



How to Spend a Day with Jesus

John Mark Comer

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Inspired by the book *Practicing the Way*

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For The Circle and all our givers who have made PTW possible

- 05 Set your intention.
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- 20 Go into your day.
- 25 Pause throughout the day for prayer.
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“How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives. What we do with this hour, and that one, is what we are doing. A schedule defends from chaos and whim ... It is a peace and a haven set into the wreck of time; it is a lifeboat on which you find yourself, decades later, still living.”

—Annie Dillard

“Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

—Moses

“I don’t have the time to ... ”

—All of us

—

Angh, angh, angh ...

It's 7:09 and my alarm is blaring—I overslept, *again*. Stayed up too late last night; that new show was fine but left me feeling hollow. Now I'm late.

I reach for my phone, eyes still groggy, the blurry screen bathing me in its blue glow.

A text from my boss. *Shoot ...*

News alert. Another bombing in ... More bad news from DC ... A scary new report on ...

Email alert too. *Dahhh, I forgot to ...*

That feeling of overwhelm. *I wonder what's happening on social right now ...*

Okay, enough. Time to get out of bed.

Now I'm *really* late.

Hurry out the door to the world of noise ...

Does any of this “hypothetical” scenario sound remotely familiar?

Or worse: normal?

You're not alone: This is how the vast majority of modern people begin their day. Up to 87 percent of people sleep next to their phones, and most check them within fifteen minutes of waking.¹ One in four people have literally slept with their devices in their *hands*.² Once we're out of bed, we go searching for our next fix; the average person touches their smartphone 2,617 times per *day*. (The number is twice that for the most extreme users.)³ ... We hurry through our days constantly reaching for our digital appendage; looking to our devices to calm our anxiety, focus our mind, or give us that fleeting feeling of connection or happiness. Yet any objective observer can see: We're just chasing the hamster wheel in an endless doom spiral; always running away from our fears and toward our desires, but never coming to peace.

Never coming to God.

As one writer put it, we "are distracting ourselves into spiritual oblivion."⁴

We're so used to a life of hurry and digital distraction and soul-numbing busyness that we just assume it's normal.

It's not—it's horrible.

What if there is another way?

What if we were to not just begin our day but also spend our day differently?

Very differently.

With Jesus ...

This little book is a companion volume to my full-length work *Practicing the Way*, in which I lay out a vision of apprenticeship to Jesus as a way of life.

The life of an apprentice of Jesus is organized around three driving goals:

- 1. Be with Jesus.**
- 2. Become like him.**
- 3. Do as he did.**

And while this is *not* a three-step formula, there is a progression: The more time we spend with Jesus, the more we are transformed to become like him. And the more we become like him, the more we find ourselves naturally saying and doing the kinds of things he said and did . . .

When you think about the vast scope of a lifelong spiritual journey, it can feel overwhelming—*Where do I even start?* While no two spiritual journeys are identical, all of us start by saying yes to the same invitation of Jesus: “come and follow me.”

Translation: come and be with me.

As with any journey, the key is to start where we *are* (not where we feel we “should” be) and take it one step at a time.

Our first goal: to spend a day with Jesus.

The day I have in mind is not a day on retreat (as life-giving as that is) but a day right out of your ordinary life, where you make an intentional effort to be with Jesus, who said, “I am with you always.”⁵ Why not a retreat? Because we need to learn how to be with Jesus—not in the silence and order of a monastery but in the noise and chaos of the city. To practice the presence of God in an environment of smartphone alerts and Wi-Fi and traffic and school drop-offs and project deadlines.

We must learn how to be with Jesus inside the contours of our everyday life—

not an idealized vision of the life we *wish* we had, *used* to have, or *plan* to have but the life we *actually* have. Here, now, today.

There's no right way to do this. In fact, it's essential that it be your day with Jesus, not mine or Dallas Willard's.⁶

It's also important for this upcoming day to be a delight, not a chore. The most joyful day you've had in months. Dare I say it, *fun*. Don't spend a day with Jesus because you "should" but because you want to—because you have come to trust that a day with him "is better than a thousand elsewhere."⁷

If you're not there yet, if you would honestly rather get in an extra hour at the office or the gym or watch that new movie, okay, that's fine.

But you could always *try* a day with Jesus.

We fall in love by spending time with someone we feel an attraction to.

Why not give your heart a chance to fall in love with Jesus?

The aim of a disciple of Jesus is to arrange our everyday, ordinary life so we are experiencing real joy, peace, and love in God's presence all day long.

To begin ...

Set your intention.

The first task is to set the intention of our hearts. We must get in touch with our desire for Jesus and then *decide* to spend a day with him. *Choose* to take the necessary steps, even if they require sacrifice.

