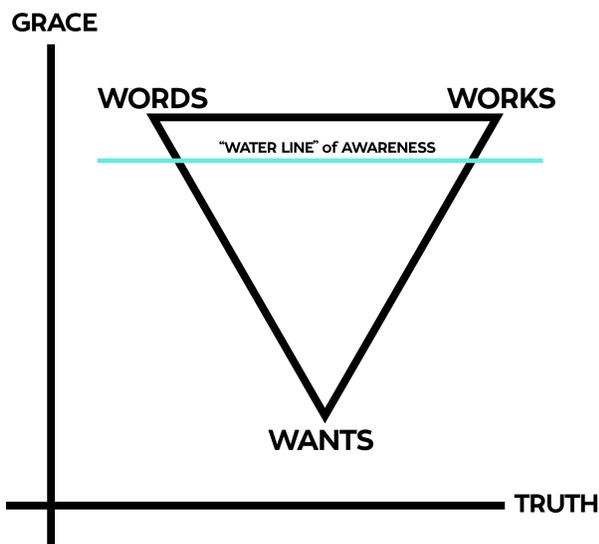


The Practices - The Kingdom...

We thought we came to God by doing it right, and lo and behold, surprise of surprises, we came to God by doing it wrong. - Richard Rohr.

*“The **time** has come, the **Kingdom of God** has come near,” Jesus said. **“Repent and believe the good news.”** - Mark 1:15*



How to get our wants on the table

So how do we actually discern our desires? And how do we “hold” them in the Lord’s presence so he can begin to transform them, especially if what we want seems “bad”?

One of the main reasons we like to stay in the realm of Words and Works is that it’s easier to “fake it” above the water line—to say the right things and do the right things,

while ignoring my actual desires, the actual state of my heart. It feels scary to look at my real desires, to examine what I really want.

But we need to. Why? Because God only meets us where we really are, and he’s always present and at work, so my actual desires aren’t obstacles to meeting God, they’re the occasion for meeting God! What seems like an obstacle (a “bad” desire) is actually the starting line for the process of becoming more like Jesus.

Wanting the wrong thing

I (Ben Sternke) wish I had known how to do this years ago when I was teaching a class on spiritual formation for the church I was serving at the time. One of the very first exercises we did in the class was designed to help us get in touch with our desires. I invited each person to envision themselves as blind Bartimaeus sitting beside the road as Jesus walked past, crying out “Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:46-52).

In the exercise, as in the story, Jesus stops what he is doing and turns aside to pay attention to us. He asks us the question he asked Bartimaeus: “What do you want me to do for you?” Then we spent several minutes in silence telling Jesus what we wanted him to do for us. We tried to get in touch with our deepest desires and confess them to Jesus.

After 15 minutes of silence, I invited people to share, if they felt comfortable, what they said to Jesus. I expected that people would get in touch with a deep desire for transformation, or for healing, or for reconciliation, etc. And some people did share those kinds of things. But what took me off-guard was the answer I got from a 19-year-old young man who was taking the class. He said, “I told Jesus I want to be a famous rock star.”

I thought he was kidding at first, but he was dead serious. He was a musician and had just formed a band. And his honest answer to Jesus was that he wanted to be famous. He wanted people to hear his songs and see him on stage and think he was awesome. At the time, I didn’t know what to do with that! Neither did anyone else in the class. I just affirmed his honesty and moved on with the class.

I didn’t know how to handle what I considered to be his “bad” desire, but this could have been a moment of breakthrough for him if I had known better how to reckon with it. Today I think I’m much better equipped to help someone like him process this desire; the honesty

