

# Disciples

*Together*  
*Being with Jesus*  
*Learning from Jesus*  
*Becoming like Jesus*



# Section 1

# Discipleship – an introduction

## Let's start with what it's not...

In Mark 8:34-35 we see Jesus address “the crowd” and “his disciples”. There’s a striking difference here, as he tells them what it means if they want to be a disciple of his. He tells them what it will cost them, but also what they will gain through it.

Throughout the New Testament you’ll read of “the crowd” who show up to events when Jesus teaches or performs a miracle. But then, there are the disciples who are with him all the time, not just when the signs and wonders start to happen.

The crowd can be amazed and in awe of Jesus just as the disciples can. But the crowd can come and go as it pleases. In John 6:60-69 we read the account of how when they did not like the teaching of Jesus, when they found it too challenging, they decided to walk away. But when Jesus asked those who were truly his disciples whether his teaching was too hard for them, and if they wanted to walk away, they replied “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life... You are the Holy One...”

Do you see it? There’s a difference between the crowd and the disciples. In our modern world we’ve turned the term “Christian” into a blanket term that covers both the crowd and the disciples. But that was never what it meant at the birth of the church.

Disciples are those who follow Jesus, every moment of every day. We need to ask ourselves are we “Christians” or are we disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. The

invitation of Jesus was not “believe I am God, go to church once in a while and be a good person”. The invitation of Jesus was “come, follow me.”

A.W. Tozer once wrote that “a notable heresy has come into being throughout evangelical Christian circles – the widely-accepted concept that we humans can choose to accept Christ only because we need him as Saviour and that we have the right to postpone our obedience to him as Lord as long as we want to”. He later writes that “salvation apart from obedience is unknown in the sacred scriptures”.

There’s a difference between the crowd and the disciples.

### **“Discipleship” – Just a buzz word**

Throughout its existence, especially in recent years, the church has had all kinds of buzz words: seeker sensitive services, accountability, purpose driven... Is discipleship just the latest of the many, many, buzz words church leaders have thrown out there over the years?

No. It’s not, and here’s why....

The term disciple (*Greek: Mathetes – pronounced Math-a-taes*) is used 268 times in the New Testament. It is the dominate language for being a Christian in the Bible itself. It’s way more than a buzz word, it’s a bible word!

### **Disciple/Mathetes – both sound just as confusing as each other**

So what is a disciple? What does the term disciple mean?

Mathetes translated into English literally means “one who engages in learning through the instruction of another” or “pupil” or (and in my opinion the best modern word for making sense of an ancient Greek term) “apprentice”. To be a Mathetes, a disciple, is all about learning from someone, so that you become like them. How different is that to what most Christians think Christianity is about today? For most people Christianity is about deciding to believe something so that you go to heaven. But for Jesus, faith in him, yes meant trusting and hoping in him and all that he did, but it also meant that

your life should start to look different in the here and now as well.

Faith is one of those great “buzz words” of Christianity. But it has weight. Faith should literally have weight - your weight. If you have faith in Jesus you should be putting all of your weight on to him, like when you step onto a bridge you have faith that it will hold you. When you have faith in something it moves you to stand somewhere different – on a bridge, or on Jesus. If we have faith in Jesus, we should be completely willing to trust, not just in his death and resurrection but also in his teaching, his “yoke” and his “way” (they’re words we’ll look at a little later on). You see Jesus was a rabbi – a teacher. So, if we have faith in him, we should be wanting to learn everything we can from him and putting the weight of our lives on his words. We should be wanting to be his apprentices, his disciples.

And I write “be his disciples” not “do his discipleship” because *Mathetes* is actually a noun, and not a verb. It isn’t something you do, so much as something that you are. You are a learner, you are an apprentice, you’ve given your life over to learn all that you can from him because you have faith in him and you believe beyond all doubt that he is the way, the truth and the life. You are a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth.

Now, before you start thinking this sounds like a cult, like something that we’ve pulled out of context from the bible and made into some weird idea that will completely change your life and make you seem a little bit weird to the world around you (*I’m afraid it might just do that... but it isn’t a cult, I promise*)... This wasn’t something that I’ve made up, and it wasn’t even something that Jesus made up.

### **Rabbi**

Like I’ve said already Jesus was a rabbi – a teacher. And in Jesus’ time all rabbi’s had disciples. They’d be pretty poor teachers if they had empty classrooms. So, like all the other rabbi’s Jesus also had disciples. But the class

of AD30 with rabbi Jesus wasn't just any ordinary class. What Jesus was teaching was something radical even for a 1<sup>st</sup> century rabbi. Most rabbis at that time were teaching observance to the Torah (that's pretty much the Old Testament) in the hope that if all Israel kept it for one whole day then God would return to them. Jesus on the other hand was teaching that God was already near, that His kingdom was "at hand". Jesus wasn't teaching a way that led you to Heaven, but a way that brought Heaven to earth. He was teaching people to be fully alive human beings; He was teaching them how to allow the image of God to be restored in humanity once again.

So how does that even happen? If it's "at hand" how do I touch it, see it, smell it, taste it, sense it?

Well Jesus certainly said that we could, so if we really want to experience all that he came to give us, if we really want to experience life and life in all of its fullness, then we need to start to live as disciples and not just the crowd.

To be a disciple means having two goals:

### **1. To be with your rabbi (all the time)**

In Mark 3:14 it says that Jesus appointed 12 "that they might be with him". That is job number one. If we want to learn his way then we need to get up close, to see it, to hear it, to experience it. And that might mean moving your life about somewhat. When the original disciples started to follow Jesus, they gave up everything, their jobs, their families. Go read about it in Matthew 4:18-22.