Because they *will* require sacrifice.

As the monkish saying goes, “Every choice is a thousand renunciations.”⁸ Meaning, to say yes to a day with Jesus is to say no to a day with all sorts of *other* people, activities, habits, and more.

To be frank, many people do not want to spend a day with Jesus because it would keep them from spending their time as they please.

Think about our relational wiring: Whomever we are with affects what we will and will not do. When I’m with my seventy-three-year-old dad, I make different choices than when I’m with my seventeen-year-old son: I listen to different music, I use different language, I start different conversations. The same is true with Jesus: When we’re with *him*, we may talk and act and live differently than when we’re with other types of people.

Here’s a simple test you can self-administer: Draw to mind all you have planned for the coming day, and ask yourself, *Can I do all this with Jesus at my side? With him smiling on our activity?*

If a certain activity comes to mind (watching that new movie, shopping for yet another pair of shoes, hurrying past that difficult person, etc.) for which the

answer is not a resounding *yes*, then it will need to be set aside. Again, just for the day.

This, in turn, will require a clear intention in your heart: to *change* your regular routine to make your life more hospitable to Jesus' friendly presence with you all day long.

So, close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, find that deep center at the base of your soul—and set your heart to this path.

The next step is to ...

Make a plan.

To repeat a theme from *Practicing the Way*—good intentions are not enough. “The road to hell...” as the saying goes. A lot of people genuinely desire to be with Jesus, but they do not make the necessary changes to their daily lives to see that desire become a reality—not because they are “bad,” usually because they’re just too busy!

We need a *plan* and a set of practices and relational rhythms (also known as a Rule of Life) to see our vision of “be with Jesus” realized.

The same is true of turning *any* vision into reality.

Imagine I want to go away with my lovely wife, T, for our anniversary. Desire is not enough, though all things begin with desire. I need to decide to do it (Step

one: set your intention); *then* I need to choose a location, book a hotel, figure out travel, save up money, ideate a few romantic surprises, etc. In other words: I need to make a plan.

I can't just wake up on the morning of our anniversary and wing it.⁹

Far too many people are winging it in their discipleship to Jesus.

You will not drift into a life with God any more than you will drift into a good marriage or accidentally stumble into mastery of a craft. It will require decision, commitment, sacrifice, habit, and fidelity through the ups and downs of life. It will require a choice architecture strong enough to carry you beyond the honeymoon stage and through the long valley to the desired destination.

You need a plan.

Again, it can be *your* plan, not mine; it can (and should) be custom designed for your personality and stage of life and situation. But since you're reading a book by, well, me ... let me offer you a little direction.

This is basically what I do, but edited for a wider range of personalities and life stages. You may find it helpful, you may not; I offer it to adopt and adapt as you see fit.

Here's a keystone habit to lay the foundation for a day with Jesus ...

Begin with rest.

I wake up in the morning and think, *It's a new day*. But in the literary imagination of Scripture, the day begins at sundown, not sunrise: “There was *evening*, and there was morning—the first day.”¹⁰

Our Creator built a rhythm into the fabric of creation. God wired the hormones in our bodies to activate based on the sun's setting and rising, so we sleep when the sun goes down, and rise when it comes back up.¹¹ In a post-Eden, post-Edison world, we often live out of sync with the sun but to our own demise. The effect is detrimental not only to our bodies¹² but also to our lives with God. Darkness and light are more than metaphors in Scripture; they are psycho-spiritual realities.

Many of us view sleep as a necessary evil, but a more helpful way is to think of it as a spiritual discipline—a daily practice of offering our bodies to God as living sacrifices, entrusting our whole beings into God's love and care.

As the poet Wendell Berry put it, “Sleep is the prayer the body prays.”¹³

God did not design you to live in a state of chronic exhaustion. Exhaustion is a discipleship problem long before it's a happiness problem—not because it's a sin, but because it *causes* us to sin. Few people get the rest they need to be the persons of love God calls them to be. One reason our world is so full of outrage, anger, and reactivity is because people are simply too tired and worn down to be gracious, show patience, and think things through. Rest is *essential* to becoming people of love. Tired, haggard, sleep-deprived people who live with little-to-no margin are *not* loving, present, joyful people who exude kindness and channel wisdom.

Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are *weary*.” He saw apprenticeship to him as a solution to the problem of exhaustion. And he said, “I will give you rest.”¹⁴

Rest is *far* more than sleep, but it’s certainly not *less*.

As we begin to apprentice under Jesus, we start to re-habituate our bodies to the natural rhythms God built into his world, starting with the setting sun.

