WEEK 9 Chapter Nine

How to Make a Pickle

You do not become a pickle by trying harder. You soak.

The God Narrative Challenge

The narrative we have been handed	**The narrative Jesus tells**
My life with God is a private matter between me and God. Other people are optional, church is a preference, and I can grow spiritually on my own schedule and by my own effort. Community is nice, but it is not the mechanism.	*A cucumber does not become a pickle by resolve. It becomes a pickle by sitting in the brine, over time, alongside other cucumbers. Transformation happens slowly, in community, by immersion. The first Christians devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship, table, and prayer, and the verb means they kept at it.*

The challenge this week: This week, decide what your brine is going to be after this class ends, and name out loud the people who are in it with you.

Quotes for Reflection

"Christianity is essentially a social religion, and to turn it into a solitary religion is indeed to destroy it."

– John Wesley, Sermon on the Mount, Discourse IV

"The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer."

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together

"How is it with your soul?"

– The question Wesley asked in every class meeting

Scripture for the Week

Read: Acts 2:42–47, 1 Corinthians 12:12–27, and Hebrews 10:24–25

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Acts 2:42

Luke's description of the first Christian community is not a list of programs. It is a list of four habits practiced together over time: teaching, fellowship, table, prayer. The verb translated "devoted themselves" carries the sense of persisting, staying with something, refusing to drift. Nothing about it is fast. Paul makes the same point structurally with the body image in First Corinthians, because a hand does not become more fully a hand by leaving the arm. It becomes a curiosity. Wesley built the entire Methodist movement on this conviction, which is why he organized people into classes and bands and had them ask one another, week after week, how is it with your soul. He did not believe anyone could keep the faith alone. More importantly, he did not believe anyone should have to.

How to Make a Pickle

Questions for Conversation

1. Which false narrative did this study most disturb in you? What replaced it, if anything did?

2. Where in your life have you been trying to soak alone?

3. Who are the people who are your brine right now, and how will you stay in it?

4. What one practice will you carry forward, and who in this room will ask you about it?

THE PRACTICE THIS WEEK: Slowing Down

Hurry is the great enemy of the soul, and most of us are not evil, we are just fast. Slowing the body down on purpose interrupts the story that says everything depends on our efficiency. It also makes us available to the people in front of us, which is where most of the soaking actually happens.

- Drive in the slow lane all week. All of it.
- Choose the longest line at the store on purpose.
- Eat one meal at half speed with the television off.
- Do one hour without multitasking. One thing at a time, start to finish.
- Then the practice that outlasts this class: pick one person from this group and agree to ask each other Wesley's question, "How is it with your soul?" once a month.

This is the last sheet, but it is not the last week. The brine only works if you stay in it.

Notes and What I Noticed

Bring back one honest sentence. Not a report card. Just the truth.