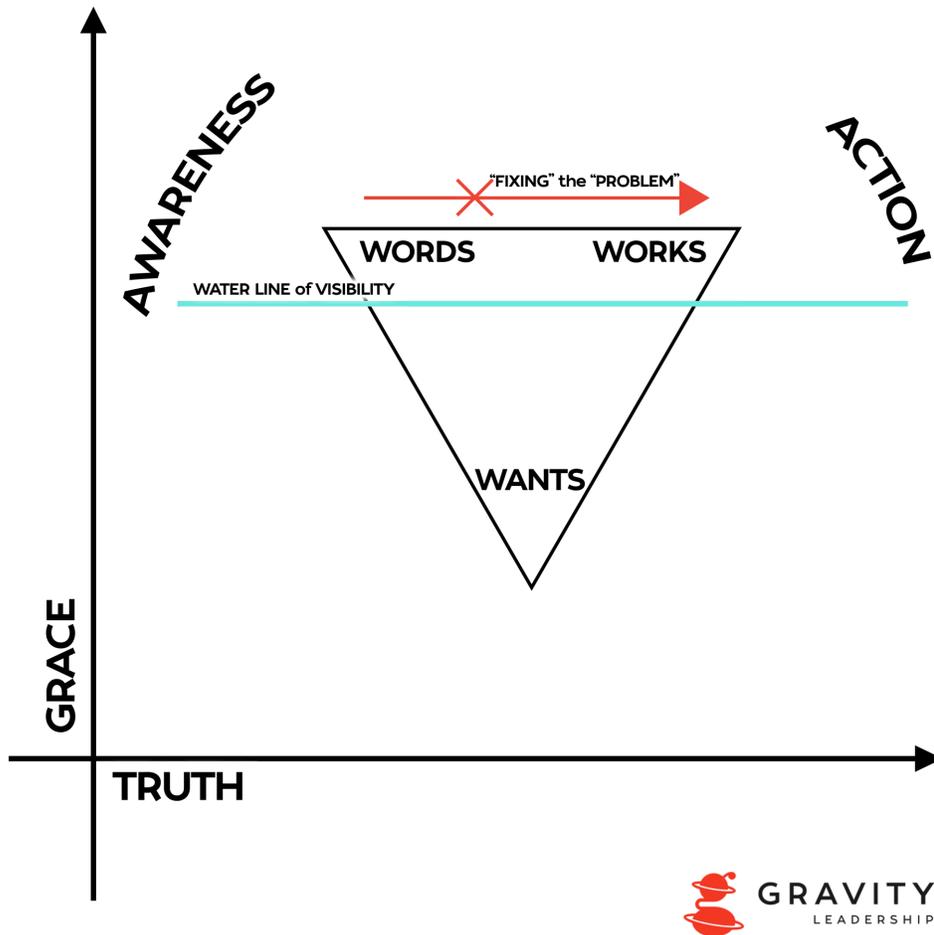
he displayed is ground zero for the in-breaking of the kingdom of God, because God is so real he most fully meets us where we’re really at.

Typical responses

This entire process, then, starts with AWARENESS: being aware of what’s going on, paying attention to our lives. When we become aware of these deep desires, like sonar pings from the deep places of our soul, we typically respond in one of two ways.

1. We ignore it, distracting ourselves from it because we are uncomfortable with it. We attempt to turn off our awareness.
2. We attempt to fix it, jumping from a surface-level awareness straight to an action that’s meant to solve the problem we’re perceiving.

Note on our diagram below that this jump from awareness to action is a kind of surface-level jump from Words to Works. The awareness is a “Word” and the action is a “Work” meant to quickly fix the problem.



For example, perhaps I have a stressful day at work and I come home and I just want some peace and quiet for a few moments. But my kids are fighting about who gets to jump on the trampoline next. So I yell at them to knock it off, and send them to bed without supper.

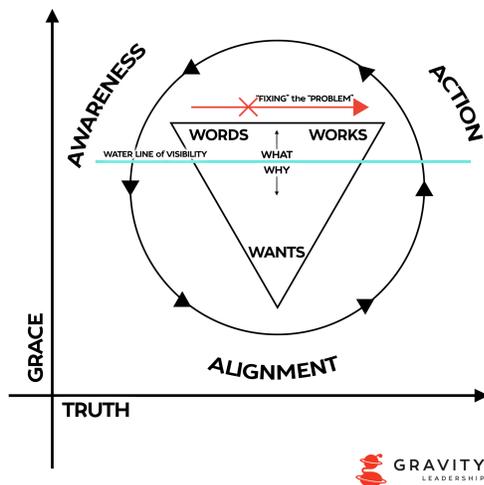
A few minutes later I feel bad about this (here’s where the “ping” of awareness is starting), and I begin to inwardly berate myself for being such a bad father and being so selfish. I reflexively react to this by springing into action to “fix” myself:

- I plan to memorize all the Scripture passages I can find about how children are a blessing from the Lord and how I'm called to take up my cross and die to myself.
- I surprise the family with an evening out at our favorite restaurant.
- I decide to listen to calming music on the way home from work so I'll be less inclined to yell at my kids when I get home.