And this God-designed twenty-four-hour cycle beginning at sundown (not sunrise) has something to do with *prayer*. As the psalmist put it, “*Evening* and morning and at noon I will pray.”¹⁵ Notice: His daily prayer rhythm began in the evening. Jesus himself frequently retreated at night to be alone with God.

What we do with our minds right before bed and first thing upon waking is of *key importance*. It’s the mental filter by which we view our entire day. It comes as no surprise that neuroscientists warn us of the caustic effect of screens on both our sleep quality and overall mental health and emotional well-being.¹⁶ Screen time sabotages our happiness, peace, mental acuity, memory retention, attention capacity, and energy levels—all faculties we rely on in prayer.

A wise first step is to either set limits on or cut out TV and screens altogether most evenings and, instead, give at least some of that time back to God, *even if it’s just a few minutes* as you lay your head on the pillow.

This may sound too extreme for you.

But, again, why not just *try* it?

It’s only for a day.

For you, it may not be the pull to TV or screens; it may be that side hustle that started out as a fun project but has since turned into a part-time job. Or it may

be a hobby that's outgrown healthy boundaries: Instead of a focal practice¹⁷ that enables you to return to your life of family and work with more presence and joy, it's devolved into an escape from your life.

Whatever "it" is that encroaches on your daily sleep, you must view it as a serious danger to your apprenticeship to Jesus. Again, chronically exhausted people do not live as the people God intended them to be. And rarely do they experience the joy God desires them to radiate to all.

Rest is a spiritual discipline. A channel of grace. A way to open the depth of your person to the breath of God.

This daily act of sleep becomes incredibly important for our weekly practice of Sabbath. If we arrive at the end of our week sleep-deprived, margin-starved, and emotionally frayed, then the seventh day will be a "recovery day." As all our overactivity catches up to our weary bodies, we'll spend the day in a fugue rather than in delight and worship—the true intention of Sabbath.

To rest well, *we need to be well rested.*

As key as Sabbath keeping is for spiritual formation, rest is a *daily* discipline, not a weekly one. It begins with margin—a little breathing room in each day—and a full night's sleep, which, contrary to popular opinion, doctors tell us is seven to nine hours for the vast majority of adults.¹⁸

The professor James Bryan Smith was commissioned by the philosopher Dallas Willard (my unofficial patron saint) to write a "curriculum for Christlikeness"—a pathway for spiritual formation that others could follow. He did.¹⁹ Do you know what week one's discipline is for the curriculum?

"The discipline of sleep."

Week one's spiritual exercise is to aim for seven hours of sleep per night and pick a day to sleep in on the weekend.

Dr. Smith has become a friend, and he confided to me that people show up on the second week feeling *transformed*, claiming it's changed their lives and renewed their spiritual vitality. I started laughing when he first told me this. Who would've thought there's such a simple solution to such a complex problem? But it makes sense: We're *whole* people, embodied souls; our bodies matter in our discipleship, more than we realize.

So, begin your day with Jesus the night before: Turn off your devices, take a bath, read a book, go for a walk, play with your kids, make love to your spouse—whatever is restorative to your soul. Then, climb into bed as a spiritual practice.

But before you close your eyes, offer the coming night's rest—and with it, your whole life—up to God in prayer ...

This can be as simple as being silent before God as you lie in bed and turning your heart toward the Father in love and gratitude. Or just listening ...

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said:

We are silent early in the morning because God should have the first word, and we are silent before going to bed because the last word also belongs to God.²⁰

Or if you're more of a night chronotype, it can be more sophisticated: You could read scripture or pray or reflect on your day.

I struggle to do much at night because I'm so tired (full-time employee, father of three, not a night person), but I often pray this liturgy from the New Zealand Book of Common Prayer before I turn off my light:

*Lord,
it is night.*

*The night is for stillness.
Let us be still in the presence of God.*

*It is night after a long day.
What has been done has been done;
what has not been done has not been done;
let it be.*

*The night is dark.
Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives
rest in you.*

*The night is quiet.
Let the quietness of your peace enfold us,
all dear to us,
and all who have no peace.*

*The night heralds the dawn.
Let us look expectantly to a new day,
new joys,
new possibilities.*

*In your name we pray.
Amen.²¹*

Whatever evening routine you adopt, the goal is to let God—his person, his goodness, his love—be your last thought, so he can be your first thought ...

Then, breathe in deeply, and sleep.

Start your morning in the quiet.

When you first wake, before you lift your head off the pillow, try this: *open your consciousness to the person of God*. Just fill your mind with his beauty; welcome his love. I like to take three long, slow breaths and quietly recite Psalm 23 in my mind: “The Lord is my shepherd ...”—all before I roll my feet onto the ground.