But how do you even do that with a guy who has already died and ascended into heaven? Well Jesus told his disciples, in Matthew 28, that he was with them always. Even though he went into the heavens he sent back his Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus. The same Spirit that he performed signs and wonders by.

So we can be with Jesus by being with his Spirit. Our first goal then is learning

to live in constant awareness of the Spirit. Jesus called this “abiding in the vine”. Brother Lawrence called it “the practise of the presence of God”. It all starts by choosing to follow him, all the time. By being with him.

## **2. To learn from him and become like him**

In Luke 6:40 Jesus says this “The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.”

- The student: *in Greek: mathetes = Disciple*
- is not above the teacher: their *rabbi*
- but everyone who is fully trained: *been through the discipleship process*
- will be like their teacher: *that’s the end goal*

This process has been commonly referred to as “spiritual formation”, but I find that title a little misleading at times as people have a habit of separating out the “spiritual” and the “physical/practical”. But in Jesus time, and in the bible, they are one of the same thing. We are both dirt and breath, dust and ruach (*spirit*), physical and spiritual, and you cannot separate one from the other. Genesis 2:7 shows us that only with the two parts are we each able to be a single, complete, alive human being. The two are interwoven and shape and form each other. We’ll come on to this later on, but this is why you find Jesus saying such crazy things like “if your right eye causes you to sin, cut it out” and “what good is it to gain the world but lose your soul”. What happens in your spirit shapes the physical and practical you, and what happens in your physical life shapes and forms your inner life.

Dallas Willard writes that spiritual formation is “a process of increasingly being possessed and permeated by the character traits of Jesus”. Do you want to become like Jesus? Do you want to be anxiety free, not in a hurry, able to love your enemy, full of wisdom and patience, and to see life, hope and healing spring up in the world around you?



Then we need to allow Jesus to become our rabbi again, and we need to become his apprentices, his disciples.



## **Section 2**

# Together

## **In the beginning...**

There is a rule in Hebrew literature called the rule of firsts. If you want to understand something, and the meaning of it, then you need to go back to the first time that a word appears or that an event happens. Discipleship is all about us learning from Jesus, through his Spirit, to be fully alive human beings again, to re-become those who bear the image of God. So, if we want to better understand that then we need to go back to the first time and place that God set this plan in motion, creating image bearing human beings through His word, by His Spirit. We need to look to see what the designer dreamed up for how it would all work. We need to go back to Genesis, the book of beginnings.

Here we find the first human – Adam. Made of dust and breath, both physical and spiritual, two and yet one. There’s already relationship involved in this being’s nature. But as we read on, we discover God saying, “it’s not good for man to be alone.” If Adam is going to truly reflect the nature of, and bear the image of, this God who is Himself a relational God (Father, Son and Spirit) then Adam is going to one: need some help doing it, and two: be in relationship himself. And so, God makes a helper for Adam, a woman, flesh of his own flesh, different from all the other animals, someone that Adam can relate to, someone who can do bear the image of God with Adam.

## **Zap**

Now Jesus said that the Spirit will teach us everything we need to learn (John 14:26). So, if the Spirit does that, why do we need other human beings? Well, spiritual formation, learning to become like Jesus, is actually something

you have to work at. I trained as a teacher and I can quite easily stand at the front of a classroom and deliver educational content. But that doesn't mean that those in the room listening will necessarily take it in. My observation has been, and what most of my training taught has me, is that people generally learn better in groups and in environments where they can work something out and engage with it, not simply just by hearing it spoken at them.

It is a myth that with just one zap of the Spirit you'll instantly become fully like Jesus. As you read through the New Testament, you will see that the disciples received the Holy Spirit on more than one occasion. Becoming like Jesus takes effort combined with the work of the Holy Spirit. And in the beginning God saw that a human being needed the help of another human being when it came to working something out. We need each other if we are going to become learners in the class of Jesus.

### **Your or Your**

No that is not a typo. They are two different forms of "your". *You* will see in just a moment.

But first, back to the Spirit, because the transformation in our lives is a work of the Holy Spirit. Throughout the scriptures there are countless references to 'unity' that are connected to the Spirit. And I want to show here that we not only need each other because if we plan on being successful at our task we'll need help, but also because the Holy Spirit wants us to be in community in order for Him to be able to do His role in our formation as disciples of Jesus.

Look for a moment at 1 Corinthians 6:19. It says this:

*"Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God?"*

Seems simple enough right? Your body, your flesh and blood, is the place that the Holy Spirit, at the wish of God the Father, has now taken up residence.

But we only read it that way because the English language isn't as expressive as the original Greek. And so, we actually read it wrong. Let me unpack it for you. Here it is again with some added explanation.

1. *Do you not know that your* – Here “you” and “your” are both plural, so the author isn't talking to you as an individual but to us, the collective called the church.

2. *Do you not know that your body* – Here the word body is the singular form. Ok, hang in here with me... So, you and your are plural meaning the passage is addressing a collective, but the word “body” is singular so the passage is referring to a singular body of a collection of people: many people making up one single body. And not your individual body, as in your personal hands and feet. So, so far this passage is talking to a group of people that make up one body and not individual separate people.

3. *Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit* – The word temple is also singular in the Greek, so the author is talking to multiple people that make up one body, that is the singular temple, or dwelling place, of the Holy Spirit.

4. *Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, who you have received from God* – Here both times the word “you” is used it is the plural form that is used in the Greek. So here the author is now referring to each and every one of us as a collective again and not to you as an individual entity in your own right.