The “only” problem with these plans is 1) they are rooted in toxic shame (we'll have more to say about this later in the course), 2) I don't need Jesus for any of it, and 3) they only deal in external behavior. It's all above the “water line.” It's all just information transfer and behavior modification, as if my problem is that I forgot that children were a blessing from the Lord, and that's why I yelled at them.

I don't need to remember something I forgot, I need to repent and believe the good news of the kingdom of God!

First, we need a process for discipleship that **dives below the surface** to discern what our deep desires are. Then, we need a way to discover why our desires have been shaped this way. Finally, we need to bring them into alignment with the presence of Christ and his Kingdom for transformation.



ACTION is important and necessary, but instead of jumping from awareness (Words) straight to action (Works), we need a way to dive below the surface for the **ALIGNMENT** of our desires (Wants). We have to go beyond just the “WHAT” of Words and Works into the “WHY” of Wants.

As we align our desires away from the “bad news” of our idolatries toward the good news Jesus proclaimed (the gospel of the kingdom), we take faithful action in response to that good news, which then opens us up to more awareness of God's kingdom breaking into our lives.

This creates a virtuous cycle of transformation that grows in momentum the more I practice it. In that sense, it is like a flywheel—the first few times cranking it are difficult, but once the momentum starts it becomes easier to keep it spinning.

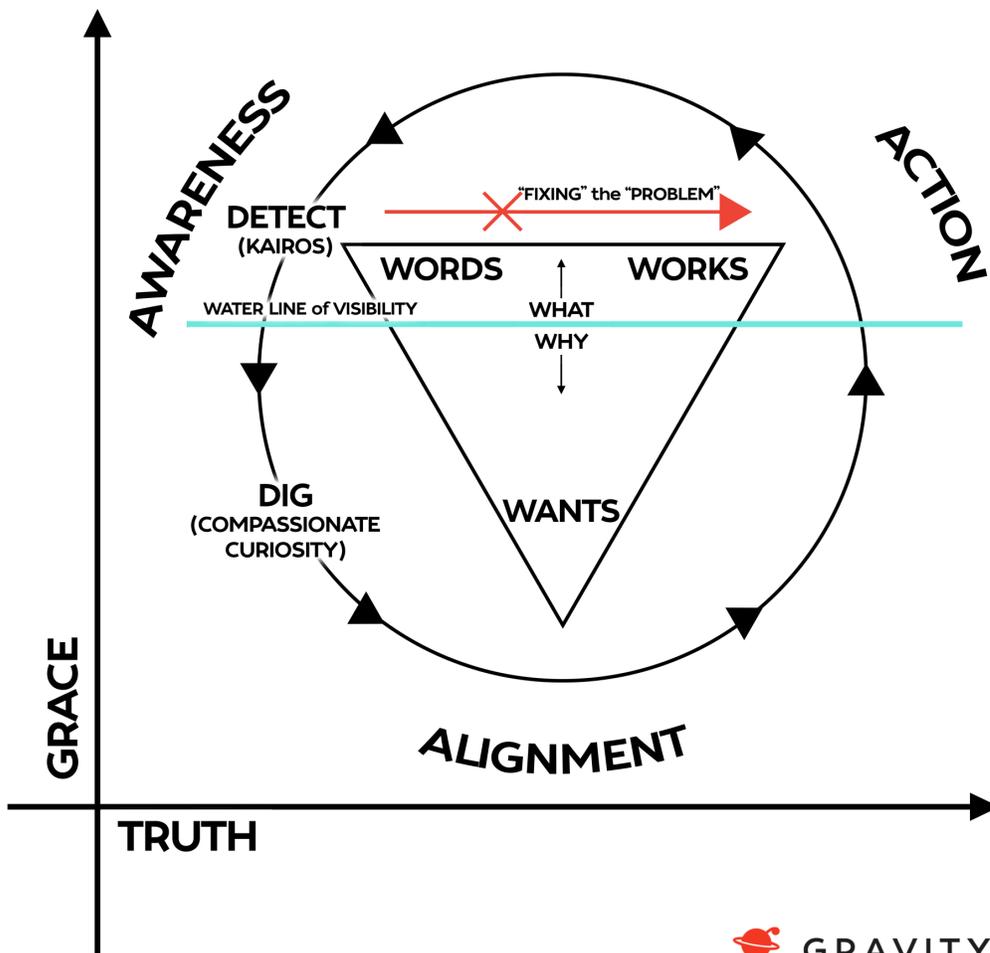
The Discipleship Wheel (Six Practices)

How do we do this? That's what the Discipleship Wheel is all about. It comprises six practices we see consistently in the life of Jesus, designed to help us get below the water line to our Wants, where God is waiting for us. These are six practices to help us stay in the virtuous cycle of **Awareness, Alignment, and Action**.

