

Practicing the Way Series

Be With Jesus

By JOHN MARK COMER

The Invitation of Jesus

The invitation of Jesus is to come and be his disciple. And to be a disciple of Jesus means to order your life around three goals:

- to be with Jesus
- to become like Jesus
- to do what Jesus did

To Be With Jesus

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. . .

— John 1:35-39

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

— John 1:43-49

The clear invitation from Jesus in these passages is to come and spend time with him. But the question for us today is how do we do this now since Jesus is not here in person walking around with us as he was then. So what does it look like for us to "be with Jesus" today?

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."

— John 14:16-18

"These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

— John 14:25-27

According to Jesus, the way that we are to be with him today is through the presence of the Holy Spirit. ***The first and primary goal of apprenticeship/discipleship to Jesus is learning to live in a constant state of awareness of and connection to the Spirit.***

Living in Awareness Of and Connection To the Spirit

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."

— John 15:1-8

Jesus' metaphor for being with him is that of a branch abiding in the vine. (Jesus uses the word "abide" 10 times in this particular teaching.) Jesus is teaching his disciples the necessity of getting into God's presence and staying at home there. This doesn't mean that we need to isolate ourselves from everybody or to go live in a monastery somewhere.

It means that we must learn how to be in two places at once...

- At home making breakfast for my family AND aware of God's presence.
- In the clubhouse interacting with my teammates AND aware of God's presence.
- On the phone texting, talking or tweeting AND aware of God's presence.

"The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer. And in the noise and clatter of my kitchen (he was a dishwasher at a monastery) while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees before the blessed sacrament."

— Brother Lawrence, The Practice of the Presence of God

“The first and most basic thing we can and must do is to keep God before our minds... This is the fundamental secret of caring for our souls. Our part in thus practicing the presence of God is to direct and redirect our minds constantly to him. In the early time of our “practicing” we may well be challenged by our burdensome habits of dwelling on things less than God. But these are habits — not the law of gravity — and can be broken. A new, grace-filled habit will replace the former ones as we take intentional steps toward keeping God before us. Soon our minds will return to God as the needle of a compass constantly returns to the north. If God is the great longing of our souls, he will become the pole star of our inward beings.”

— Dallas Willard

The big point here is that ***being with Jesus takes a lifetime of practice***. In fact, in the chaos and noise and the hyper-connectivity of the modern digital world, it takes more intentionality than ever before. (Think about that for a minute.)

“It is unlikely that we will deepen our relationship with God in a casual or haphazard manner. There will be a need for some intentional commitment and some reorganization of our own lives. But there is nothing that will enrich our lives more than a deeper and clearer perception of God’s presence in the routine of daily living.”

— William Paulsell

Practices or Disciplines or Habits

The practices of Jesus (or habits) are activities that you do with your mind and with your body in order to orient all of your life around experiencing God. Throughout history these types of practices used to be the starting point for discipleship to Jesus. However, within our own generation, when people decide they want to follow Jesus, our starting point has typically been to take them through a book of the Bible and/or teach them Christian doctrine (that’s not a bad thing by the way; just different than starting with practice).

Practices such as Silence & Solitude, Prayer, Fasting, Reading the Bible, Living in Community, Sabbath and Simple Living are all intended to be a means to an end — these are things that we do to orient our lives around experiencing the presence of God. These are things that we do to live in a constant state of awareness of and connection to the Spirit. These are things that we do to be with Jesus, to become like Jesus and to do what Jesus did. Remember the teaching of Jesus, ***“Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”***

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

— Galatians 5:13-26

The "fruit of the Spirit" are not commands to go and try to do (ex. "Go be more joyful. Go be more patient."). These are not things that are simply a matter of the will but rather of the inner disposition of the heart once it is transformed to be more like Jesus.

There is only one command in this passage that is repeated — "walk by the Spirit" or "keep in step with the Spirit" (or in the words of Jesus, "Abide in the vine").

Trees do not produce fruit by trying really hard to produce fruit; the fruitful branches of the tree simply abide in the trunk or vine and that is what leads them to bear fruit. In the same way, we will not bear the fruit of the Spirit simply by trying really hard to do so; we must abide in the vine or walk by the Spirit — ***we must live in a constant state of awareness of and connection to the Spirit.***

So How Do We Do This?

Answer: ***We live like Jesus.***

"If you want to experience the life of Jesus, then you have to adopt the lifestyle of Jesus."

— John Mark Comer

We cannot simply believe the right things about Jesus; we have to follow — adopt the lifestyle of Jesus. So many of us want the life but not the lifestyle. ***But your life is the by-product of your lifestyle.*** Your system is perfectly designed to give you the results that you are getting.

As you read through the gospels, you will notice some things about Jesus' lifestyle:

- Unhurried
- Spent a lot of time in community
- Spent a lot of time alone — up early before everyone else and would go away on retreat
- Sabbath and Synagogue
- Lived simply
- Lived with peace

* By the way, think about how much our relationship with our phone is disrupting the way we spend our time and interact with the world around us. ***How might our current habits with our phone present a challenge?*** The average smart phone user touches their screen 2617 times a day spending over 2.5 hours on it a day. Keep in mind that this study is from 2016 and these numbers are just simply the average user.

"The general human failing is to want what is right and important but at the same time not to commit to the kind of life that will produce the action we know to be right and the condition we want to enjoy. This is the feature of human character that explains why the road to hell is paved with good intentions. We intend what is right but we avoid the life that would make it a reality."

— Dallas Willard

The lifestyle of Jesus is the way to the life of Jesus. The early church for hundreds of years was called “followers of the Way” because it was not just about believing all the right things; it was about living a whole new way of life based on the life and teaching of Jesus.

How to get started

The longterm goal here is for us to simplify our life down to what really matters — to slowly cut out all the extra unnecessary activities and then add in, one at a time, the practices of Jesus. Here’s a list of the core practices that I am personally trying to implement in my own life.

- Silence & Solitude (aka. Quiet-Time)
- Fixed-Hour Prayer
- Fasting
- Reading the Bible
- Living in Community
- Sabbath
- Simplicity

The short term goal for this week is to set aside at least 10 minutes for silence & solitude (quiet time).

- How do you plan to do this?

- What will that time look like?

- What might make this difficult for you?

Set a time. Set a place. Show up.