Ok, if you [singular – so I'm talking to you, haha] are feeling confused, let me just spell out what's happening here.

The Holy Spirit is poured out on each of us, but His residence, His dwelling place, the place he can be found (i.e. His temple) isn't in you personally as an

individual, but in “you” as in all of you reading this booklet – the church as a single entity, a single body.

All of you, collectively/together are one body, that is the temple of the Holy Spirit, whom you, collectively, have received.

Emily, my wife, says it’s like a body of water. A lake, for example is made up of many particles of water. Fish live in the “lake” (the body of water), and not specifically in separate particles of water. No one individual water particle could contain a whole fish, but one body of water particles joined together can.

Now I know what you’re thinking, “but Matt, the Holy Spirit is in me though right?” and the answer to that is yes. If you believe in Jesus the Spirit is in you. But He is in you because you believe in Jesus and are now part of the body of Christ. It’s like we are the body of Christ, and the Spirit is the blood. While we’re attached to the body, like a finger, toe or ear, His blood runs through us. But, in the same way as if you cut your finger off it would cease to have your blood flow through it, if you ceased being part of the Church (the body of Christ) then His blood, so to speak, would cease to run through you. His Spirit is in you, as an individual part of the body, because you are part of the body.

The Holy Spirit moves in community. If you read through the book of Acts, almost every single time the Spirit is poured out it is poured out on a group of people. So, if we want to allow him to be at work in us, teaching us and forming us into the likeness of Jesus then we need to be in community. Discipleship doesn’t happen in isolation.

### **The Lone Ranger**

The role of spiritual formation, the purpose of discipleship, is to form Jesus within us. Paul writes “it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me”, he has a new identity. Back to Genesis again... Identity is worked out in

community. In Genesis we read about one person who becomes two people, as Eve is made out of Adam. But then these two people become one flesh and it's here that for the first time, after they've become a community and have been on adventure together, journeying right and wrong and shaping each other's lives that they finally stop being called "the man" and "the woman" and they have names, identities.

If you want to work out your salvation, your call, your identity, what it means for you to be you, your gifts, and what it means for you to follow Jesus, then you need a community.

Daniel Merriweather had a song called 'Red' in which the first line of the chorus cried out "I can't do this by myself". And we can't. You won't make it on your own. The youth Alpha videos use a great image of a coal being taken out of a fire. You'll stay warm for a while but slowly you'll become more and more cold and you'll lose your heat, your fire, your passion. You won't be part of a fire anymore; you'll just be a lump of coal.

There was once a disciple who went it alone. No one realised at first because this disciple still hung with the crowd. He was there at all the major events, he showed up to church, he sang the songs but despite that he was still a lone ranger. He never opened up, he was never honest about his heart or his thoughts, and he never allowed others to walk the teaching of Jesus with him so that it transformed him. He smiled and nodded along, he looked the part, but he was failing at being a disciple. And here's the rub: if you're not engaging with others in learning from Jesus, it's not just that you won't be shaped by Jesus, you will end up being shaped by something, or someone, else. This disciple was called Judas and he was shaped by greed and money, and he ended up betraying Jesus.

If you look at the call of the disciples, you'll notice that many of them became disciples as part of a group, or at least in pairs. Go read Matthew 4:18-22



you'll see that Jesus calls Simon and Andrew, and then he calls James and John. Or read Acts 16:33 and you'll see that whole households at the same time got baptised and became disciples of Jesus. We need each other. We are called as brothers and sisters to a group, a family, a collective, to one body. If Adam couldn't work out this being a bearer of the image of God thing on his own, and he was the original, the cookie cutter from which we're all formed, then we most certainly can't.

### **How?**

So that's the question then. We want to be disciples, we know we need to be part of a community, but it's more, way more, than just showing up to church on a Sunday. So how do we together do life in a way that is authentic and really enables us to be disciples of Jesus?

I've made this point already, but I want to make it one more time from a personal perspective. When I was 16-18 I was going to church, I was even leading worship, I was passionate for Jesus. But I wasn't being a disciple. I was doing the "Christian" stuff, but I wasn't allowing the Spirit to teach me and form me. And yet I was always praying for the Spirit to move and seeking to follow the Spirit when I led worship. So why wasn't I really being a disciple? Because there were areas of my life that I kept shut off from other people and from God. And eventually I ended up leaving church and trying my hardest to run from God.

You can be "doing" all the right things, but still not be a disciple of Jesus.

There's no "right" answer to this part. You need to figure out what works for you. I had a mentor when I was 17, but I had so much respect for him that I was too afraid to be honest with him about what was really going on for me and so I just said all the "right" things. Again, like Jesus said what's the point in gaining the world, all your hopes and dreams (like mine to be leading worship at that point), if it means that you lose your soul. Together doesn't

just mean standing next to someone at a gathering, it means really being together. Like it says of Adam and Eve “Adam knew His wife.” It’s intimate, it’s open.

So here are some ways you can be together, but if you’re serious about Jesus then be serious about walking with those he’s given you. Don’t be a Judas. Don’t be a lone ranger. Be a disciple.

You could join a home group. In our church these are great places to get to know people, to build relationship and trust, and to be able to intentionally do life around Jesus together. You can read the bible together and be honest about what excites you or confuses the heck out of you when you read it. You can ask all the questions you like. You can share what you’re passionate about or what you’re struggling with in life and have people support you in prayer and if you want it, share their wisdom with you.

You could get a mentor. These are intentional relationships where two people meet up on a monthly basis, share some life together, but also ask intentional questions about your walk with God.