Then, get to your “secret place,” as Jesus did: “Early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus ... went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”²²

You may need to get your kids out the door to school or walk your dog or make your coffee, but *as soon as possible upon waking*, find a place that is quiet and free of distraction. *Where* you pray is almost as important as *what* you pray. Carving out a little nook in your home or finding a park bench near your house—a place to ground your body’s memory in God’s presence each morning—can be an incredible aid to prayer, whereas many environments are an *impediment* to prayer.

But once you find your secret place, get into a comfortable position, take a few deep breaths, become present to your body, and then ... just open your heart to Jesus.

This time slot may not work for you, due to an early morning work schedule,

young children, or an unexpected interruption. That's okay. Find another time that does. The important thing is to set your heart's intention on Jesus as *soon* as you rise.

If you wake up to an infant crying your name, you could just quietly recite Psalm 23 in your mind and then go comfort your child.

If you have a super-early-morning job start, you could do this at night, right before you go to sleep, or immediately after work each day.

But I recommend you pray first thing upon waking if at all possible. *Before* you touch your phone. We want to give God access to our hearts in the *first* moments of our day to set the trajectory for all that is to come.

The evangelical tradition has long called this a “quiet time,” and while many mock it now, I find it to be utterly beautiful and essential to my life with God.

I have four practices that frame my quiet time with Jesus:

1. Praise and gratitude

The first thing I do is call God to mind and attempt to fill my imagination with his goodness and love, to praise him for who he is, and thank him for my life in his world.

As the psalmist said, “From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the Lord is to be praised,”²³ and “Where morning dawns, where evening fades, you call forth songs of joy.”²⁴

I'm a make-Chemex-coffee and do-a-few-stretches-before-I-sit-down-to-pray kind of guy. But as I make my coffee, I simply name at least three things

I'm grateful for that day: the sunrise, a roof over my head, an event on the day's calendar—if nothing else, there's always the coffee.

Once I have my elixir in hand, I love to step outside for few moments, put my bare feet on a rock in my front yard (a practice scientists called grounding), take a few slow, deep breaths, face the rising sun in the east (to remind myself of Christ's soon-coming return),²⁵ and simply praise God for the new day, his presence with me, and his promise to come again to make all things new. These micro-practices are unique to me and you may find them odd or off-putting, but they do more than help me wake up; they help me open my *whole* self to God.

But once I sit down, the best way I've found to praise and thank God is to pray (not read) the Psalms.

The Psalms are the hymnbook of Scripture, and they are designed for daily prayer. There are all sorts of wonderful lectionaries and devotionals and apps to facilitate your prayer, but I've been reading the Psalms every day for my entire life, and I *still* find them to be the single most helpful, moving, effective path to God's presence I know.

So, I pray the Psalms.

Then, I come to quiet ...

2. Contemplation

I don't talk to God, or even listen to God in this moment. I just sit *before* God; and I look at him, looking at me, in love—a practice known as contemplation.

Contemplative prayer isn't a formula, but it has three basic movements.

The first is contemplating who God is.

As the fourth century Saint Paternus said in *Advice to a Son*:

First of all, my child, think magnificently of God. Magnify His providence; adore His power; pray to Him frequently and incessantly. Bear Him always in your mind. Teach your thoughts to reverence Him in every place for there is no place where He is not. Therefore, my child, fear and worship and love God; first and last, think magnificently of Him!²⁶

I will often spend a minute or two just “looking” at the Father’s love coming toward me in Jesus and being poured into my heart by the Spirit.

The second movement is the interchange of love. We receive God’s love and then give it *back*. Saint John of the Cross called this “silent love.”²⁷ It’s just *presence* to God, loving him from the depths of our beings, beyond words. Loving him with all our hearts and souls and minds and strength.

The final movement is surrender. Dr. Robert Mulholland, Jr., defined *contemplation* as “the practice of stilling ourselves before God, moving ever deeper into the core of our being and simply offering ourselves to God in totally vulnerable love.”²⁸ It’s a yielding of our wills to God, a letting go of our agendas and attachments, and a setting of our hearts on God as our portion.

This entire process of contemplation doesn’t have to last long; it can be done in minutes, not hours. My mind is still untrained enough that, honestly, I only have the capacity to contemplate for a few moments each morning and only when I’m well rested and at peace. But those few, precious, fleeting moments are *always* the most joyful of my entire day—a glimpse of eternity in time.

