

Practicing the Way Series

Teaching & Practice

By JOHN MARK COMER

Our Secular (but still religious) Age

Our modern secular society likes to think of itself as spiritual but not religious, but the reality is just that we don't want to be tied down to any one religion. We are just as religious as we've ever been:

- Instead of church it looks like a yoga studio
- Instead of worship it looks like Super Soul Sundays with Oprah
- Instead of teaching it looks like a podcast or a Ted Talk
- Instead of a pastor it looks like a therapist
- Instead of a community it looks like a gym membership or a running club
- Instead of a Bible Study it looks like a Book Club
- Instead of a retreat it looks like a motivational seminar
- Instead of silence & solitude and prayer it looks like mindfulness

We all have this instinct or this felt sense that the world is not what it should be — that something is wrong. We all have this instinct or this felt sense that there is a gap between who we are and who we are intended to be. We all have this desire to change.

For us, to be a disciple of Jesus means to order our lives around three basic goals: to be with Jesus, to become like Jesus and to do what Jesus did. And to live all of this out is going to require a transformation.

How We Change: Teaching

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

— Mark 1:14-15

Jesus' Teaching = The Kingdom of God

"The central theme of Jesus' teaching, contrary to popular opinion, was not love... it was not liberation for the poor or the oppressed... it was not justice (although all of that was encapsulated inside of Jesus' kingdom agenda)... but the central message of Jesus was that the kingdom of God — this brand new reality; this in-breaking rule and reign of the Creator God over creation — that it was near... that it was accessible... you have an open invite into this brand new reality. And the response that he was looking for from this message was to repent and believe."

— John Mark Comer

repent (v.) — to change your mind; to reimagine your life from the ground up around the kingdom of God; to fully embrace a brand new way of seeing the world and a brand new way of living in it

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

— Romans 12:1-2

"The process of spiritual formation in Christ is one of progressively replacing... destructive images and ideas with the images and ideas that filled the mind of Jesus himself. Spiritual formation in Christ moves towards a total interchange of our ideas and images for his."

— Dallas Willard

5 Ways to Get Jesus' Teaching In Your Mind

1. Reading the Bible
2. Reading Books
3. Sunday Gathering (church)
4. Podcasting
5. Having a Mentor

Getting Jesus' teaching into your mind is the first step towards your transformation, BUT we have to keep going. Many people are good at reading their Bible, going to church, taking notes, listening to podcasts and surrounding themselves with good teaching but they still stall out and hit a wall in their discipleship to Jesus. Why does that happen?

Because you can't just think your way to becoming like Jesus!

Information transfer alone is not enough for actual transformation of your life. There is a big difference between what we know and what we do and even what we want to do. We have to move from knowing Jesus' teaching to actually doing Jesus' teaching in order to become someone who actually wants to do Jesus' teaching.

“What we love in our heart has a far greater influence on what we do than what we know in our head.”

— John Mark Comer

How We Change: Practice

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them (puts them into practice) will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them (does not put them into practice) will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

— Matthew 7:24-27

Jesus said, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.”

— Luke 8:21

If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”

— John 13:17

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

— James 1:22-25

Over and over again, Jesus and his first disciples make the same point: **teaching has to lead to practice.**

What the Practices of Jesus Do To Us

The things we do, do something to us. What we do on a regular basis shapes what we become. We are the cumulative affect of our daily and weekly habits. Just your ordinary routine of life — how you spend your morning, what your job is, how you interact with your phone, your night routine, how you spend your free time or days off, etc. — all of that is doing something to you for better or for worse.

“Because we are what we want. Our wants and longings and desires are at the core of our identity, the wellspring from which our actions and behavior flow. Our wants reverberate from our heart, the epicenter of the human person. Thus Scripture counsels, ‘Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.’ (Proverbs 4:23)... Discipleship, we might say, is a way to curate your heart, to be attentive to and intentional about what you love. **Discipleship is more a matter of hungering and thirsting than of knowing and believing.** Jesus’ command to follow him is a command to align our loves and longings with his — to want what God wants, to desire what God desires, to hunger and thirst after God and crave a world where he is all in all — a vision encapsulated by the shortened ‘the kingdom of God.’”

— James K.A. Smith

Discipleship to Jesus leads us to direct our heart towards the things that God desires and loves. **We have a role to play in what we love.** We have the authority and the power (through the Holy Spirit) to change what we want and love. In Jesus' words to seek first the kingdom of God and his right way of living.

How can we do this?

By practicing the way of Jesus, we can recalibrate our heart towards the things of God one day at a time.

A Liturgical Audit

Liturgical — the rhythms, routines and rituals that make up your day, your week, your life (ie. Your habits, your practices, your schedule, your spending, how you spend your weekend, how you spend your day at work, your relationship to your phone, etc.)

On a new note, write out your habits — the things you do on a daily basis. Then see if you can make the connection between those habits and what they are doing to your heart.

Then for a season of your life (ie. week, month, 3 months, etc.), cut out one habit of your life and then replace it with one of the practices of Jesus (ie. Prayer, Bible Reading, Fasting, Worship, Silence & Solitude). Then see after this period of time what it does to your heart.