

## **Discipleship #2 - Time with God**

Abide in Me. <sup>4</sup> **Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.** <sup>5</sup> **"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.** <sup>6</sup> **Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned.** <sup>7</sup> **But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!** <sup>8</sup> **When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.** <sup>9</sup> **"I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love.** <sup>10</sup> **When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love.** <sup>11</sup> **I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! John 15:4-11.**

Jesus gave us this metaphor of a winery and the need for a branch to "abide" in the vine to bear much fruit. Simply put, Abide in me and I in you. The word for abide in Greek can be translated as "remain" or "dwell" or "make your home in". Jesus used this word not once but ten times. He is wanting to make a singular point: Make your home in my presence by the spirit and never leave.

Now, to be clear, Jesus is not asking us to do anything that we are not already doing. All of us are abiding. If we are rooted in the never-ending scroll of social media, it will form us, likely into people who are angry, anxious, arrogant simplistic and distracted. If we are rooted into the endless streams of checking websites or other platforms, they will form us too, likely into people who are lustful, restless and bored. Never actually present to what is.

Where is your emotional home? What do you return to in your quiet moments. What would it look like for you to make your home inside God? This is about learning to be in two places at once, through the daily connection with Jesus. Eating your breakfast and being with Jesus. Navigating your morning commute and being with Jesus. Changing a nappy and being with Jesus. Going to school or university and being with Jesus. Sorting through your inbox and being with Jesus. Cooking dinner and resting your heart in Jesus.

Apprenticing Jesus is about letting your body become God's home and it's a fresh invitation each day. Jesus called this way of life, "Abiding". <sup>16</sup> **Rejoice always,** <sup>17</sup> **pray without ceasing,** <sup>18</sup> **give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18.** The apostle Paul called it praying without ceasing. This concept is not new. Many Christians down through history have had different names but perhaps my personal favorite is from the 1600's. A monk named Brother Lawrence called, "The Practice of the presence of God".

John Mark Comer in his book said this, **"You must ruthlessly eliminate Hurry from your Life"**. The call to apprentice Jesus is a call not to do more but do less. It's not about addition but subtraction. Jesus is calling us to slow down and simplify our lives around the three goals of being an apprentice, being with him, becoming like him and doing as he did.

The elephant in the room is that most of us have far too much going on to add Jesus to our already busy lives. I do not know how to soften the blow but if you want all that Jesus has for you, you must un-hurry your life. This is how the devil will attack you by filling your life to overflowing but with no real time for Christ. Dallas Willard famously called this, **“the great enemy of spiritual life in our day”**. Hurry is arguably the number one challenge you will face should you decide to take following Jesus seriously. Like the enemy, it won't just stand in your way; it will actively fight against you.

We see this in the Old Testament. In the life of Daniel. He was hugely successful. He rose through the ranks of the administration. To give you some idea of how successful he was – The King organised the entire empire into 120 provinces. He named a ruler of each one. Daniel was one of those leaders.

**<sup>1</sup>Darius the Mede decided to divide the kingdom into 120 provinces, and he appointed a high officer to rule over each province. <sup>2</sup>The king also chose Daniel and two others as administrators to supervise the high officers and protect the king's interests. <sup>3</sup> Daniel soon proved himself more capable than all the other administrators and high officers. Because of Daniel's great ability, the king made plans to place him over the entire empire. Daniel 6:1-3.**

Daniel proved himself so capable, so gifted that the King not only trusted, him but made him second in charge of the entire empire. **<sup>10</sup>But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God. Daniel 6:10-11.**

Did you notice that “as usual”. He prayed three times a day - “as he always had”. Daniel's spiritual life was ordered around prayer. We are told he had a set place in his home, an upstairs room. He didn't leave anything to chance. He built it into his life, and he prioritised it. The Bible says, “just as he had always done”. It was a pattern, a habit. He had an incredibly busy job, yet he made the time.

Rich Villodas, a pastor in New York City said this, **“Our souls were not created for the kind of speed to which we have become accustomed. Thus, we are people who are out of rhythm, a people with too much to do and not enough time to do it. Our lives can easily take us to the brink of burnout. The pace we live at is often destructive. The problem before us is not just the frenetic pace we live at but what gets pushed out from our lives, that is, time with God.**

To say yes to Jesus' invitation to apprentice under him is no say no to countless other invitations. We need to make space in our days to pause, to breathe, to abide. Why not un-hurry your life to apprentice under Jesus?