3. Scripture reading

I do not let a day go by where I do not soak my imagination in Scripture and fill my mind with the truth of God. Even if only for a few minutes, I *have* to be in these writings daily—not because I “should” but because I have come to love them. Like the writer of Psalm 119, I find them “sweeter than honey to my mouth.”²⁹

This may not be your experience of Scripture. You may be troubled by it, bored with it, or angry about it; you may have even been wounded by people who wielded it like a weapon, and used it to hurt you deeply. If so, I am *so* very sorry. May God heal your relationship with this gift. Because, while it is strange and complex and can be an acquired taste—it *is* a gift.

As we immerse our minds in the writings of this ancient library, we begin to think God’s thoughts after him and to think *like* him—and, in time, to think *of* him more and more throughout our days.

There are all sorts of ways to read Scripture, but the key for a day with Jesus is to read *prayerfully*. This will likely mean you’ll read more slowly and in a spirit of meditation, but not necessarily. Your heart may come alive with a Greek lexicon open on your desk and commentary at your side. But whether researching the meaning of the original language or reading an entire book in one sitting or just pondering a single verse while breathing deeply, the key is to read not just *of* Jesus but *with* Jesus.

4. Listening for direction

Before I get up, I want to listen for any direction God has for the day. I deeply believe that the Spirit of Jesus has direct access to my mind and imagination and that God is not silent; he often deposits his thoughts into our thoughts, his feelings into our feelings, his desires into the depths of our hearts. Learning to listen to his voice (and to distinguish his voice from all

the other voices in our heads) is one of the core tasks of apprentices of Jesus. “My sheep hear my voice.”³⁰ Listening is our primary posture, so for me, much of prayer is just sitting quietly and waiting for God to speak.

One way to do this is to ask a very simple question: “God, what would be pleasing to you today?” And just see what comes to mind.³¹

Sometimes, nothing comes; but normally, a small act of love or service will come into my mental view. Or often it’s a scripture or phrase or thought to hold with me through the coming day. This morning, it was the line “embrace your limitations,” which came with a quiet sense of my mortality and finitude, and a reminder to my heart to be patient in my work.

I will often write out any words like this or scriptures that come to mind in the quiet and carry them on a small paper in my pocket to come back to throughout the day. By the end of the week, I have a little wad of rumpled papers in my Bible, which I review on the Sabbath.

I’m just trying to hear God’s voice and remember what he said, because it was Jesus who said, “man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”³²

Lay your requests before God.

At some point in your day, it’s important to set the needs of your life before God. And the morning can be a great time to do this.

As the poet behind Psalm 5 put it:

In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice;
in the morning I lay my requests before you
and wait expectantly.³³

Of course, you can do this anytime—on your morning commute, at lunch, walking your dog after dinner, and so on.

The key is to recognize that our lives are contingent, that we can't do life on our own. We are dependent on God; we need to be saved.

Praying isn't reading our Christmas list to heaven. It's calling on God to be *God* in our lives, to do what we cannot possibly do on our own. To release his power and purposes in and through our days.

To do this, we have to *ask*, as Jesus himself commanded his apprentices to do time and time again. This can be very difficult for many people. We're not sure what to ask for, or we feel bad, like we're just telling God what we want; or it can feel like reading a shopping list to the sky. But to ask is to *come to our Father*—not just as a child but as an heir and a partner in the Father's work in the world. And this asking is essential to the life of faith. As C. H. Spurgeon once said, "Asking is the rule of the kingdom."³⁴ There's something about asking that our Father seems to find of great importance in our development as souls.

But don't be intimidated by this. Like contemplation, you can do this for hours at a time or in a few minutes as you shower or drive to work ...

Here's the way *I* do this (again, this may or may not be helpful): In each season of my life (which may last a few months or much longer; I'm thinking spiritual seasons here, not summer/fall/winter/spring), I write up a short liturgy—a prayer that captures my heart toward God and what I believe to be God's heart

toward me in that particular season. It's not *just* a list of requests, but it always includes requests. Having a prewritten prayer makes it easier to pray, especially on days when I'm busy or tired or can't seem to focus my mind.

I simply pull the prayer out of my Bible and pray my heart to God.

Other people use daily prayer cards, take a daily prayer walk, or go to a church prayer meeting. Again, *there's no right way to do this*.

The key is to *ask*.

Then, whether your time in the secret place was a few hours or a few minutes . . .

Go into your day.

Or better said, *as* you go into your day, go *with* Jesus. The first goal—literally the driving priority of our day—is not killing it at work, being the perfect parent, or getting in better shape. It's practicing the presence of God.

Our desire is, like Jesus himself, to be aware and awake to all the Father is doing in each moment and to cooperate with him as best we can. It's to look for the hand of God at work around us and join in.

