

Disciplines of a Disciple

An Invitation to Life

Rob Rogers August 21, 2022

Introduction

How many of you have ever attempted to make a significant change in your life, whether it be a bad habit you're trying to stop, a good habit you're trying to start?

- Spending less, saving more
- Eating clean, exercising regularly
- Spending more time with your kids
- Date nights with your spouse
- Breaking an addictive habit
- Maybe even reading your Bible or praying more?

How many of you have ever tried to make a change like this and it lasted for a little while, but the change didn't last?

FACT: Market Research reported that the self-help market in 2016 was a \$9.9 Billion industry in the US alone. It's estimated to increase to \$14 Billion by 2025.

Here's what that tells us.

1. **We've got problems.** Job security for counselors, psychiatrists, and pastors
2. **We want to grow, but we don't know how** — and despite all our efforts to change — what we're doing isn't working — and we don't know what to do about it.

There is no such thing as progress without discipline.

Many of us can exercise some level of discipline for a time... but eventually the wheels come off the tracks, we crash and burn, we wear ourselves out, the ball gets dropped, and often we find ourselves right back where we started — only with shame weighing us down, making it that much harder to try again.

Now that we're back in full swing with school and heading toward the fall season, we want to extend an invitation today that God offers every single one of us.

That invitation, while it involves discipline, is not to a life of self-effort, exhaustion, burnout, and what the Apostle Paul calls "Will-Worship."

It is an invitation to the abundant life that Jesus promises us in John 10:10.

- This is **NOT** an invitation to ***try harder. run faster. do better.***
- This is **NOT** an invitation to add more to your already overfilled schedule.

This series, where God is taking us, is an **invitation to LIFE**, and a laying out of the path, the narrow road, the WAY that Jesus and His followers traveled for the last 2,000 years.

Jesus is inviting us to experience the abundant life HE ALONE CAN OFFER.

Not just WHAT IT IS, or WHY WE NEED IT, but HOW WE LIVE IT.

GOALS

We're going to be studying what have been referred to as the spiritual disciplines, spiritual rhythms, the spiritual practices of Jesus and His followers — that have created room...

- for spiritual transformation
- for intimacy with God
- to grow to maturity in Christ
- to be sanctified
- to grow in trust
- to have the capacity for greater levels of faith, grace, and forgiveness
- to be changed
- to find liberty and life to the full

Maybe you're here, and you've attended church your whole life, or maybe you're new or exploring Christianity and you have no idea what **the abundant life** I'm referring to is.

Maybe you've been living under the weight of legalistic, religious self-effort, and there is no celebration or joy in your relationship with Jesus. *Step out from under legalism.*

Maybe you're exploring faith, you're open to Christianity, but you've experienced the scorn, anger, judgment, and condemnation of those who claim to know Jesus.

**My invitation to you today is
not to base your decision about Jesus on imperfect followers —
base your decision about Jesus on JESUS!**

Many of us, as followers of Jesus, don't really know what the "easy yoke" of Jesus is about. As a result, much of our Christian lives are spent being weighed down by ***shoulds and oughts*** and ***guilt and shame*** for not being better, for not accomplishing more than we are. *So, for many of us, our experience of the Christian life is that it's not working! There is no JOY, there is no abundant life!*

- The result is there are people abandoning their faith, and renouncing Jesus. *But the reason for their abandonment of Jesus rarely (if ever) has anything to do with Jesus — and everything to do with a misapplication and misrepresentation of the WAYS of Jesus in the world!*

Today, this is the invitation...

Ephesians 4:23-24, MSG

...take on an entirely **new way of life**—a God-fashioned life, a life **renewed from the inside** and **working itself into your conduct** as God accurately reproduces **His character in you**.

This has been said a variety of ways by Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, Ruth Haley Barton. But our own Pastor Dylan summarized in a way that is my favorite out of all of them.

*“God is far less interested in **what you've done**, or **what you do**,
than **WHO YOU ARE BECOMING**.”*

~ Pastor Dylan Dawkins

He's more interested in who you're becoming IN HIM, than what you do FOR HIM.

- He has things for you to do — He’s prepared good works for you to do.
- **But what you do FOR God, must flow out of WHO YOU ARE IN GOD.**
What Ephesians 4 is saying is, “*Your conduct will flow out of WHO YOU ARE.*”
- And we want God to make WHO WE ARE like Him.

Here’s a description of the character of someone that is being made into the image of Jesus.