**<sup>35</sup> The following day John was again standing with two of his disciples. <sup>36</sup> As Jesus walked by, John looked at him and declared, “Look! There is the Lamb of God!” <sup>37</sup> When John's two disciples heard this, they followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup> Jesus looked around and saw them following. “What do you want?” he asked them. They replied, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”),**

**“where are you staying?” <sup>39</sup> “Come and see,” he said. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon when they went with him to the place where he was staying, and they remained with him the rest of the day. John 1: 35-39.**

In John one, Jesus said, “come and see”. God is not a concept or an emotion. He is not a chapter in a book. He is a person who has a burning desire to know you and to be known by you. Like any intimate relationship, it is fostered by direct person-to-person experience. To experience the love of God is to be transformed into a person of love. So many of us fail to grasp the staggering immensity of God’s love for them. This is where true happiness and peace are found.

**<sup>14</sup> For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. <sup>16</sup> I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3: 14-19.**

Of course, everyday should start with that very old Christian spiritual discipline - a really good coffee. Some days my mind is sharp and alert, my heart is burning for God, and I feel God’s nearness. Other days, my mind is like as Henri Nouwen once said, “A banana tree filled with monkeys”. It’s all over the place, my heart is troubled and afraid, and I struggle to pay attention.

In our fast paced, productivity-obsessed, digitally distracted culture, it’s hard and counterculture to slow down. So, the idea of slowing down, coming to quiet, dealing with all those distractions within and without and just letting God pour his love into you sounds like a waste of time.

Prayer, that is being with Jesus, is our primary way, our major way of being with Jesus. Some would say that it is a portal to joy. The reward of prayer is Jesus. It’s the sheer joy of friendship with him. **<sup>15</sup> I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. John 15:15.**

**<sup>6</sup> But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. Matthew 6:6.**

The word Jesus used for “room” in Greek can be translated as “inner room”. So, Jesus is saying, I want you to find a place, maybe unique to you, maybe not, where you can be with him through prayer. He is also saying that our environment for prayer is important. I know from personal experience that certain environments help me focus on my work and prayer, while others seem to sabotage it.

When you read the four Gospels of Jesus in the New Testament, one thing jumps out at you. Jesus had a rhythm of retreat and return. Like breathing in and then out. Jesus would retreat. He would slip away from the noise and press of the crowd and find a place where he could

pray either alone or with a few very close friends. He would come back to preach, teach, heal and deliver. All done with love. <sup>35</sup> **Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Mark 1: 35.**

The phrase “solitary place” can be translated to “*deserted place*” or “*quiet place*”. In the Gospel of Luke, we read the same word again. <sup>16</sup> **But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. Luke 5: 16.**

<sup>39</sup> **Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. Luke 22:39.**

<sup>2</sup> **Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. John 18:2.**

I think that sometimes we all have excuses of why we can't pray or spend time with Jesus. There is a battle going on. On the one hand we deeply desire time with God but part of us resists him and we allow our own agendas to get in the way. One reason so many people avoid the quiet is because they have yet to find a way of being with God that works with their personalities and stages of life.

**“Without quiet prayer, your life with prayer will wither; with it you will come alive to the greatest joy of life; a familiar friendship with Jesus”. Practicing the Way: Be with Jesus, Become like him, Do as he did. John Mark Comer.**

An ancient writer put it like this, “the most important thing that happens between God and the human soul is to love and be loved”. Do you believe that? That the most important thing in all of life is to love and be loved by God. David in Psalm twenty-seven puts it like this, **One thing I ask from the Lord, that only do I seek that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple. Psalm 27:4.**

With the rise of social media and digital algorithms, all aimed at getting you to slide your finger across your phone. This plays a huge part in our lives. It shapes what we think, feel, believe, shop and live. The world as it's called in the New Testament is constantly forming us whether we realise it or not. The question is -what is it forming us into? Or what or who am I becoming.

If we are not being intentionally formed by Jesus himself, then its highly likely we are being unintentionally formed by someone or something else. So, again, who are you following? Of all the countless options he's the one I choose to follow. You are going to end up following someone, so choose each day to follow Jesus. I invite you to consider the three most important words ever spoken in human history - **Come Follow Me.**