This is how we repent and believe, how we pay attention to God's activity and participate in his kingdom. Below is a quick overview of these six practices; we will dive into them in more detail during the rest of this course.

Awareness Practices: Detect and Dig

The two practices of awareness are 1) detecting kairos moments, and 2) digging with compassionate curiosity.



1. Detect

The first practice is simply detecting these “sonar pings” from the deep places of our souls. We call them “kairos moments.” Usually they’re everyday, ordinary events in our lives that become counterintuitive “onramps” into noticing the activity of God within us.

Instead of ignoring these things, we choose to pay attention to them.

- I get irritated when my kids don’t listen to me: KAIROS.
- I daydream all the time about writing a novel: KAIROS.
- I never look forward to going to work: KAIROS.
- I get excited every time we have neighbors show up unexpectedly to our house: KAIROS.
- I don’t see eye to eye with my spouse about our weekly menu for mealtimes, but I keep my mouth shut and just get frustrated: KAIROS.
- I notice when I go for long walks in the woods that I sense God’s nearness and presence: KAIROS.

2. Dig

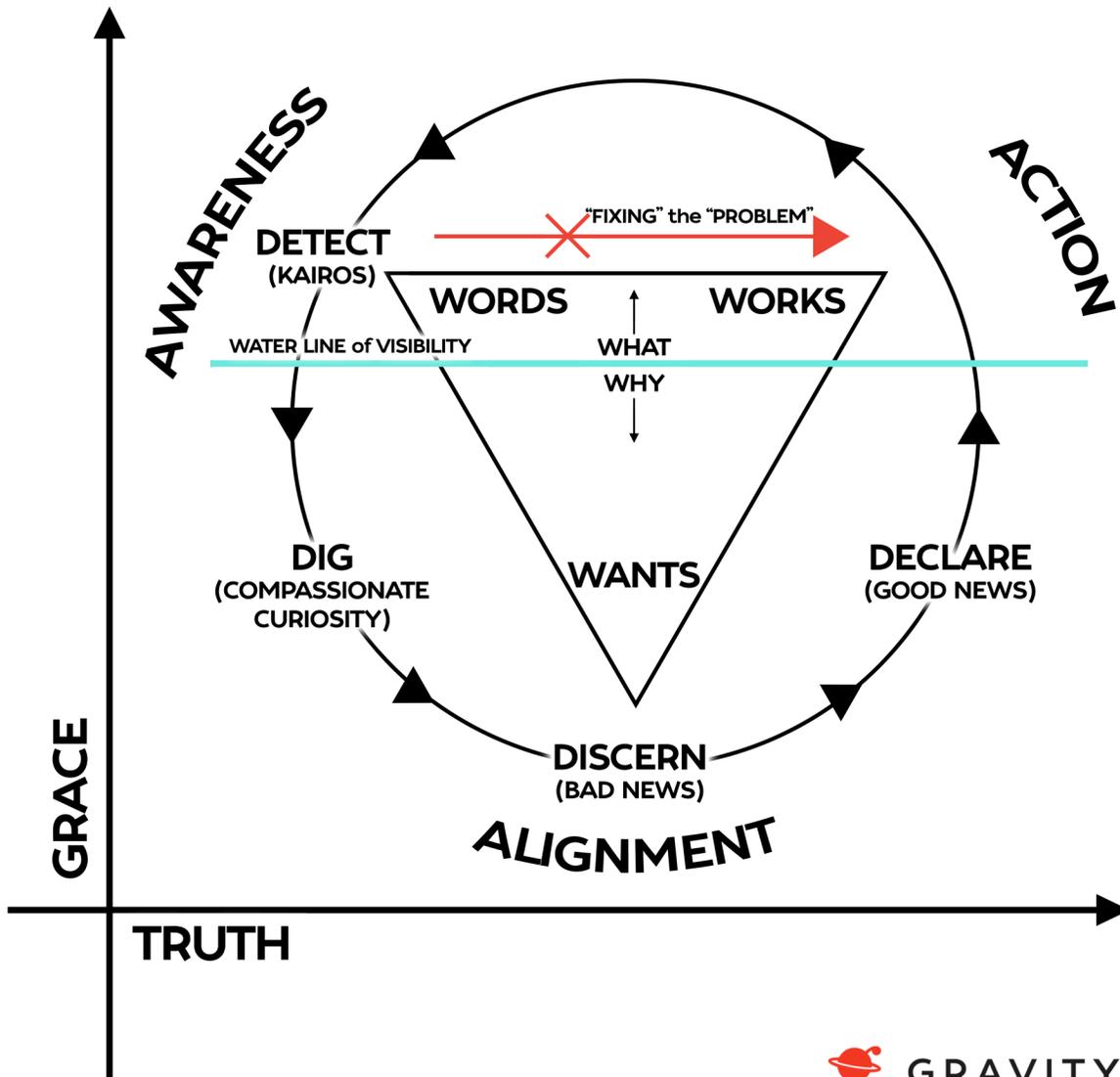
As we saw above, sometimes when we detect a Kairos, we jump right into “fix it” mode, trying to solve what we think the problem is. Instead of “fixing,” the second practice in the Discipleship Wheel is to dig below the waterline of visibility into why this Kairos is occurring.

