

The writer Annie Dillard once observed, “How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.” Each week, each month, each year, each decade, each life is made up of the everyday.

I want to begin with a confession and then a quote.

First, the confession: one of my greatest fears is getting to the end of my life and realizing that I wasted my days, that I spent all this time doing, becoming an expert, skilled even, at meaningless things.

Second, the quote. The Stoic philosopher William Irving coined the term “misliving.”

There is a danger that you will mislive—that despite all your activity, despite all the pleasant diversions you might have enjoyed while alive, you will end up living a bad life. There is, in other words, a danger that when you are on your deathbed, you will look back and realize that you wasted your one chance at living. Instead of spending your life pursuing something genuinely valuable, you squandered it because you allowed yourself to be distracted by the various baubles life has to offer.

Isn't “misliving” what this time of year is all about correcting? How many of you are “course correcting” with the new year, even in some small way, shape, or form? We get a budgeting app or learn some Excel tricks, we throw out the Oreos, and we commit ourselves to the gym at least three times a week. (*Looks down.*) OK, four times ek.

But are these kinds of changes enough? How do we get a life well-lived?

Here's the truth: Jesus has something to say about those questions.

In John 10:10, Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” Jesus came not just to make sure you experience LIFE later (in heaven). That's all good, but he also is bringing LIFE now.

- How many of us, though, go through life a bit life-*less*? Zapped? In turmoil? In a state of constant friction or agitation? Hurried? Anxious? With battles in our minds? With wars in our hearts? With anger that's volcanic?
- How many of us need the kind of Cosmic Influence that is able to bring us the peace that passes understanding, that is able to send camels leaping through needles, and that is able to hurl mountains into seas?
- How many of us need *someone* to say, “I love you,” or “You are safe,” or “Do not fear,” or “I'm preparing a place for you,” or “I'll give you everything you need,” or “I'll heal you”?

In Matthew 4, THIS is the kind of thing that comes with the advent of Jesus.

Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “The land of Zebulun and the land of

Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.” (Matthew 4:12-16)

This is what we talked about at Christmas: people were living in darkness, but now light and life are here! How do we touch the Light? How do we access the Life? Look at how Matthew goes on in verse 17: “Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”

That’s the good news. Jesus has come, and with his coming a new way of life has opened up: not only life LATER, but life NOW—an eternal kind of life. It begins with a choice, but that choice continues with a relationship—a relationship we call discipleship. Let me explain.

Matthew 4:18-20 tells us: “While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him.”

Now, **CONTEXT before CONTENT**. In the world of Jesus, there were people called *rabbis*. “Rabbi” is a word meaning “teacher.”

You’d have rabbis in school teaching you the Scriptures but then, after their version of elementary and secondary school, a select few students would seek permission to study with a *famous* rabbi, often leaving home to travel with him for a lengthy period of time. In Hebrew, these students were called *talmidim*, or *disciples*. The goal of being a disciple: to become a rabbi yourself.

This is similar to how a student teacher might have a stint with a more experienced teacher. Or maybe closer to the mark, think of someone who apprentices under another to learn a trade, like blacksmithing. You’d have a master and an apprentice. As an apprentice seeking to become a blacksmith yourself, your goal is to learn everything your teacher has to teach you, so one day you can do what he does now.

This disciple/rabbi relationship was something I had the task of explaining to a bunch of Kenyan kids in 2019. As some of you know, our church works with a specific school in a specific slum in Nairobi. Each year we do a VBS and give the teachers a break. During that 2019 VBS, we ended up with the theme of discipleship and this passage in Matthew 4. Easy money. Except NOT. *How in the world do you convey the meaning of being a disciple to kids aged toddler to 8th grade?!*

So, here’s what I did: I read the passage (same one we’re reading) to the kids, said that Jesus wants us to follow him, and I broke that “following” down into three goals. I told the kids if you were a *talmidim* or *disciple*, you’d essentially have three objectives:

1. **BE WITH YOUR RABBI:** If you were a *disciple*, you’d be doing all you could to hang around your rabbi every chance you could get so you didn’t miss any pearls of wisdom falling from his lips.
2. **BECOME LIKE YOUR RABBI:** It wasn’t only about learning information; it was about forming hearts, minds, and souls. It was about shaping the character of the disciples as much as it was about shaping their mind.

And you went through all this effort because of goal number three:

3. DO WHAT YOUR RABBI DID: Disciples were seeking to one day be able to do what the rabbi they were studying under did. What good was years of apprenticeship if you couldn't teach, speak, counsel, advise, interpret, and live out the Scriptures in the same way as your teacher? That was the goal: total transformation of the student into the likeness of the teacher.

