMS for at least three months so that you have a sense of who are these people that you are committed to walking alongside.

3) There is no age limit to the Common Life. We see this shared way of living to be meaningful for families to invite their children into following the Way of Jesus. Older children who have an understanding of what commitments they are making, and have the agency to follow through on them, are welcome to participate with their own unique statement of living the Common Life.

Why do we have this common life instead of “church membership”?

From our experience, our ideas of “membership” are often weak and more like joining the YMCA than giving yourself to know and be known, to love and serve among a community of people. We hope to broaden our imagination around what it means to be part of a Christian community, and we think that this language and these rhythms and practices may help us do this. We desire to be a Jesus- people, actually living together, with all our mess and all our hope. We imagine that something like a rule of life has a better chance at helping us form a living community rather than merely an organization. But this is a kind of membership, a way of belonging through relationship, a way of being welcomed and a way of committing yourself to Jesus and to one expression of Jesus' people. We're simply trying to enrich what membership, at its best, truly means.

I feel like our church values not drawing lines between insiders and outsiders. Doesn't this Common Life do that?

We are not establishing a guide for who is in and who is out – but rather a graceful means for people to commit themselves to one another and pursue shared hopes. Taking on this rule of life doesn't gain any of us status or power, and it doesn't make any of us superior or more spiritual. Rather, it is a way of practicing humility and submitting yourself to the shared life of the broader community.

A shared identity should increase our ability to be a defined and meaningful community that others might want to be part of. All we have to give away is who we are in Jesus. The richer and deeper our sense of who we are, the more depth and vigor we have to give away. We hope to invite anyone and everyone into our family - and every family needs to know who they are.

My life already feels too full. What if I just can't do anything more?

Maybe this isn't the right season for you. You are still welcome to be part of the shared rhythms of our church community. But as you consider participating, we hope you can see with us that these rhythms and practices are meant to be “life-giving” rather than “life-costing.” We believe that the community and growth that we experience through these will lead each of us to the “life to the full” that Jesus invites all to in John 10:10. Each of the practices is designed around “making space” for something different, and something more meaningful. So yes, that might mean saying “no”, and giving up on other things in our life. The question for each to consider is what ways of living will mean more to us as we reflect back in the years to come.

It feels like this is missing _____, which I think is a very important part of living out the Christian faith. Did we consider including that?

This isn't intended to be a comprehensive list of what someone needs to do in order to “be a Christian.” Our hope is to form a reasonable and sustainable shared way of living that is meaningful in the culture where we live. These rhythms and practices are meant to guide us toward a rich way of living alongside one another that pushes back against the unique and often destructive pressures of the time and place we live in.