Here are a few best practices to that end:

1. Eliminate hurry.

The Anglican priest Walter Adams gave spiritual direction to the Oxford

don C. S. Lewis for many years. He once told Lewis, “Hurry is the death of prayer” and “To walk with Jesus is to walk with a slow, unhurried pace.”³⁵

It is *incredibly hard* to live our days free of hurry’s tyranny. But it can be done—imperfectly but still effectively.

This is the *baseline* of a day with Jesus: walking, not running, with God at his pace, his speed—“the speed of love.”³⁶

We can (and will) work diligently, sweat, and even toil at our labor, but we can also do this all without hurry.

2. Be fully present to each moment.

Be fully present to each breath, to each experience, to each person you interact with. Attempt to see them as Jesus does.

See if you can bless the people you meet. You can do something useful for them, even if it’s as simple as holding a door open, or you can literally say, “Peace to you” or “Bless you.” It will feel a bit cheesy because our world is so full of cursing and contempt, but you will tap into the flow of the Trinity’s love.

Again, hurry is our great enemy here. To see like Jesus, we must slow down to his pace. One way to do that is to . . .

3. Practice gratitude.

Attempt to live as gratefully as you possibly can, turning your mind to the rich goodness of your life in God’s world, saying “thank you” all day long.

A common way to do this is to say grace before a meal. As the theologian and chef Norman Wirzba put it in *Food and Faith*:

To say grace or offer a benediction of thanksgiving over a meal is among the highest and most honest expressions of our humanity ... Here, around the table and before witnesses, we testify to the experience of life as a precious gift to be received and given again. We acknowledge that we do not and cannot live alone but are the beneficiaries of the kindnesses and mysteries of grace upon grace.³⁷

Or as the psalmist put it, “Taste and see that the Lord is good.”³⁸

Food isn't just a *sign* of his goodness; it is his goodness.

Savor it.

Savor *all* of your life before God.

This doesn't mean you need to offer a ten-minute, flowery prayer before your lunchtime burrito bowl; it just means we need to slow down, breathe, and give thanks ... all day long.

4. Turn routines into rituals.

So much of life is maintenance—cooking food, cleaning up, folding laundry, making the bed, dropping kids at school, working out, logging into Zoom, plowing through email, etc. etc. It can feel like we're just keeping our heads above water. But all these routines can be repurposed as rituals, as spiritual disciplines; our entire lives can become prayer, *if* we offer them to God.

This can be as simple as short, fleeting prayers before each routine: “God, I thank you for a healthy body to go on this run” or “God, I give you this morning commute” or “God, I invite your presence into this Zoom call.”

Tish Harrison Warren called this the “liturgy of the ordinary” and argued,

“The crucible of our formation is in the anonymous monotony of our daily routines.”³⁹

By offering our daily routines to God, we can repurpose them as channels of grace, and elevate our ordinary lives from maintenance to miracle.

5. Embrace interruptions.

Okay, I am *bad* at this one; I’m painfully task oriented, and I tend to get angry or anxious when my daily schedule is thrown off. But many of the most important moments in life are interruptions.

How many of the stories about Jesus in the four Gospels are interruptions?

Most of them.

C. S. Lewis once said:

The great thing, if one can, is to stop regarding all the unpleasant things as interruptions of one’s “own,” or “real” life. The truth is of course that what one calls the interruptions are precisely one’s real life—the life God is sending one day by day.⁴⁰

Be open to the unexpected, to any unplanned surprises God (or life) may have for you throughout the day. As the interruptions come (and they will), ask, “God, are you in this? How are you coming to me? How would you respond to this if you were me?”

Especially if those “interruptions” happen to call you mom or dad.

In monasteries, bells toll multiple times a day to call the monks to fixed-hour prayer. The monks learn to drop whatever they are doing at that

moment and walk straight to the chapel. If they are writing a letter, they stop mid-sentence. If they are cooking, they lay down the chopping knife mid-carrot. If they are teaching, they stop mid-point. Because the purpose of the bells is not just to get all the monks to prayer on time; it's to set them free from the prison of self-will. Each bell is an invitation to die to self. To come alive to God.

In his book *Domestic Monastery*, Ronald Rolheiser writes about how for us non-monks, children can be our monastic bells. *Any* interruption—be it from a two-year old, a knock at the door, a visit from a co-worker one cubicle over, or even an unexpected crisis or delay—can have the same effect as the bell in a monastery: It can call us off our egoistic operating systems and free our hearts in surrender.⁴¹

Welcome the interruptions—open your heart to the unexpected, to any unplanned surprises God may have for you throughout the day. When they come (again, when, not if), slow down; *breathe* ...

Welcome whatever God has for you ...

