

Individual Reflections

Transformed by Being w/Jesus

By Mark Shuey

Day 1: A decision of destiny

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." – John 1:42

We never know what may happen within any given day that could quite possibly change our lives forever. Often times we feel our daily lives might lean towards the mundane. However, in the everyday living there are times when the profound can suddenly explode into our lives and we are never the same.

I think of that exact, life altering type of situation when I read John 1 about a young man named Philip. I imagine he woke up as usual in a fishing village on the Sea of Galilee, expecting another ordinary day. And yet by the time he went to bed that evening, his life had taken a dramatic turn. Little did Philip realize that a man named Jesus would speak two words to him on that day – words that would lead him into a life of incredible heights, thrilling adventure and a powerful purpose.

When Jesus looked to Phillip and said, "Follow me," Philip embarked on a new vibrant and abundant life. The apprenticeship of Phillip was underway. It is with this intentional decision that Phillip stepped into a life of discipleship with Christ.

Jesus speaks the same two words to each one of us: "Follow me." Follow me into a new life of faith that sees the world through the prism of God's goodness and sovereignty.

Follow me into a life that perseveres through life's most difficult circumstances and follow me to a life permeated by love.

The gentle offer of Christ to follow Him is, as pastor and author John Mark Comer writes, nothing less

than "the single most extraordinary opportunity in the universe."

For reflection

1. Apprenticeship begins with an attraction to the one you follow. Read through John 1. As you read, focus on the qualities of Christ that have attracted so many to Him. What attracts you?
2. Pray a prayer of surrender and presence each day. Tell Jesus you are not the captain of your life and ask Him to meet you throughout each day as the shepherd of all your thoughts, words and tasks.

Day 2: To be with Jesus is to learn from Jesus

"If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit" – John 15:5

Whether we realize it or not, we all answer Jesus's call to in some way or another. Even a no response is a response.

I first began to get a whisper from Christ in the days following a serious illness nearly 30 years ago. Through the weeks and months of treatment and recuperation, the call became more insistent. Sure, I have always believed Christ is who he says he is; I just didn't live like it. All to say, that to know about Christ, as I did; and to follow Christ, as I have tried however imperfectly to do, are two different things entirely.

We can know Christ from a distance, but that is not what Jesus is asking of us. He wants us to closely follow Him, to learn from Him, to speak like Him, to think like Him, to live like Him. One cannot absorb Christ to the extent Christ desires from a distance. Jesus wants you and me to BE with Him and to learn from him.

As a Christ follower, our classroom is everyday life and we are conformed to Christ as we pray for the mind and heart of Jesus. Always. Everyday. All day. We pray, we worship, we engage in Christ's community. We read and meditate upon

God's sacred Word and as we do, we begin to change. We begin to cultivate thankfulness. We grow to love those whose lives intersect ours. We choose to serve rather than being served. We become more like Jesus.

The original disciples had the beautiful opportunity to physically be with Christ and learn from Jesus each day. Our beautiful opportunity is to be with Christ by allowing the Holy Spirit to dwell within us and form our entire being.

He helps us to become more like Christ day by day. This is what brings true satisfaction. This is our true identity in Christ alone.

For reflection

1. What have you been looking to for satisfaction and purpose?
2. What has been your journey with Jesus? Have you ever experienced a time when you chose like Philip to leave your life behind and follow Him?
3. What might the Holy Spirit be showing you to release your grip on so you can receive what he has to offer?

Day 3: Make Jesus your Priority

For where your treasure is, there your heart will also be - Matthew 6:21

One day, as I sat at a red light, I noticed the car in front of me had a "Baseball is Life" bumper sticker. Now, I like baseball. A lot. However, baseball is not my very life. Far from it. It's astounding how so many of us devote enormous amount of time, thought, energy and life itself to a wide variety of pursuits that might give us comfort, wealth, security or enjoyment on earth. And yet God is the only one who actually gives and sustains life

In this age where we have access to a remarkable amount of information and entertainment in our pockets, there is a tremendous amount of competition for our mind and heart. What we value and how we spend our time shapes us.

When I was dating my wife, I wanted her to know how important she is to me. I gave her my utmost attention, and I wanted to know all about her. There was no other one for me.

Paul wrote in his letter to Colossians, "when Christ who is your life..." (Col.3:4). Now that would make for a good bumper sticker! it would also make for a better rule of life.

Making Christ the center, is at the core of our discipleship. To become a disciple is not an "add on" to life, like a hobby. *Christ is life* could be the motto for discipleship.