And the way we dig is important. We dig with compassionate curiosity rather than condemnation or anxiety. We embrace reality as the place God meets us, so instead of beating ourselves up or fixing the problem, we simply choose to ask compassionately curious questions about this Kairos.

- What am I feeling when my kids don’t listen? Why do I want their compliance so badly? What would that mean for me?
- What is it about writing a novel that seems so appealing to me?
- What am I wanting my work to be like? Why?

Alignment Practices: Discern and Declare

From this place of awareness, we begin to discover our desires, which is where we need to seek alignment. The two practices of alignment are 3) **discerning** “*bad news*” (i.e. lies I’ve believed about reality, or the story I’m telling myself that is doing bad work in my life), and 4) **declaring** the *good news of the gospel*.



3. Discern

As we dive into what we really want, we begin to **discern** where there is “bad news” at work in our lives. Bad news means a lie we have believed about God, ourselves, others, or reality. Most of us don’t know what we actually believe, but our habits reveal it to us as we dig into the Kairoses we’ve detected.

Dallas Willard said we are always living out our actual beliefs, so we learn to discern the lies we’ve believed in our pursuit of our desires. For example, I may discover that I get irritated with my kids because, when they don’t listen to me, I feel insignificant and powerless. Thus my very identity is at stake! If my kids don’t behave in a certain way, I’m worthless! My desire for significance is a good one (that’s part of how we’re created in the image of God), but I’ve believed a lie about how I can gain significance: if my kids listen to me.

Discerning these “bad news” stories—that often live under the water line of our awareness—is a key part of finding our center in the love of God.