You could form a prayer triplet. These are small groups that get together to pray for each other and the things that you’re all going through on a regular basis (weekly or bi-weekly). Just a short 30 minute catch up and prayer before work, or in the evening, whenever suits you.

There are so many ways to be “together”, but the key is that together is about spaces and relationships in which people are honest with each other and open to the holy spirit. There is never any judgement, just encouragement to fight the good fight, and run the race. We’re all on a journey of becoming like Jesus, and we all need each other if we want to make it any distance on that journey.

If you're interested in joining a home group, finding a mentor or starting a prayer triplet please talk to one of the eldership.



## **Section 3**

# Being with Jesus

## Up close and personal

Our God is a god of relationship. We've already seen that. He is in Himself a relationship; He made humans to have relationship, both with one another and with Him; and throughout the bible He is constantly reaching out to build relationships with people. But in order to have relationship you have to get up close and personal, you need to be near. The language of relationship is intimate, and that's why throughout the bible you read about God as a lover, and a father.

In one of his books the author Rob Bell speaks of the honour it was for a disciple to be covered in the dust of their rabbi. The ancient near east was a hot and dusty place. Your role as a disciple was to literally walk in the footsteps of your rabbi, to go where he would go and do what he would do. As they closely followed their rabbi they would become more and more covered in the dust that would spray up from the ground with every footstep. Are you close enough that the dust of Jesus is getting on you?

Jesus didn't just invite us to see what he was up to, as if to look on from a distance. Which is how it can sometimes feel over 2000 years later right? His invitation was "come and see". You're invited to *MOVE* towards him. The bible is full of the language of closeness and movement, right from the start through to the end. In Genesis God is an up-close God whose breath is breathed into us and brings us to life, how I long for that breath every day, to be that close to feel His breath. He walks with humanity in the garden. In Exodus 3 He calls Moses to *COME* near, and in Exodus 34 He shows more

intimately who He is as if to say *SEE*. Leviticus, as much as it's a book that many people find weird or even boring, it is at its heart a book all about drawing near to God. The opening line in Hebrew is all about God continuing to call to His people, and what is He calling to them about? He's calling them to come near and showing them how to do it. At the end of the previous book, Exodus, the people are stuck outside of the presence of God, but thanks to God's instruction in Leviticus when we get to the opening line of the next book, Numbers, they've moved into the presence of God.

In the New Testament, in John 1, we read about how God moved Heaven and Earth and became one of us so that we could literally see Him. At the end of the bible, in the book of Revelation, we read about how God will bring Heaven and Earth fully together and will come and make His dwelling, His home, among us here on earth. And with that we read the intimate language of how, as a father, He will wipe away every tear from our eyes. If we want to be disciples, to learn from and become like Jesus it starts with us getting close to Him. If we're the clay and we want to be formed, we need to be in the potter's hands.

### **In the kitchen**

A monk from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, called Brother Lawrence, wrote this: *"The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquillity as if I were upon my knees before the Blessed Sacrament."*

For Brother Lawrence it didn't matter where he was, what he was doing, nor what was going on around him. He had learned to live in a constant state of awareness and connection to the Holy Spirit. That is how we are able to be with Jesus. In John 14:16-18 Jesus says that He will send us the Spirit and the Spirit will be with us forever. He goes on to say that we can know him

because he lives in us, and in this way, Jesus will never leave us. It is through His Spirit that Jesus is with us, and that we can be with Him.

In another passage (John 15) Jesus calls this “abiding in the vine”. The word “abide” in the Greek is the word *Meno* and it literally translates as:

- remain
- abide
- to stay at home in

And this concept is so important to Jesus that he uses this single word (*Meno*) here in this passage ten times. Jesus spent His life abiding in the Father, and he cant stress enough to us how important it is for us to get into the Fathers presence and stay there, to make ourselves at home there, whether you’re in the kitchen, at a desk, on the sofa, taking the bus, walking through the park, talking on the phone, playing with your children, eating dinner... do it all in the Father’s presence, do it all in a constant state of awareness and connection to the Spirit.

### **Me-not-know how to meno all the time**

So I hear you, that sounds SO hard to achieve. I know what you’re thinking, I struggle to read my bible without falling to sleep or becoming distracted most of the time. How on earth do you meno and live in a constant state of being with Jesus?

Let me just say it straight up, without lacing it with all the modern niceties that we so often like to wrap the Christian message in at church. It is hard! Jesus Himself said that being His disciple would cost you. He used phrases like “take up your cross.” Just so we’re on the same page here a cross isn’t a nice little wooden thing that you put in a church building, at least it wasn’t back then when Jesus said it. A cross was a noose, an electric chair, or a lethal injection, a cross was a method of execution, an incredibly painful way of ending your life, and if you were the one taking it up it was your life that was coming to an end. The men, and women, who became disciples of Jesus gave



up their jobs, their families, and all that they had to follow Him, to go where He was going.

The bible also uses language like sit, eat, taste and see. We all know how to sit and how to eat (maybe some of us better than others). But if you're invited to go sit with a friend and eat at their house then you have to leave where you are and go be where they are. You also have to trust their cooking! The language of discipleship is the language of movement, change and trust. You can't be a disciple and carry on just as you are in every way.

So how do we do it? It's simple really (*and yet hard to swallow at times*). It comes down to habits. Dallas Willard writes that we need to allow grace filled habits to replace our former ones and return us to God. Basically, we need to make new habits. If you see someone you like, like when I saw Emily for the first time, you make (consciously or unconsciously) some decisions to form new habits. If you want to get close to that person, to get to know them, you change your schedule a little and make room for them. You give up some old habits and invest in new ones. To be a disciple doesn't just happen, you have to be intentional about it. You need to look at Jesus and hear His invitation to "come and follow" Him and decide do you really want to, do you really think He's worth it, or not.

