

Practicing the Way Series

Key Thoughts On Practice

By JOHN MARK COMER

Being a Disciple of Jesus

To be a disciple of Jesus means to reorganize your entire life around these three goals:

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

All of these can be described as a *transformation*.

Sports & Spiritual Disciplines

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

— I Corinthians 9:24–27

Paul uses sports as his common metaphor for what it is like to follow Jesus:

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my race and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

— Acts 20:24

You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?

— Galatians 5:7

Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

— 1 Timothy 6:12

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

— 2 Timothy 4:7–8

Following Jesus is like being an athlete and notice the central role that discipline plays in this metaphor:

Spiritual disciples (*aka. The practices of Jesus*) — practices that are based on the lifestyle of Jesus that create a time and space for us to access the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, and in doing so, be transformed from the inside out.

Some spiritual disciplines are things like...

Silence & Solitude

Prayer

Fasting

Scripture

Community

Sabbath

Sunday Gathering

Lord's Supper

Hospitality

Teaching

Serving

Simplicity

“A discipline is any activity I can do by direct effort that will eventually enable me to do that which, currently, I cannot do by direct effort.”

— John Mark Comer

Spiritual disciplines (or the practices of Jesus) are part of following Jesus like training is a part of being a professional baseball player. Some training disciplines for baseball are things like...

Batting Practice

Bullpens

Ground-balls

Weight Lifting

Running

Dieting

Watching Video

Studying Reports

Recovery

“A discipline is a way to access power. A spiritual discipline is any activity that will help you access the power of the Holy Spirit — a power that is beyond yourself and way past your natural capacity and that is rooted in the reality of God.”

— John Mark Comer

“The disciplines are activities of mind and body purposefully undertaken, to bring our personality and total being into effective cooperation with the divine order. They enable us more and more to live in a power that is, strictly speaking, beyond us, deriving from the spiritual realm itself, as we ‘yield ourselves to God, as those that are alive from the dead, and our members as instruments of righteousness unto God,’ as Romans 6:13 puts it.”

— Dallas Willard

“Grace is not opposed to effort, but to earning.”

— Dallas Willard

You have a part to play in your discipleship to Jesus. It takes effort. It takes effort to live in any relationship in your life and that includes your relationship to God. You have a part to play in your transformation. You have a responsibility and a role to play, and God has a role that he plays. God plays the bigger part for sure but that does not negate your responsibility to put forth the effort to play your part.