4. Declare

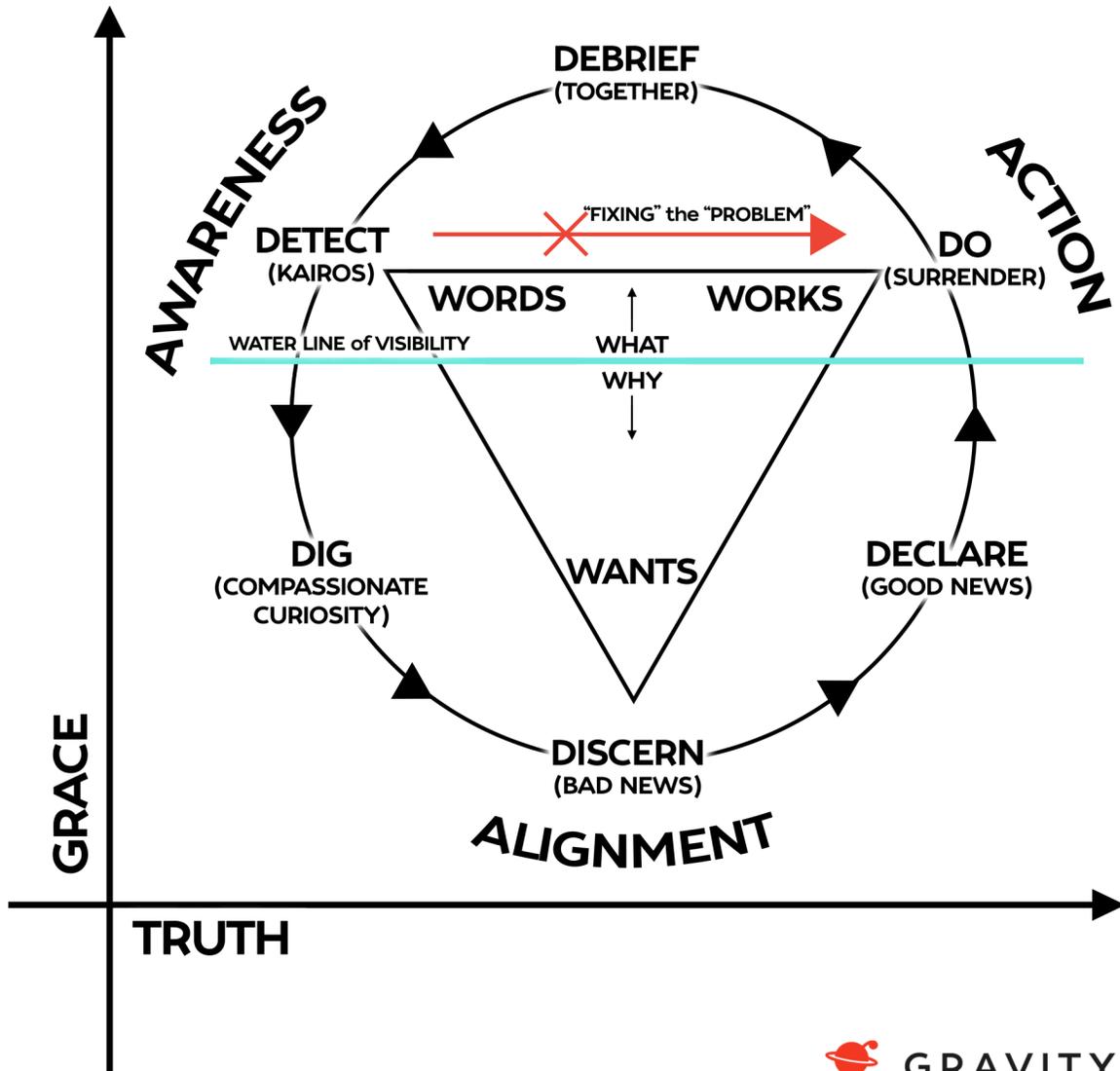
After we discern the specific “bad news” story, the answer isn’t to try harder to behave differently. No, the remedy for bad news is good news. We declare the good news that Jesus proclaimed: the gospel of the kingdom. Specifically, contextually, personally, we proclaim reality according to God into this specific bad news story.

There’s a lot more to say about this. (And all of these practices! We’ll have an entire article for each one in the future). But this isn’t a general, abstract truth about God. It’s more like a contextualized word from God to us that we learn to receive. Less like “I know God loves me,” and more like “Neither do I condemn you.” Less like “God’s good, all the time!” and more like “Take up your mat and walk.”

This is gospel-based, transformational practice, and so we must declare an explicit, specific word of good news before we will know what to do.

Action Practices: Do and Debrief

After we ALIGN our desires toward the kingdom through the proclamation of the gospel, we take action. The two practices of action are 5) **doing** something concrete in response to the good news, and 6) **debriefing** with friends in community about the journey.



5. Do

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used many words to tell his hearers that if they only listened to his teaching, they wouldn't get anywhere in the kingdom. In contrast, the person who hears and puts his teaching into practice is a wise person who is building on a solid foundation.

This is why the fifth practice is to do something about the good news we've heard! We respond not as a way of earning something, but simply as an act of surrender to the reality of the gospel. If this word of good news that I've heard is true, what would change about my life? How can I take a concrete, embodied step in that direction in order to open up my life to the transforming power of the Spirit?

The stuff we do in response to good news opens our lives to God's power; it's where transformation begins. This is a concrete, embodied demonstration of faith, where God meets us to accomplish in us what we cannot do on our own.