### **Practising the presence**

Practising the presence is the phrase that Brother Lawrence used to describe these new habits. They've been called many things over the years, for example *Spiritual disciplines* or a more modern version *means of grace*. And I love that last one because that's what they are. You don't just fast to say, "hey I went without food for a day", that's not the point of fasting. You fast because it does something. It is a means to an end. And that end is the grace of God – Jesus Himself.

So here are some ways and means in which you can practise the presence, in

which you can cultivate a constant state of awareness and connection to the Spirit, in which you can form new grace filled habits, in which you can *be with Jesus*.

## **Worship**

The bible tells us that God inhabits the praises of His people. So, sing! Sing your heart out! Who cares if you can't hold a tune, it's not about you, it's about Him. Become less aware of yourself and more aware of Him. Don't make worship about you. In the words of the song undignified by Matt Redman, which was written about King David, "I will dance, I will sing to be mad for my king... I'll become even more undignified than this, some may say it's foolishness." And as John the Baptist said, I must decrease and You (Jesus) must increase. Worship isn't really about singing, it's about the overflow of the heart's response to Him, who He is and all that He has done, so let your heart overflow. *"For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of" (Jesus words in Matthew 12:34).*

Look at Him, and throw yourself in. I've heard people say "yes, but worship is more than singing" and yes, they're right it is about a life lived out, but it is also singing, so that's not an excuse not to sing. The bible contains over 400 references to singing and 50 commands to sing. Singing and music really do help us to experience God's presence. I've heard people say that worship music is "manipulative" and my response to that is "yes, it is" and I believe it's supposed to be. In 2 Kings 3:15 when Elisha is asked by some kings to listen to God for them, he asks for a harpist to play music. Why? Who knows for sure, but probably because he was surrounded by the noise of an army in camp, or maybe because he was frustrated with these kings and his mind was focussed on that, and when the music played it calmed him and took all that away, it manipulated and moulded his heart and mind into a place where he could hear God speak. Worship is all about Jesus, but there's something incredible that happens as we sing to Him and about Him... We, our hearts and minds, become present, as the rest of the world slips away, and we start to become

aware of and experience the presence of our God who IS with us, and we find ourselves echoing the words of Jacob *“Surely the LORD is in this place and I was not aware”* (Genesis 28:16).

## **Prayer**

Deuteronomy 4:7 says *“What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him?”*

Do you see that?

God. Is. Near. Us. When. We. Pray.

I don't know about you but I'm one for praying “on the go” which is great, and God loves it when I pray to Him at any time about anything. But, there is something different about being intentional with my prayer times, about doing as Jesus said to do and going alone into my room, closing the door and praying. It shuts me off from the rest of the world, which is different to when I pray while I'm driving and looking at all that is going on around me. It gets me alone with God.

## **Silence & Solitude**

In the scriptures we read about how Jesus would take Himself off to a lonely place, a place where He could be alone. And this was important to Jesus. One example is in Luke 5:16, notice how either side of this verse, where Jesus is alone, He does incredible miracles. The place of solitude is so important.

Jesus said that He only did what He saw the Father doing. For Jesus getting time away from the world to sit and listen to God is so key. And silence is also key to that. We read that in those places Jesus prayed. We often think of prayer as spewing out loads of words to God. But it's more than that, it's also listening to him, and how are you going to listen if you don't ever have silence?

It's not easy, I've often sat alone in silence and wondered what I was doing there, I didn't feel a thing. But Psalm 46:10 says this *“Be still and know that I*

*am God*". Notice those words, first Be still. In our modern world I think we often feel that we have to be doing something to make something happen, but here we're just commanded to stop and be, not to do. And second it says, "and know", not "and feel". We rely so much on our feelings, and feelings are a great thing, but we need to let what we know shape our feelings and not what we feel shape our thoughts. Feelings can be fleeting, and they can change as easily as the wind. Truth, who God is, never changes. You may not feel anything, but you can know Him as God as you are still.

## **Sabbath**

Before we go any further I want you to remove from your mind all that you know about Sabbath. For most of us we hear the word and instantly what comes to mind, if you're my age or older (and the older you are the more extreme this mindset will be), is going to church, maybe twice on a Sunday, shops being closed, lunch around the family table, no work and possibly not a lot of anything. Sabbath traditionally has been all about a day where we were not allowed to do a single thing. But I want to argue against that, and I think that Jesus would as well. You see that view of Sabbath is a very Pharisee kind of view. It's legalistic and it's all about rules. Take a look at what Jesus did on the Sabbath, and how much that really annoyed the Pharisees.

Jesus taught people on the Sabbath (Luke 4:31).

Jesus set a man free from demon possession on the Sabbath (Luke 4:31-37).

Jesus healed on the Sabbath (Luke 4:38-39).

Jesus and his disciples picked, prepared and ate food (Luke 6:1-2).

Jesus healed a man's hand on the Sabbath (Luke 6:6-11).

Jesus heals a crippled woman on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10-17).

Jesus healed another man on the Sabbath (Luke 14:1-4).

Jesus heals a paralysed man on the Sabbath (John 5:1-16).

Jesus heals a blind man on the Sabbath (John 9:1-14).