You're not in a hurry.

6. Live in continuous conversation with God.

Bring your mind back to Jesus as often as you can. think of him, talk to him, sing to him, and fill your heart with the wonder of his beauty.

Ask him, "What should we think about right now?"

Or "Jesus, what would be pleasing to you right now?"

Or "Jesus, is there anything you want to say to me right now?"

Or “Jesus, is there anything you want to say *through* me right now to the person in front of me?”

As Frank Laubach wrote, “I must learn a continuous silent conversation of heart to heart with God while looking into other eyes and listening to other voices.”⁴²

The best way to live in this continuous conversation is to ...

Pause throughout the day for little moments of prayer.

You can do this ad hoc, at random times, but a better strategy is to develop a daily prayer rhythm. This is simply *your* version of what spiritual directors call fixed-hour prayer and monks call the Daily Office. It is the simple practice of pausing a few times a day, even if only for a minute or two, to pray: to bring your heart’s attention and affection back to Jesus.

This tradition of a daily prayer rhythm goes back at least as far as Daniel, who prayed three times a day in Babylon, facing Jerusalem.⁴³

By Jesus’ day, it was common practice for the Jewish people to pause three times a day for prayer, based on Psalm 55: “Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice.”⁴⁴

In the sixth century, Saint Benedict codified eight “offices” (prayer hours) into his Rule of Life:

Lauds—dawn

Prime—the first hour, 6 a.m.

Terce—the third hour, 9 a.m.

Sext—the sixth hour, noon

None—the ninth hour, 3 p.m.

Vespers (or Evensong)—dusk, about 6 p.m.

Compline—before bed

Vigils (or *Matins*)—various hours in the night⁴⁵

Of course, this is wildly unrealistic for 99 percent of us. Which is why, more recently, the Anglican Book of Common Prayer offered two daily prayer offices: morning and evening, which are *much* more doable for us non-monks.⁴⁶

But to say it *again*, there’s no right way.

Whether you join a monastery and pray eight times a day or just pop out of the office for a ten-minute walk on your lunch break and recite the Lord’s Prayer, the point is, you need to pause throughout the day and come back to your center in God.

This will likely feel difficult at first (eliminating hurry always is), but it will get easier over time, until your whole life is a kind of prayer.

As Madame Jeanne Guyon, imprisoned by the Catholic church for her book *A Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer*, in which she dared argue that all of our day could and should be spent with Jesus, said:

It is not enough to be turned inwardly to your Lord an hour or two each day. There is little value in being turned within to the Lord unless the end result is an anointing and a spirit of prayer which continues with you during the whole day.⁴⁷

Think of a daily prayer rhythm as being like training wheels when you're learning to ride a bike: They are just there to keep you from falling over, and you use them *a lot* when you are first getting started. But once you grow in your spiritual balance, you barely feel them at all ...

As we spend *some* of our day with our minds and hearts intentionally set on Jesus, over time we begin to live *all* of our day with our Lord.

Do your work.

The bulk of our daily lives goes not to prayer but to our work—whether it's the paid work of a job or the unpaid work of caregiving or creativity. Even monks live by the motto *ora et labora*, or “prayer and work,” the two defining features of our days.

We *must* see our work as central to our spiritual formation, or we will never be able to be with Jesus throughout our day. We will instead compartmentalize our “spiritual life” (a phrase nowhere to be found in Scripture) from our *actual* life.

We must do our work in faith that Jesus is with us, that he is the master of every craft and can teach us how to grow in ours, and that he wants to release goodness through us into the world. Our work is thus imbued with a meaning and significance that is deeply rewarding.

And remember, “work is love made visible,” as Kahlil Gibran once said.⁴⁸ Work, at its best, is an expression of the love of God in Christ.

And the best way to love people through your work is usually very simple: Do a really, really good job. As the spunky Dorothy Sayers once put it:

The Church’s approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours, and to come to church on Sundays. What the Church *should* be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables. Church by all means, and decent forms of amusement, certainly—but what use is all that if in the very center of his life and occupation he is insulting God with bad carpentry? No crooked table legs or ill-fitting drawers ever . . . came out of the carpenter’s shop at Nazareth. Nor, if they did, could anyone believe that they were made by the same hand that made heaven and earth.⁴⁹

There’s a Hebrew concept called *kavanah* that Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost write about in *The Shaping of Things to Come*. It basically means “the power of holy intent.”⁵⁰ Some rabbis teach that when the fall happened, the manifest glory of God was shattered into tiny, imperceptible pieces. But when we do our work with *kavanah*, or holy intent—when we bring our full presence and a motivation of love and excellence to our work or any ordinary task—we are reweaving the manifest glory of God into the created order.⁵¹

The Jewish philosopher Martin Buber tells the story of a cobbler who made

leather shoes. As he sewed the top of the shoe to the bottom, he was reweaving God with his glory through each stitch.