Galatians 5:22

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

- The maturity of the Christian is not measured by accomplishments, but by your character!
- The fruit of the spirit... these are words that describe your *character* not just your *behavior*.
- *Every one of them is a reference, not only to how you behave, but the character that God is growing in you over time.*

It’s not just “**Do you do loving things?**”

It’s “**Are you a loving person?**”

It’s not just “**Do you do good things,**” —

It’s “**Is the overarching pattern of your life one of goodness, selflessness, and gentleness, joy, peace, patience...?**”

Now, if you’re like me, there’s something inside of you that hears those questions and thinks, “*Ok, I’m really gonna try really hard to patient... I’m going to be way more selfless... I’m going to be way more joyful! I’m going to be way more generous, or caring, thoughtful... I’m gonna try really hard..*”

- ***And for many of us, we put an enormous amount of weight on our ability to change ourselves from the outside in...***
 - ***Behavior modification from the outside-in doesn’t work because it never lasts.***

Personal: Before I knew Jesus, I spent a year off of heroin when I was in a wilderness therapy program in NE Washington State. But as soon as the structure of that program was removed from my life, it took about 10 days, and I was right back to doing what I did before I got there — because nothing changed *IN* me. The only thing that changed was external.

*“In the end, I cannot transform myself, or anyone else for that matter. What I can do is create the conditions in which spiritual transformation can take place, by developing and maintaining a rhythm of spiritual practices that keep me open and available to God.”¹
~ Ruth Haley Barton, “Sacred Rhythms”*

This is why Jesus’ invitation to us is so simple, and so clear, and we make it so unnecessarily complicated.

John 15:4

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.

¹ Ruth Haley Barton. *Sacred Rhythms* (InterVarsity Press, Dec 14, 2009)

- In other words, you will not grow, you will not change, unless you're connected to ME!
- Jesus says here, "You are a branch, your job is not to produce fruit." What is your job!? Stay connected to the VINE! and the byproduct of your connection to that vine will be that you will grow in love, joy, peace, patience — you won't be able to help it! And as you remain connected, those things will grow stronger in you over time — you will be strengthened! The life of the VINE will flow through you — and you won't be able to help but produce fruit!
 - *Have you ever seen that a branch doesn't muster up a bunch of energy and stress and try really hard to make some fruit pop out!* The branch is to Abide in the vine — before you know it, fruit starts appearing.
 - **ILLUSTRATION:** A sheep produces wool... that's just what a sheep does. You've never seen a sheep frantically running around trying to figure out how it's going to produce wool! You don't ever see sheep saying, "I'm going produce so much wool! I'm going to produce way more wool than Billy over there..."
 - **No, what does a sheep do? A sheep follows the shepherd, it eats and sleeps wherever the shepherd tells it, and over time the sheep naturally produces wool. It doesn't have to try. It just happens. Why? Because it's a sheep! That's what a sheep does.**

What the disciplines do, what spiritual rhythms do, is they help us remain connected to the vine.

*"The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that He can transform us . . .
The inner righteousness we seek is not something that is poured on our heads.
God has ordained the disciplines of the spiritual life as the means
by which we place ourselves where He can bless us."²
~ Richard J. Foster, "Celebration of Discipline"*

*"Although God will grant Christlikeness to us when Jesus returns,
until then He intends for us to grow toward it.
We aren't merely to wait for holiness; we're to pursue it."³
~ Donald S. Whitney, "Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life"*

This is why the Apostle Paul writes to his protégé Timothy and tells him...

1 Timothy 4:7-9

Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather **train yourself** for **godliness**; ⁸ for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. ⁹ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. ¹⁰ For **to this end we toil and strive**, because we have our hope set on the living God...

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

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. ²⁵ Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶ So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. ²⁷ But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.
I heard recently that discipline is the friend that you dread to see coming, but you're always glad they came after they've left.

- **PERSONAL:** Years ago when I did Crossfit for the first time... I was 32, they put in with the 50+ crowd, because it was the only time I could make... (that's what I told myself anyway). Every time I drove there, I was DREADING IT! And after the first two weeks of not being able to walk right... I was so glad every time I went — I felt better, my endorphins were kicking, my thinking was clearer!

² Richard J. Foster. *Celebration of Discipline* (HarperCollins, Feb 13, 2018)

³ Donald S. Whitney. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Tyndale House Publishers, 2014)

*“He who sweats more in training bleeds less in war.”⁴
— Spartan Warrior Creed*

Often, what begins as a **DISCIPLINE**, is something we don't want to do. But if we'll stick with it long enough... it becomes a **DESIRE** – something we want to do, something we look forward to doing. Eventually it become a **DELIGHT** – it's something that we miss when we don't do it. We dread missing it, instead of dreading doing it.

DISCIPLINE
DISCIPLINE | DESIRE
DISCIPLINE | DESIRE | DELIGHT

We're going to talking through the disciplines over the next month...