Here's the thing about Sabbath, we have treated it as if it has some kind of

power or rule over us. And I can see where that has come from, because in the Old Testament God is saddened that His people haven't kept the Sabbath and have done all kinds of things. But God isn't saddened because they "broken the rules" but because they've abandoned time with Him and not celebrated and enjoyed all that He has given them. Sabbath is a day to celebrate God and all that He has given us. And it is a day to celebrate the fruit of your work, as God did on the seventh day in the creation narrative at the start of Genesis. It's a day to enjoy the fruit of your labour, not a day to get trapped in trying not to do anything. Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.

Yes, it is a day of rest. But it is completely possible to do nothing and yet not find yourself rested, and even at times more stressed out by doing nothing. True rest, true Shalom, where you are at peace, actually looks like something and not nothing. Look at Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, and you see that Sabbath looks like reaping and enjoying the produce of the land – it could look like cooking and baking a wonderful meal to enjoy, a meal that you have worked hard all week to earn money for so that you can rest in and celebrate, with you friends or family, the goodness and provision of God. When we look at what Jesus did on the Sabbath, we see that Sabbath could be anything that brings life, sets us free, and makes us well. All these things, whatever shape or form they take, should point us to God, the giver of life and all that is good, and cause us to remember Him and celebrate Him.

### **Others**

There are so many habits, or means of grace, that you can form. But like with all these things they take time. When the disciples first followed Jesus, he had them walk the length and breadth of Israel. It was a long walk, it took time. We can often read the pages of the bible as if it all happened in a matter of hours or days. It took years. So, set aside time, and set your expectation realistically, but be intentional. Back in Jesus day the disciples probably went to the synagogue every day, and every day they would have read the

scriptures, most days they would have broken bread with one another, and every day they would have said set prayers at different times (as well as any other prayers they wanted to offer up). These were the habits and lifestyle of a disciple; these were not optional things. They were what you did if you wanted to cultivate an awareness of, and connection to, the Holy Spirit. Here are some other grace filled habits that you can look to develop in your life: fasting, or reading Scripture.

### **Pick up the phone**

As a pastor, previously as a youth worker and actually just as a follower of Jesus, I've often heard people tell me again and again that they feel far from God and that they don't know where He is. When I ask them if they've been praying regularly, if they've been picking up their bible and reading it daily, and if they've been taking time to worship Him, the answer is always the same... "um... not really."

It's like having your mobile phone sat on the arm of the sofa to the side of you while you're watching whatever the latest tv show is you like to loose yourself in. Bob tries to call you. Your phone lights up and rings and rings and rings....

...and rings...

...and rings...

...and rings.

But you don't notice it because you're too sucked in to what's in front of you. And then later on you turn to your husband, wife, boyfriend, girlfriend, house mate, colleague, mother, father, sister, brother, your pastor or youth worker, and moan to them that you never hear from your friend Bob anymore.

The question isn't "where is God" but "where are you?"

If you want to be with Jesus, turn off the TV.

Be intentional.

Make some graced filled habits.





## **Section 4**

# Learning from Jesus

## **“Here, Mr Christ”**

Teachers can be both good and bad. I’m sure you’ve got a favourite that you remember, and maybe one you were terrified of that you still have nightmares about now. The good ones were often the ones who we felt a connection with, almost like they were our friend, but they weren’t, they were our teachers. One great thing about Jesus is that He is our friend. We know that all too well. But we sometimes forget that He came to be our teacher too.

He was Peter’s friend, he loved him and cared for him and he healed his mother-in-law when she was ill (ok maybe he wasn’t always the best friend). But he was also Peter’s teacher, he would ask him questions and quiz him “you’ve been watching for some time now Peter, who do you say that I am?”, and He would rebuke him if he got it wrong “Get behind me Satan” (bit harsh but I’m sure some teachers have called students worse things). My point is this, if you want to be a disciple you need a rabbi. We must start to think again of Jesus as our teacher, not just as our friend or saviour.

## **Work work work work work**

*If you’re over a certain age you probably just read that title, if you under a certain age you probably just sang it! Haha.*

Let’s talk for a minute about yoke, not the runny kind. Jesus had a yoke, as did all the other rabbis. A yoke is a farming device used to put over the neck of a donkey, a horse, or cattle. The idea was that you would yoke a younger animal to a more experienced one and it would learn to do the things the

older one had been trained to do, like plough the fields. Or it was used to put two together so that they would walk in step with each other. Now Jesus, and the other rabbis, didn't literally go around attaching themselves to their disciples with a yoke, but they did call their teaching their yoke.

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” – Matthew 11:28-30*

The pharisees had a yoke that was hard, they expected people to keep over 600 laws. Jesus boiled all that down so it was nice and easy and said that all those laws could be summed up in just one sentence: Love God and love your neighbour. The pharisees wanted you to observe so many things, but Jesus said His way would give you rest. You see with Jesus' way you still pray, but you don't pray to achieve something, you pray to because you love God and you love spending time with Him.

Do you see how Jesus yoke (His teaching) was easy and light in comparison to the pharisees? Do you see how with Jesus stopping to Sabbath was about rest and not about keeping laws? It was about what you could do, how you could be alive, not about what you couldn't do. But that doesn't mean that Jesus yoke didn't involve a little work. Yoke is a working term after all, and Jesus decided to call His teaching a Yoke, not a couch. He didn't say *“sit on my couch”* but *“take my yoke upon you.”* Jesus may only have had one sentence and not 600 or so laws to keep, but Jesus one was the most important one of them all and it still takes work to live by it, it still requires us to take up His yoke.

