**Come, follow me . . .**

**An Invitation to follow the practices of Jesus and become People of Love**

**Week One — 9/10/24**

Christianity is misunderstood. We are responsible for showing our little corner of the globe Christ-like love in words and actions. Just like Jesus always does, He shows us the Way.

Jesus said, *"By this, all people will know that you are my disciple if you have love for one another."* (John 13:35.)

*"The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through Love."* (Galatians 5:6)

**Key Verse:** "No one knows the Son the Way the Father does nor the Father the Way the Son does. But I'm not keeping it to myself; I'm ready to go over it line by line with anyone willing to listen. 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**." (Matthew 11: 27-28 MSG)

We must draw deep from the Source of Love to become a person of love. This study is about how we draw deeply from the source of God's Love by pursuing the practices of Christ.

1. **We spend time with God.**

This study is **simply** about spending time with God. A relationship grows by spending time together, giving it our attention and priority.

**Our relationship with God brings unspeakable joy and satisfaction.**

As we spend time with God, the beautiful part is that you will want nothing more than to be with Him. Jesus is the most fulfilling relationship, and time spent with Him is the best part of our day. It is never empty. It always refreshes and strengthens.

"He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He refreshes my soul." (Psalm 23)

**God is calling us into a friendship like no other.**

It's your friends that make your world. (William James)

These practices are not burdensome but a delight. Jesus said, "*I no longer call you servant instead, I call you friend."*

**The practices create space to be with God and open ourselves to His power.**

We open ourselves to inspiration beyond our imaginations by dedicating time to God. Spending intimate time with the Lord, seeking direction, and allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us is essential to our well-being. Time with God is where the fruit comes from. Moments of spiritual connection often yield unexpected insights, helping to clarify our thoughts and renew our direction. Overlooking this spiritual dimension will hinder our progress, leaving us stagnant or misguided.

We will examine things like prayer, reading the Bible, silence and solitude, being a witness, thankfulness and generosity, Sabbath rest and worship, community, humility, surrender, and trust. **This study is not more to DO, it's a path to BE. It is less of something you check and more of someone you become.**

We live in a distracted and busy world that thrives on instant gratification, and God calls us to focus on Him and be awake to those things that matter.

**Practices open us up to claim God's promises**.

"Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you." (James 4:8)

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. (Jeremiah 29:13)

1. **God transforms us as we spend time with Him.**

God's power transforms, but we need to give Him the opening. It's God's power, but we have a part—to consistently spend time with Him and surrender and obey His teachings. Striving, pushing, and trying harder will never bring spiritual victory. Spiritual practices do not twist God's arm into getting what we want. They are a means to an end—an activity or process to accomplish a goal. The goal is to grow closer to God, not to be better at prayer, to become people of Love, not to be a Biblical scholar. This study helps us to create a system for keeping in step with Jesus.

This transformation is not achieved by willpower but by the pursuit of Christ. The practices or **unforced rhythms of grace** are "means" that open our hearts and lives to Christ.Apart from Christ, these disciples will be useless activities of continually earning our entrance to heaven, which has already been made. Transformation into the image of Jesus isn't something we do as much as it's done to us by God himself, as we yield to his work of transforming Grace. Our job is mainly to make ourselves available. **At the end of the day, His presence changes us.**

Jesus **personally** presents His truth to us through these sacred spaces where we meet with God.

1. **When God changes our hearts, we want to share it with others**

"Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." (Philippians 2: 1-4)

God is a big God; let's resist making Him small by having him fit into our world; instead, let's fit into His. God is not a genie in a bottle to get what we want, nor is He just a crutch when we are fearful. We are new creations to His economy. We are not the center; He is. Our relationship with God is not linear; it is filled with mystery. The world needs to know God's relevance, power, and LOVE.

**Closing Thoughts**

Your life is being formed by something. Our habits and practices have a huge influence on us: social media, the news, the opinions of others, shopping, etc. Is it forming you to be more like Christ? If not, we counter our habits with the practices of Jesus.

"Grace is not opposed to effort; it is opposed to earning."

Wormwood said in "Screw tape letters" —"It's ok if the patient believes in God **all the habits**, both mental and bodily, are **still** in **our** favor."

"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." (Romans 12:2)

It's time to get serious about what we live for. We have more years behind us than we have in front of us. What do we want to be known for? This study is about becoming intentional. Referencing Mark John Comer's book, It's Eulogy vs. Resume Living.

**Questions**

1. Have you experienced the satisfaction and delight in the Lord? If so, please share.
2. What's your experience with the spiritual disciplines?  What practices have you engaged with in your spiritual journey, and how have they changed you?
3. What if anything stops you from engaging in Jesus's practices?
4. If the practices are the means, what do you understand the end of the spiritual life to be?
5. What are some habits that you would like to get rid of?
6. Who has most reflected God's Love to you?  Where did you see the life of Jesus at work in them?
7. What do you want to be known for? Eulogy virtues versus Resume virtues