What a vision of work—reweaving glory.

This is the barista who doesn't just pour milk into the latte and set it on the counter but creates the ever-postable heart, makes sure the lid fits perfectly to where the opening isn't on a seam, and, with a generous smile, says, "Here, have a good day."

It's the construction worker who doesn't just throw a bathroom remodel together as cheaply as possible but does every step with the passion of an artist at his craft.

It's the preschool teacher who doesn't just babysit but gets down at eye level and draws out the potential in each precious child.

And you thought you were just spell-checking your email or making your kids lunch or planning events ... Actually, you're *reweaving glory*.

Finally ...

Review.

It is written, "People go out to their work, to their labor until evening."⁵³

At some point, we run out of daylight, our energy is all used up (often long

before we run out of daylight!), and we transition from work to rest. In our home, that means family dinners, and often time with community, where we reflect, give thanks, and connect.

But there's a spiritual moment here we don't want to miss. At the end of your day, ideally before or after dinner, it's good to take just a few minutes and review your day with God. I love to sit on our deck or take a short walk and look back over my day with God.

In the Christian tradition, this practice is called the Examen, and it's a way of praying backward through your day. First developed by Saint Ignatius, it's since been codified by the Jesuit order into five basic movements:

- 1. "Beg for light"**⁵⁴—Ask the Spirit to illuminate his presence in your day and speak to you.
- 2. Review your day with God**—Playback your day like a video recording in your mind's eye, looking for signs of God. Rejoice in the moments when you said yes to him, and repent of the moments when you said no.
- 3. Pay attention to your emotions**—look for God in the undercurrents of your heart. When did you feel close to him? Far away? When did you feel joy? Sorrow?
- 4. Pray what you got!**—Pray one aspect of your day back to God—a sorrow, a gratitude, a need.
- 5. Renew for tomorrow**—ask for God's grace to do better tomorrow. This is not a "God, I'll do better tomorrow!" moment but a "God, I ask for grace to change" moment. At the end of the day, we're so aware of all we did not get done, as well as all our failures. In prayer, we just give these over to God's mercy and ask him for the gift of rest.

The “proper” Examen takes about fifteen minutes and is easiest with a prayer journal or written prompt to keep your mind from wandering. In the Jesuit tradition, it’s the equivalent of a morning quiet time for evangelicals, the most important spiritual discipline of the day. But you can do a five-minute version of the Examen as you’re driving home from work or walking your dog. Or just pray it weekly on the Sabbath.

Sound like too much? If you have a family or a few roommates you eat dinner with, there’s an incredibly easy way to do this: Just go around the table and say one gratitude from the day and, if you have time, one short story of where you felt God’s nearness.

I *love* to do this with my family; it’s so easy, and I strongly suspect it’s doing a lot below the surface of our hearts . . .

The main goal here is to soak up all God has for you in life, to never stop growing. As my Ignatian professor Trevor Hudson said in one of his lectures on the Examen, “We don’t change from experience; we change when we *reflect* on our experience.” This isn’t even a Christian concept, per se; it’s just a human reality.

But for those of us who follow Jesus, it’s an essential task—whether we pray the Examen before bed, journal on the Sabbath, or just get coffee with a best friend and talk through the week, the point is to *become increasingly awake and aware of God and all he is doing in and through us.*

Begin again.

This may sound like a lot. Too much, even. But if you were to write up what you do on any ordinary day—all your thoughts and habits and responsibilities and social media posts and device-checking and where your free time goes—it would be a *much* longer read.

Life is full, as it should be.

The question is: what is your life full *of*?

The aim of a disciple of Jesus is to arrange our everyday, ordinary lives so they are full of deep joy, peace, and love, as we live in conscious communion with God all day long.

But there's no doubt: We will fall *far* short of all these aspirational ideals.

I certainly do.

We will have bad days and horrible moments, interruptions that are not from Jesus but from the evil one.

We will remember God and then forget him.

We will hear a word from God early one morning and disobey it before noon.

Some days we will sense God's presence and peace; other days we will feel lonely and afraid.

In some seasons of our lives, we will feel the weight of God's favor upon us; other seasons will feel like dark nights of the soul and stretch out to the horizon with no end in sight ... Each day, another step in the valley.

That's okay; it's all part of the journey.

The key is, *when* we fail—not if, *when*—to keep walking.

To simply come back to God and begin again.

How to Spend a Day with Jesus —

Extras

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