### **Back in my day**

That's how my nan and grandad would often start their stories, and now I fear I'm not far off of saying that myself. But back in their day, in school, they

would sit at separate desks and they would only speak when spoken too, and most of the teaching was copying lines from a chalk board. Thankfully today that's not really what schools are like anymore, and it seems to me that we've actually started to recapture the teaching style of Jesus from 2000 years ago. I have no idea where we lost the plot along the way and ended up with what my grandparents had, but I'm thankful that we're back to a more Jesus style of teaching. What I mean by that is we've adopted a more hands on, interactive, and engaging way of teaching.

The Jesus way involved a lot more group work, and a lot more modelling it and then having a go. You'd learn by seeing, so you knew it was possible, and then by trying it, and often not on your own but with some other disciples (so you'd feel like less of idiot when you got it wrong – which they often did, so you often will). Check out these examples:

- Luke 8:26-56 Jesus casts out demons, then he heals the sick. Then in Luke 9:1-6 Jesus send out the disciples to cast out demons and heal the sick.
- In Matthew 14:22-32 Jesus walks on water, then Peter has a go.

## **Holy**

There's a verse in the bible that gets repeated quite a bit in a number of places and it goes like this: Be holy as I am holy. Before we jump into it let's just clear something up, holy does not mean up yourself, or self-righteous, or better than anyone else. Holy means set apart, different, marked out, devoted to God. If Jesus was anything he was definitely set apart from the other rabbis, his ways were completely different, and his words were absolutely marked out. And Jesus, in showing us something then telling us to go do it, is basically repeating that line from the Old Testament "Be Holy, as I am Holy." Notice it doesn't say "understand holiness" it says *be it*. Jesus is showing us how to be human beings in the image of God, as we were made to be, and then calling us to step out and have a go.

## **Words and Ways**

There are two means by which we can learn from Jesus, His words and His ways. And you'll find that in every way one matches the other. So, let's look at His words first. If you want a detailed account of the words that Jesus used to teach you can start by reading Matthew 5-6 – the sermon on the mount, but there's loads more in His parables and other things that He said throughout the gospels. They're well worth a read. You'll find Jesus' teaching on:

Forgiving and forgiveness

Tithing and money

Community

Love & lust

Serving

Anger and attitude

Commitment and promise

Worth, value and life

Worry and anxiety

Provision

Trust

...and so many more things

The second source we have for learning from Jesus is His way, quite literally the things He did, how He acted and treated people, the way He responded to others and situations. Have a look through the gospels and you'll see Jesus way when it comes to all these areas and more:

- Eating and drinking
- Healing the sick
- Peace making
- Showing compassion
- Justice
- Prophesying
- Preaching the gospel

- Prayer
  - Sabbath rest
  - Miracles
  - Celebration
  - Submission to authority
- ...and so many more.

There's SO much we can learn from Jesus, from His words and His way. And if we live in a constant state of awareness of, and connection to, the Holy Spirit then He will start to teach us. He will highlight in our lives the things He wants to show us, and then He'll say to us "now you go do it, have a go." But remember all of this is easy and light, and it's all about one thing: Loving God and loving your neighbour. But man, they are two of the most challenging things to do. So, you will need to be together with other disciples on this journey, and you will need to be with Jesus.

Being with Jesus, and learning from Jesus are in themselves ways and means that lead us to an end. That end is to glorify Him by becoming like Him. By being fully restored as human beings that bear (that carry and reflect) the image of God, as we were made to do in the beginning. The practises of being with Him, and those that enable us to learn from Him ultimately both shape us to become like Him.

## **Section 5**

# Becoming like Jesus

## **Easy-peasy lemon squeezy**

This stage is the easiest one of the lot, and yet so many people get it wrong. This is the stage where if we get it wrong, we end up with religion rather than relationship when it should be the other way around. The reason that this one is the easiest stage of all the discipleship stages, for us, is because this stage is the job of the Holy Spirit, and not you or me. There are two ways in which people get this stage wrong. To start with they think that this is the first step in discipleship, rather than the outcome of it. Secondly, they think that this stage is all about having to “do good”. This is what the bible refers to as “works” and this is not how salvation works. Look at Ephesians 2:8-9 *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.”*

Tozer writes makes this observation in regard to this topic “We take a convert and immediately make a worker out of him. God never meant it to be so. God meant that a convert should learn to be a worshipper, and after that he can learn to be a worker. The work done by a worshipper will have eternity in it.”

Oswald Chambers also wrote “Beware of anything that compares with loyalty to Jesus Christ. The greatest competitor of devotion to Jesus is service for Him... The one aim of the call of God is the satisfaction of God, not a call to do something for Him.”

You see Jesus was more than a do-gooder. He happened to do good because He was only doing what He saw the Father doing. The main thing He did was



to live in constant awareness of and connection to the Holy Spirit. This in turn shaped all that came out of Him, it produced fruit in Him. That's what we need to do. That's our main responsibility – to abide in Him. And as we do that, the Spirit can do His role, and produce in us fruit.

The patterns that Jesus gave us weren't about doing good, but about cultivating a right relationship with the Father so that we might be transformed by Him into His likeness: a fully alive, image of God bearing, human being. Look at some of these passages:

### **Colossians 3:1-10**

*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

It starts by saying “You have been raised with Christ”. He's already done the hard work, there's nothing left for you to earn. But it goes on to instruct us to make a choice, and that choice is to choose to set our hearts on things above, not on earthly things – to set our hearts on Jesus. This choice leads us to the place where we then have to make some new grace filled habits and leave the old habits behind (verses 5-9), and as we do that, as we choose Jesus, and choose His way and His grace filled habits then we find ourselves *being renewed in the image of our Creator*.