1. **Private Devotion** Things like getting in the Scripture, Prayer, Fasting, Simplifying your life, and Slowing down. There is going to be practical application every week.
2. **Biblical Community** We'll look at the rhythms of how the early church functioned in community, as a family with one another; hospitality.
3. **Missional Living** How to live with healthy rhythms and boundaries, as it relates to loving those outside of the church.
4. **Kingdom Stewardship** Everything in our lives, even our lives themselves don't belong to us. They've been entrusted to us to steward for His glory. How do we faithfully steward our lives, our time, our gifts, our resources for God's glory?

*We'll talk about our **Discipleship Covenant**, and you'll have an opportunity to prayerfully consider how God is inviting you to step into Abiding in Him, training for godliness, growing in maturity, and allowing HIM to shape you into His image.*

One of the greatest dangers and detriments to the church today is that it is filled with spiritually immature, cultural Christians. We want to give you tools, resources, and practical ways to Abide & Grow in Christ.

OBJECTION 1: If you say, “*Rob, I don't want to say I'm going to do something and then fail at it.*”

- This isn't cookie cutter Christianity. You're going to have to wrestle through what God is asking you to prioritize, and rally people around you to help you until you get it down.
 - As we said last week, this is a community where it's safe to try and fail and try again. Because there is no such thing as success without failure.

OBJECTION 2: If you say, “*Rob isn't this just another form of legalism and religious obligation?*”

- It *would be* IF we were saying you must do these things in order to be saved... in order for God to be pleased with you.

But in the words of Dallas Willard...

*“Grace is not opposed to **effort**; it is opposed to **earning**.
Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action.”⁵
~ Dallas Willard, “The Great Omission”*

⁴ Brian E. Sherwood. *Man Up with God* (Christian Faith Publishing, Mar 29, 2021)

⁵ Dallas Willard. *The Great Omission* (HarperCollins, May 13, 2014)

A branch doesn't earn anything from the vine. The branch is already a part of the vine. You're already connected — we're talking about drawing more deeply from the life of the vine that we're already connected to.

OBJECTION 3: *"I'm so busy already, I can't afford to add anything else to my plate."*

- This isn't about ADDING. This is about *prioritizing*. And I'll be honest, if you're going to prioritize abiding in the vine, it's going to mean that you'll probably have to say "no" to something else. And if you say, "I can't afford to make room for scripture reading, for prayer, for communion with God," I would just simply say that in the day and age that we're living in — you can't afford NOT to.

OBJECTION 4: *"Well, Rob isn't this kind of practice what causes Christians to look down on other people that aren't as spiritually 'committed' as they are."*

- It's only possible for someone to become prideful in their spiritual disciplines IF they believe they can *earn* salvation or God's pleasure *through their own efforts*.
- But it's IMPOSSIBLE for a Christian to become judgmental, condemning, scornful of others *if they recognize that God's grace applies just as much to them as it does anybody else*.

It's the grace of God that has made Abiding in the vine available to us. What we want to do is draw more deeply from the life of Jesus, and allow Him to grow us individually and collectively to maturity, into His image.

"The meaning of earthly existence is not, as we have grown used to thinking, in prosperity [productivity and performance], but in the development of the soul."⁶

~ Alexander Solzhenitsyn

This is why Jesus invites us into the disciplines the way He does in Matthew 11.

Matthew 11:28–30, MSG

*"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to Me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the **unforced rhythms of grace**. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with Me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."*

Living freely. And lightly. That's the invitation Jesus extends toward us.

*"The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for **deep people**."⁷*

—Richard J. Foster, "Celebration of Discipline"

As we've talked today, if you're thinking, "My priorities are so out of order, I need some Divine assistance with this because it feels overwhelming right now." Ask and receive prayer — no matter how BIG or how SMALL the request is, God invites us to bring it to Him. **So come now, let's Abide In Him. Let's pray and worship together.**

⁶ William E. Cripe. *The Proper Pursuit of Prosperity* (Tate Publishing, 2011) p.39

⁷ Richard J. Foster. *Celebration of Discipline* (HarperCollins, Feb 13, 2018)

Discussion Questions

1. What is the “abundant life” that Jesus promises to us in John 10:10?
2. Do *you* really *believe* that you can have a more “abundant life” than you currently have?
3. Do you think that *more abundant life* is tied to things that you have to DO to ATTAIN it?
4. Discuss, “God is more interested in who you are becoming IN HIM, than what you do FOR HIM.”
5. How does “abiding in Him” take the pressure off of you to produce and perform?
6. How do “spiritual disciplines” help us remain connected to the vine?

NOTES