I said, "So, there are three goals for disciples: (1) be with your rabbi; (2) become like your rabbi; and (3) do what your rabbi did. Any questions?"

And they just stared at me like, "*Whaaaat?*" And I was like, "Oh Lord, help me!"

Then it hit me. I made it super applicable. I asked them who their favorite football players were. They said names like Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi, and Pierre-Emerick Abumayeng (think the equivalent of our Tom Brady, Lamar Jackson, or Patrick Mahomes).

Then, I asked them what they would do if they saw Ronaldo, Messi, or Abumayeng come waltzing down through their streets, offering the opportunity to be their personal students. Like imagine if Cristiano Ronaldo came through their slum and said, "Come, follow me and I will make you the best soccer player ever! I'll show you how to pass, how to shoot, how to dribble the ball, how to play defense, and how to do tricks with the ball!" And something like a light bulb went off in their minds. You could see it.

They said they'd leave everything behind because they knew that a new way of life that had previously been closed had just opened up to them—the opportunity to learn from arguably the best soccer players ever, the opportunity to have their futures completely altered, and the opportunity to pursue something really meaningful in their lives.

This is what was happening here in Matthew 4. Jesus was a rabbi, a *ateacher*. With his invitation to discipleship, a new way of life had opened up for these fishermen, and they left everything behind to follow Jesus

Jesus makes the same offer to you and me, too. He says, "Follow me. Be my disciple. Let me be your rabbi. Learn to live in the kingdom of God. You want LIFE and LIFE to the full? You must be my disciple." Here it is on a bumper sticker: if you want to experience the life of Jesus, you have to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

What does that look like for us? It's the same as what Jesus offered Peter and Andrew. To be Jesus' disciple is to live life oriented around three goals: (1) to be WITH Jesus; (2) to BECOME like Jesus; (3) and to DO what Jesus did. Let me walk through these briefly.

1. BE WITH JESUS

There is no DISCIPLESHIP to Jesus without PROXIMITY to Jesus.

Every time we do Rooted, we begin by talking about God. Without fail, one of the main features of God that people often talk about is how God feels distant, out there, far away. It's like they believe a form of deism—God set the whole thing up, but he's not close, involved, nearby.

But the thing we learn about God is that this Creator, Ruler, Redeemer of the Universe isn't some impersonal force out in the Universe. He is close. He IS present. To you. Here. Now. More inward to you than your inward depths.

I get it that. I'm more apt to think ABOUT God than to actually be WITH God. Even though I'm a pastor, it is sometimes super difficult for me to transition all the normal fretting that life brings and all of the thinking about God that I do into a WITH God kind of relationship.

For example, a lot of times I'll be getting ready in the morning and think ABOUT God instead of actually talking WITH God. I'm trying to train myself to, more consistently, say NOT: "Okay, I've got this, this, this, and this," but instead TO say: "Lord, help me with this, this, this, and this."

But it extends beyond simply asking for help. Believe it or not, the presence of God is a profound source of LIFE.

John Ortberg says, "Anytime you see *LIFE* flourishing, it is because it is receiving nourishment from outside of itself." In other words, take away all the sunlight, and your monstera dies. The same is true for us: there is no LIFE without WITH-ness

From who or what are you receiving nourishment? Where do you go to nourish your soul?

- Sunlight before screenlight? Exercise? Counting your macros? Get a solid 8 hours?
- What about travel? Experiences? Things that expand your horizons?
- Warm bath? Little mani/pedi? Little spa day with the bros/girls.

What if there was a place that you could go and every time you went there you received **affirmation** of who you really are, **strength** for whatever circumstances you face, **encouragement** in the face of disillusionment, and **power** to get through anything? THAT'S THE PRESENCE OF GOD. THAT'S WHERE WE GO WHEN WE'RE WITH JESUS.

THAT'S JESUS' INVITATION TO YOU.

Jesus' first words to Peter and Andrew, the first part of his invitation to LIFE, ISN'T to clean up their act or to prove their faithfulness. No, Jesus simply invites them to be WITH him. He says, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19).

2. BECOME LIKE JESUS

A couple weeks ago, Google released their annual "Year in Search" video for 2022. The video began by saying, "This year more than ever the world searched "can I change?" Can I change my life? Can I change myself? Can I change careers? Can I change my outlook? Can I change my style? Can I be original? How to find my passion? How to be spontaneous? How to be more positive? How to become a fighter pilot? How to be a better friend? How to start again? Can I level up? Can I evolve? Is anything possible? (See online sermon video for related photos.)

Think about the questions people are asking: *Can I change? Can I change myself? Can I level up? Can I evolve? Let's get real: mom guilt, body shame, porn addiction, dating bad people, volcanic anger, etc.*

The good news is, "YES! You can!" God longs to see you put off your false self & put on your true self by joining Jesus in his school of formation.