### **Romans 8:28-30**

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*

Here we read that God is at work bringing about good, not us.

We are to be conformed, notice it doesn't say "try your best to conform yourself" but it says that He is the one conforming us into the image of the Son. It ends by making the same point in verse 30 as verse 28 that He is the one doing all the justifying and glorifying. He is the one who transforms us.

### **2 Corinthians 3:18**

*And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

We, again, are "being transformed", not transforming ourselves, into His image. And all this "comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit". 2 Corinthians 4:16 makes the same point.

### **Ezekiel 36:26-27**

*"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."*

Let's have one from the Old Testament, just to show that God's always been doing the same thing, He hasn't changed. Jesus after all was the always there, always at work right from the beginning, and when He came, He said that He

hadn't come abolish the Old Testament but to fulfil it. So, all that He did wasn't something new, but the fulfilment of something very ancient. Which means if we want to understand the things Jesus said, we need to understand some of this ancient Old Testament stuff too.

I love this one. Firstly, as per all the other verse, it's still God who's doing the work, it's God who's doing the transforming, not us. But secondly because I have wasted so many years and tears on trying to "get it right" and "do the right thing" when all this time I just needed His Spirit to move me.

### **Jeremiah 32:38-40**

*"They will be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me and that all will then go well for them and for their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me."*

The road map laid out here in these verses shows us how this works. In verse 28 we have a choice to be His people and allow Him to be our God. If we do that then verse 39-40 tell us what He will do. We simply have to allow Him to be our God, He does the rest. Why? Because only He can!

### **Philippians 1:6**

*being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

A well-known verse, but easy for us to forget in a world where work = reward. He has started a good work in us, and He will carry it on to completion.

### **Romans 12:1-2**

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true*

*and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

This verse spells out so clearly the discipleship pattenr:

1. Offer your body as a living sacrifice - Worship Him. Allow Him to be God. Choose Him above all else. Lay your life down.
2. Do not conform to the pattern of this world – choose new grace filled habits over the old habits.
3. Be transformed – notice it's **BE** transformed, not transform yourself. This process of Discipleship, of “being with Jesus” (1), of “learning from Jesus” (2), leads to “becoming like Jesus” (3).

### **The Spirit**

It's all a work of the Holy Spirit. We just need to position lives so that they are orientated towards Him. Check out the book of Acts, you'll notice that most of the time when something big happens the Spirit is poured out, it moves, or it's received, first and then society at large and individual people's lives are changed, transformed or impacted. Jesus told the disciples to wait for the Spirit before they did anything. So, there they are sitting in the upper room waiting. Then when the timing is right and they've got nothing else but a hope for Him to do something, His Spirit is poured out on them and they are transformed from this scared group of people into men and women who speak the gospel with power and confidence and see their world changed. If only we waited on the Spirit more, rather than rushing into action with our own ideas and in our own strength!

In Galatians 5:13-26 we find, quite possibly, the best and clearest passage about the Spirit. Paul describes the outworking of the Spirit in our lives as fruit. Fruit is produced on a tree when it is healthy and well rooted. A tree cannot produce fruit by trying harder, or by hoping, or by straining to produce it. The trees job is to grow its roots as deep as it can so that it has a good

source of water. That's what we need to do, by intentionally being with Jesus and learning from Jesus. In John 4:14 Jesus said that if we drink of the water that He gives we'll never go thirsty and we'll discover that His water produces, in us, a spring of life-giving water. We need to grow deep roots in Jesus, and then drink of the water that He gives – His Spirit.

In Galatians 5 Paul isn't writing to tell believers to try harder at being good, or to have more patience, or to be more kind. He only gives one command to believers and that's found in verse 16 and again in verse 25: Walk/live in step with the Spirit. Create habits in your life that open you up and orientate you towards the Holy Spirit and then He will produce in you His fruit. That's how you become more like Jesus, by abiding, by making your home in Him – Meno. He does the rest.



## **Section 6**

# Follow up

Jesus tells us that we are to “make disciples”. That means growing deep roots. It means abiding in Him. It means allowing Him to be our teacher. It means choosing to invest in new grace filled habits. And all that is about creating space in our lives for the Holy Spirit to transform us so that we become more like Jesus.

It’s going to be lifelong journey. But we’re in, and we hope you are too. This is what being church is all about: A gathering of people who have chosen Jesus as their rabbi and who are together, being transformed more and more into His likeness, through His Spirit, by being with Him and learning from Him.

## **So here are a few things you can do:**

### 1. Together:

Join a home group, get a mentor, or form a prayer triplet.

### 2. Being with Jesus:

Regularly worship Him, daily read the bible, be intentional about your prayer times, fast, take time for silence and solitude, and sabbath.

### 3. Learning from Jesus:

Look at what Jesus said, and what He did, and allow His words and His ways to challenge you and how you live. You’ll find that the first two steps help you with this, having someone or a group of people to share these things with will encourage you. Give people you trust permission to call stuff out in your life and to pray with you. Be open to the Holy Spirit and what He might be putting



His finger on in Your life.

4. Become like Jesus:

Well, that's His role. You concentrate on the first 3 steps and watch and see what He does in Your life.

### **Questions that will help**

Here are a few simple questions that some of us have started using that will help you to be accountable in your discipleship journey.

- Who are you being together with?

*(This doesn't mean just hanging out with people socially, this means really being "together" – being open and honest and allowing people to speak into your life).*

- In the last week/month how have you been with Jesus?

- In the last week/month what have you learned from Jesus?

- How have you become more like Jesus?