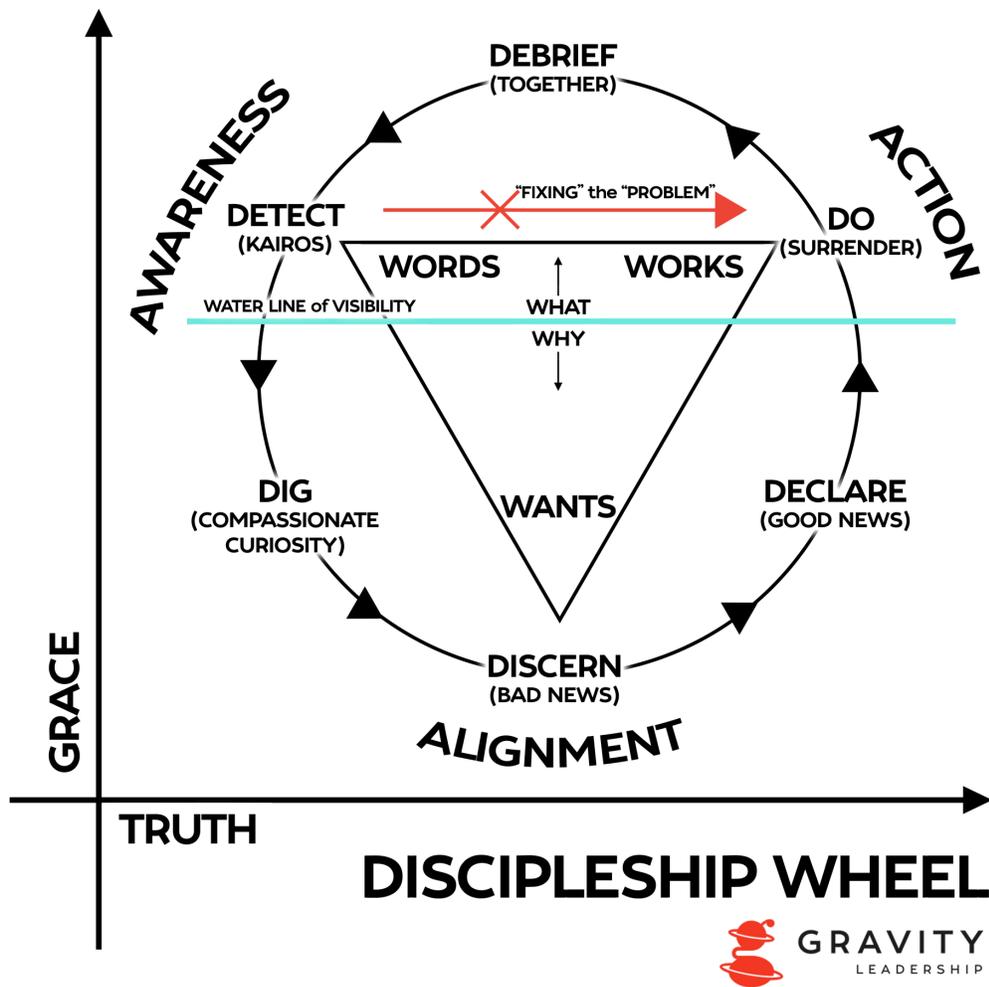
6. Debrief

Finally, discipleship is never a solitary exercise, so as a community of disciples, we always debrief together about how our experiments in faith are going. We never seek to "gotcha" each other or bring shame on those who fail.

Rather, we love one another enough to ask questions about the things we committed to doing, in response to the good news. These conversations are filled with grace and truth and always lead to more awareness/kairos moments.

(In fact, the entire process takes place within the Call In quadrant of the Grace and Truth Matrix. Within the posture of love, trusting the paradigm of the kingdom, we practice discipleship together.)

In the following weeks we will have an article for each of these six practices (and some we will unpack even more than that). But we wanted to give you the entire picture of the process we've been using week in and week out during our time together.



Exercise: Lots to think through...

Let's start by simply detecting a Kairos. Think in 4 categories: Brick Wall, Speed Bump, Mirror, and Vision.

- *A brick wall Kairos is a big event that brings life to a sudden STOP.*
- *A speed bump Kairos is a little event that seems to happen repeatedly; a pattern or habit that sticks out to you.*
- *A mirror Kairos is where you see yourself more clearly, more like who you really are.*
- *A vision Kairos is a picture or description of where you'd like to go in the kingdom; it's a revelation of the good future God is pulling you into.*

Take a few minutes of prayerful reflection on the last couple of days, notice what has stuck out to you. Go through the conversations of the day, reflecting on the highs and lows, stress, moments of peace, conflict, tension, failures, struggles, etc. Write down the concert moments that come to mind. **Homework is to do this 4 times this week.**