After Jesus called Simon and Andrew to follow him, he said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

There was a process of formation that the disciples had to undergo. Who they were at the moment of their calling wasn't all that Jesus had for them. They had been formed by their culture, by their parents, by their media. They needed changing.

One example: Jesus was showing compassion one time to some Samaritans, they rejected Jesus, and some of the disciples were like, "What the heck! Jesus, just destroy them. How's about we call down fire and leave a black greasy spot!?"

BAD formation. Jesus loved his disciples too much to leave them as they were. The same is true for us.

Recently, in my life group we did a "spiritual GPS," taking an assessment of how each of us are doing spiritually in the new year.

As I went through that exercise, I realized that I listed a lot of fears and anxieties. Nothing major, but several things taking up mind space.

So, in prayer, I brought those fears to Jesus, and I felt like what he said to me was what he said to his disciples in the raging storm: "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" meaning that I can trust Jesus to be with me despite the storms. Then when I brought my specific anxieties to him, I heard him say to me what he says in the Sermon on the Mount, "Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Look at the birds. Look at the lilies. Do I not take care of them?"

That was a *becoming* moment for me. That was a *learning* from Rabbi Jesus moment for me. We're all on a journey of *becoming*. We're either becoming more like Jesus in our character or we are not. Who are you becoming as a person? Are you taking on his character? His love? His patience? His kindness? His pace of life? His ability to be a non-anxious presence?

Brennan Manning says, "The temptation of the age is to look good without being good."

Maybe the question for you to consider is, "*Am I allowing Jesus, through the Word, to form me? Might Rabbi Jesus have some insight on how to become the kind of person God intends for me to be—a person of agape love?*"

3. DO WHAT JESUS DID

In Matthew 4:19, Jesus says, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

There's a lot packed into that phrase but suffice it to say that one of Jesus' points here is "Hey, guys, follow me, learn from me, and I'll teach you to do the things that I myself am doing."

A few verses down what do we see Jesus doing?

And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. (Matthew 4:23-25)

I love that passage because it shows us the results of following Jesus and living life in his kingdom. Life in Jesus's kingdom is summed up with things like love, justice, righteousness, healing, redemption, reconciliation, peace, joy, freedom, and power. God wants to bring that kind of thing through you and me.

Later in the gospels we see how Jesus empowered his disciples. "When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick" (Luke 9:1-2).

Might it be that life and purpose are found in joining the creator God in everyday, normal acts of renewal, manifesting the kingdom of God right where you are?

What's this look like on the ground? It means everything Dan talked about last week—open eyes, open hearts, open wallets, open calendars, etc. We care for the poor, we pray, we evangelize, we pray against demons, we call out injustice, we forgive, and, as we are discipling under Jesus ourselves, we invite others to do so alongside of us.

Jesus has a purpose and plan for you to join his kingdom work in this world. Will you join him?

Disciples are students of Jesus who want to do three things: (1) be with Jesus; (2) become like Jesus; and (3) do what Jesus did.

If you want to experience the life of Jesus, you have to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

I recently saw an online schooling course called MasterClass. Anyone heard of it? Basically, it's an online school where you can learn all kinds of hobbies or skills from some of the most famous people ever.

- Want to learn how to cook? Learn from Gordon Ramsey.
- Want to learn how to write a thriller? Learn from James Patterson.
- Want to learn business leadership? Learn from Bob Iger.
- Want to learn about the art of performance? Learn from Usher.
- Want to learn how to sing country songs? Learn from Reba.

Naturally, I wanted to buy the whole collection when I saw it. Who wouldn't want a master class in cooking? Who wouldn't want a master class in writing? Who wouldn't want a master class in government policy?

Here's the thing: Jesus is offering an invitation to a masterclass *in life*.

Like any invitation, we can either accept it or reject it. The choice is ours.

A couple months ago, I met with a guy who is SSA. He was trying to decide if he should be baptized or not. So, we chatted and shared stories. We were candid with one another. I very much appreciate this guy.

He asked me, "Do you regret following Jesus?" Dang. Tough question. I thought about it and said, "No." He asked, "Why?"

Then, I told him about the time when many disciples left Jesus. Jesus asked the others, "You're not going to leave me, too, are you?" Peter replied, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

- To the young believer: what path are you going to take? **I invite you to disciple under Jesus.**
- To the older believer: are you a Christian or a DISCIPLE? **I invite you to disciple under Jesus.**
- To the nonbeliever: give Jesus and his teachings a try. The only way you'll know is if you taste and see for yourself. **I invite you to disciple under Jesus.**