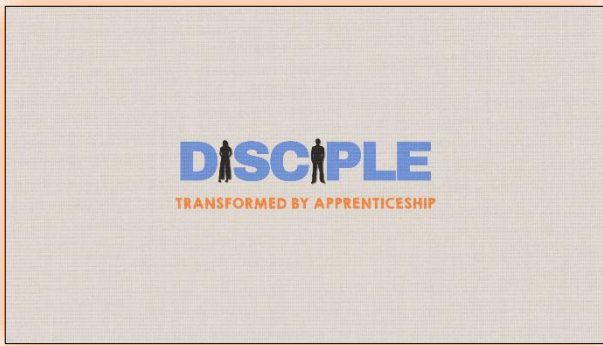
And whether its baseball or Jesus Christ, one doesn't center their lives upon something without dedicated and intentional effort and desire. Jesus says in Matthew 6:21, "where your highest priorities and greatest desires are where you will devote your highest attention and the majority of your resources. Those are sobering words.

When "Christ is your life," as Paul writes, Christ is your highest priority. You want to be with him, to know more about him, to be like him and to act like him. If Christ is your highest priority, you will structure your life, your time and your resources to reflect the ultimate importance of Jesus.

For reflection

Considering these truths, I ask myself and I ask you the following convicting questions:

1. Is Jesus Christ my highest priority? Why or why not?
2. If Christ is my highest priority – how is he reflected in the way I live my life?
3. How might I structure my life differently to give Christ a higher or the highest priority?



Group Talk

For Starters

If you could spend a day or evening with a friend or group of friends you don't get to see often or even at all – who would that be and what would you do?

To Discuss

Enjoying his presence (John 15: 4-5)

(4) Jesus says, "Abide in me, and I in you." Abiding suggests a posture of dwelling and resting in Christ. Can you describe a time when you felt Jesus' presence in your life – a time when you spent it just being with Jesus?

What do you think it practically means to "abide" in Jesus in your daily life? What specific practices help you maintain this connection? How does it look like in your daily rhythms?

In what ways have you found yourself substituting 'activities' over 'abiding'? What specific obstacles or distractions most commonly prevent you from abiding in Jesus?

What practical steps could you take this week to overcome these barriers and deepen your connection with Christ? What practices help you shift from a performance-based spirituality to a relationship of resting in God's presence and love for you?

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The Big Idea

Best Practice

Commit to being in God's presence to be transformed by the Holy Spirit.

Passages

John 15:4-5, 2 Corinthians 3:18

Group Goal

We Jesus invites us to be with Him as the primary way we can become like Him. How? By constantly returning to Him in our thoughts, emotions, relationships and actions amidst our busy days and hectic schedules. It's learning to "make a home in Him" in our thoughts, desire, emotions, habits, and relationships.

It is vital that you and I intentionally invest time to be with Jesus. When we read and meditate on God's Word or spend time in silence listening to God's voice, we allow Jesus to work in our life to transform us into becoming more like Him.

What are some warning signs in your life that indicate you might be disconnecting from the Vine (Jesus)? How do you recognize when you're not abiding well?

What kind of fruit have you seen in your life when you've been intentionally abiding in Christ? How was this different from times of 'disconnection'?

Glorious change (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Paul describes our transformation as happening *"with ever-increasing glory."* What does this suggest about how spiritual growth often occurs?

How have you experienced this gradual progression in your own journey with Christ?

"The Lord who is the Spirit" – How does recognizing the Holy Spirit's presence and role in your growth move you away from relying simply on willpower or self-improvement techniques?

How does He help you to step away from 'activities' and move towards 'abiding'?

Next Steps

Focus on three practices this week to intentionally devote time and space to abiding in Jesus.

Sabbath: It's a deliberate time to stop, rest, delight, and contemplate. Pick a time frame, clear the schedule, say no to rushing around, and plan some fun games with the kids!

Prayer: Set a timer for 3 minutes, and after it starts, just repeat a simple phrase like *"Come to me, Lord"* or *"Here I am, Jesus."* Repeat as much as you need to.

Scripture: Don't read a large chunk. Pick a verse, and ask the Spirit to speak to you from it. Just read it 2-3 times and keep asking Jesus to speak to you. Mix it with prayer!

Prayer Focus

Instructions: Take a moment to settle into a posture of abiding in Christ's presence. Find a comfortable seated position. Rest your hands in your lap, palms facing upward in a posture of receptivity.

Take a deep breath in – and slowly exhale.
Allow your shoulders to relax with each breath.

As we quiet ourselves, imagine Jesus' invitation to abide in Him. Like branches connected to the vine, we don't strain or strive to produce fruit—we simply remain connected, receiving His life.

Now, in the silence, repeat silently in your heart with each breath:
When breathing in: *"I abide in You, Jesus..."*
When breathing out: *"You abide in me..."*

[Allow 1-2 minutes of silence] Lord Jesus, we rest in Your presence now, not bringing requests or words, but simply being with You.

Leadership Tip

Your discussion will flow back and forth along the **"truth-life"** spectrum. On one end, **truth** focuses on content and meaning of text. On the other, **life** focuses on my situation, needs, and journey. Make sure you spend time in both areas, balancing the discussion to include moments where God's word can be examined, and where your life can be explored to see how to incorporate that truth.