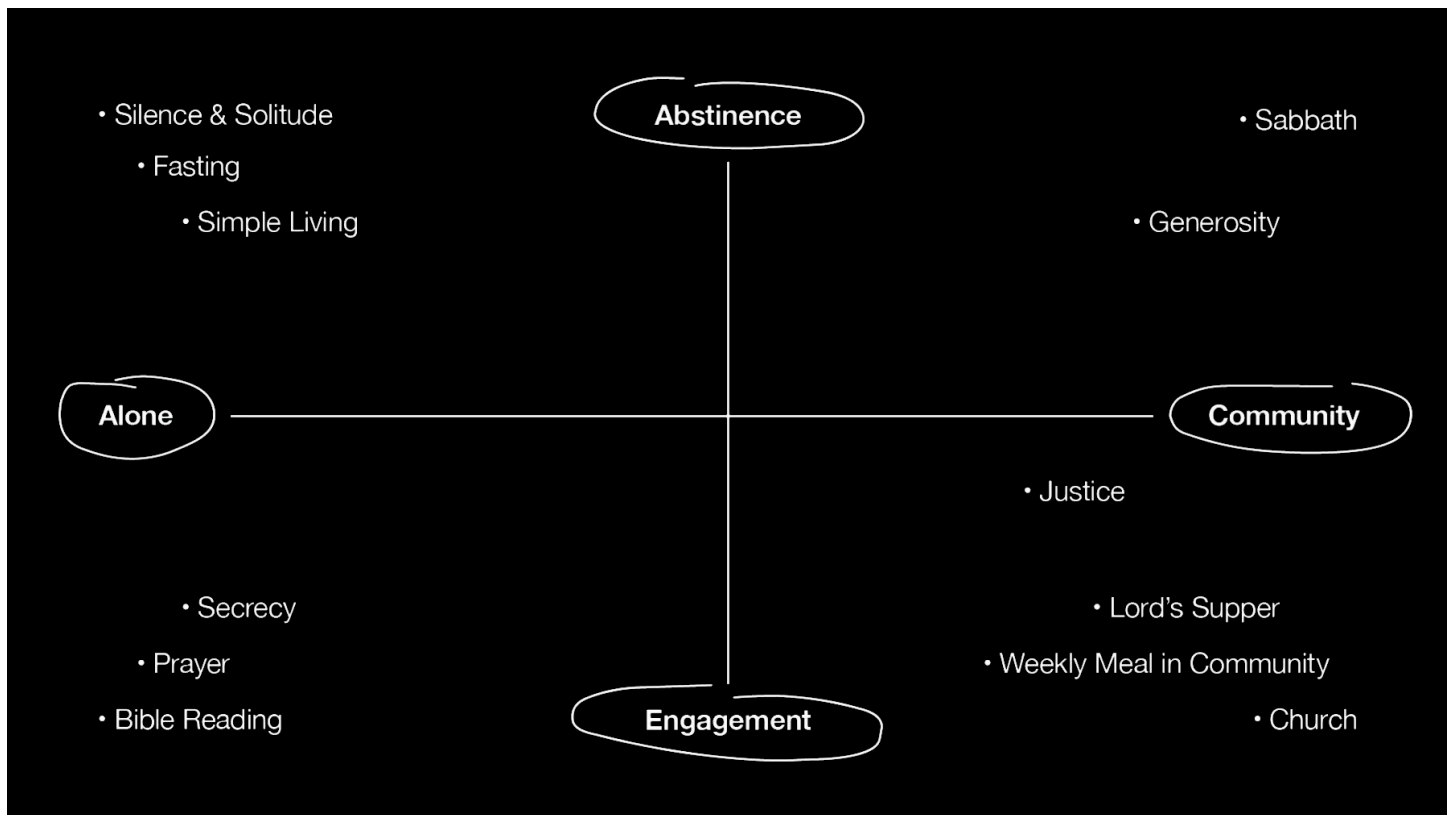
The spiritual disciplines are our part in our transformation and discipleship to Jesus. BUT all they do is open up our heart, mind, body and soul to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to do the deep real work of transformation in our life. This is why we must remember that all the spiritual disciplines are a means to an end. They are a means to an end just like training and batting practice are a means to an end.

“Following Jesus is not about trying really hard but about training really hard.”

— John Mark Comer

6 Thoughts on How to Use the Spiritual Disciplines Well

I. Smart training takes a balanced approach.



The point here is that we should not just settle for the types of disciplines that we naturally gravitate to because of our temperament or personality (ex. An introvert would gravitate towards silence & solitude but might find meals in community difficult.) We must make sure that we also embrace the disciplines that go against our natural inclinations and that we will probably find more challenging (see next thought).

2. Smart training takes into account your personality.

The point here is that even though we should not just settle for the types of disciplines that we naturally gravitate to because of our temperament and personality, we should acknowledge and be aware of the ones that we are drawn to and press into those. God has made us unique and different and that is a beautiful thing that we do not need to run away from. If you are extroverted and come alive when you are with others in community then you need to press into community and spend more time and energy there than in silence & solitude (even though you need silence & solitude too).

3. Smart training takes into account your season of life.

4. Smart training takes into account the need of the hour.

The point here is to think of the way a doctor treats and prescribes a remedy to a problem — what discipline(s) will help the most with the sin, problem or struggle that you are currently dealing with.

5. Smart training isn't afraid to do the hard work.

The point here is to press into the disciplines that you naturally gravitate towards but also do the hard work of practicing and preserving in the disciplines that you find really difficult.

6. Smart training takes into account the need for repetition.

“There is no formation without repetition.”

The spiritual disciplines change you, but it takes a while and you won't notice it's changing you. So it takes patience and repetition. It will be longer and harder than you think. (ex. The Karate Kid waxing on and waxing off.)

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

— John Mark Comer

The spiritual disciplines are non-negotiable if you want to experience true transformation in your discipleship to Jesus. And this should make sense to us... training and practice are non-negotiable if you want to experience the reality of being a professional baseball player.