

# Jesus' Rhythm of Life

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Excerpted from *Your Best Life In Jesus' Easy Yoke* by Bill Gaultiere (updated edition in 2016).

Jesus lived in a particular rhythm of life that was essential to his well-being, his own faith-life, and his ministry to others. It was his way of life with the Father that was the secret to the holy and wholesome life he lived.

## Jesus' Active Life of Compassion

One of the most obvious things about Jesus' life is that he was a servant to other people. Even as a young man in Nazareth he worked as a carpenter (what we would call a "blue collar worker" today). It's easy for us to imagine that when he fixed furniture he did so with a smile and that when he had to deal with complaining customers he served them in kindness. And when he loaned his tools out and didn't get them returned we don't doubt that he forgave his offender and blessed the one who cursed him.

Tradition tells us that when Jesus was a young man his father died. As the oldest child in the family he stayed at home and kept his father's carpentry business going. Jesus sacrificed advancing his career to provide for his family. He waited to begin his public ministry until he was 30 years old.

Jesus' generous life of compassionate service fills the pages of the Gospels. He went from city to city preaching the Good News and engaging people in conversation about the Kingdom of God. He spoke to masses of people, sometimes thousands at a time. He healed person after person that cried out for him or pushed through crowds to grab a hold of him.

For three years Jesus focused on investing himself on discipling the twelve and other eager learners. He encouraged them. He served them. He answered their questions. He taught them how to live and to love. And they reached thousands of other people with the gospel and established churches throughout their world. Jesus' ministry to his band of disciples was so effective that it is prospering in the lives of people like you and me over 2,000 years later!

## What Was Jesus' Secret?

How did Jesus have such a successful ministry? Where did he get his strength? Compassion? Wisdom? Miracle-working power? How did he deal with the overwhelming demands and stress of his ministry without becoming over-stressed or weighed down?

Today we see some Christians, including pastors and ministry leaders, have moral failures or just "go through the motions" of their ministry without much heart. In many cases these are highly trained and gifted leaders, men and women who have great understandings of life with Christ which they share with others and yet they lose touch with it in their *personal experience*.

Perhaps you've experienced overload from ministry or care-giving? At times most of us who are leaders do. No doubt, Jesus had far more responsibility and pressure than you or I or any human being has ever had and yet he remained relaxed, patient, joyful, and generous with people — including many very difficult or very needy people. *How did Jesus do this?*

We tend to explain Jesus' holiness and miracles by saying, "He was the Son of God." That is a fact, but it is not an adequate answer! Jesus was fully God, but he was also fully man.

We read in the Bible that, “Jesus grew in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52) and that “He learned obedience from what he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8). What a mystery that our sinless Savior *grew* in grace and *learned* to obey God!

Jesus learned and grew in the context of his relationship of *abiding* in the Father’s love. His time with Abba was the most important thing to him – *not* his ministry to others. Many Bible students miss this! Yet there are *many* examples in the Bible of the centrality of [Jesus’ Solitude and Silence](#) with the Father.

It was Jesus’ rich life of quiet prayer and tender intimacy with Abba that was the source of his love, wisdom, and power. His ministry was an *overflow* of his oneness with the Father.

## As a Branch Abiding in the Vine

Jesus’ rhythm of life is portrayed in a wonderful metaphor. He taught us that we need to become like branches abiding in a grapevine that is tended to by a gardener. The sap from the vine flows into the branches and they bear clusters of juicy grapes. Jesus is the Vine, the Father is the Gardener, and the Holy Spirit is the Life in the Vine (John 15:1-15).



Jesus is teaching that *the power for you and I to bear the fruit of love for others comes out of our intimate abiding in God.*

What Jesus taught he lived. He was the “Righteous Branch” (Jeremiah 23:5, 33:15) who abided in God continually. He lived a life of submission to the Father; *he only did what he saw the Father doing* (John 6:38, 12:50). So complete was his moment-by-moment reliance upon God that he knew the Holy Spirit without limit (John 3:34).

Jesus told us that the fruit in his life grew out “father and son intimacies” (Matthew 11:27, MSG). Jesus didn’t have to force himself to push out fruit! It came out *naturally*, out of his abiding in the Father’s love.

Jesus was *the first disciple* – he was a disciple of the Father. This is why he can disciple us. He’s gone through the process of growing in godliness and grace. In his lifestyle – in what he did and the way he did it – he shows us how to live a generous and joyous life.

Jesus is confident in teaching you and me that in the midst of a stressful world we can learn to live in an “easy yoke” (Matthew 11:28-30). He knows this because he proved it in his own life. He knows from personal experience as a human being that to be “yoked” (or submitted) to God in all things was to the way to live in his “unforced rhythms of grace,” to walk “freely and lightly” with a smile and a hand extended to help others (Matthew 11:28-30, NIV and MSG).

## The Inside – Out Flow

Jesus lived in an inside-out rhythm of life. Again and again in the Gospels we see him withdraw from the crowds to go and pray alone in a quiet place by the lake, in the hills, in the desert, or up in the mountains. He shared his heart with the Father. He prayed and meditated on Scripture. He listened to the Father, submitted to his leadership, and obeyed.

Jesus lived this way as a young carpenter in the quiet decades of his life in the small, obscure town of Nazareth. And he lived this way as a famous preacher in the bright lights of his public ministry

He prayed and he served. He prayed alone in quiet and he prayed in community in the synagogue or on a grassy field. He worshiped and he healed people. He meditated on Scripture and he taught astounding new insights. He fasted and he fed the hungry. He rested in quiet and he ministered in noisy crowds. He withdrew on retreat and he

was patient with people who interrupted him.

Jesus abided in the Father's love and he bore fruit.

Jesus is the Psalm 1 Man who meditated on the law day and night and walked in the way of righteousness and love. Jesus is the Psalm 1 Tree planted by the stream of water, roots going deep into rich and moist soil, strong to survive desert heat without its leaves wilting, and thus bearing fruit in season.

Jesus taught us to follow his example and become good, fruit-bearing trees like him (Matthew 7:17-19; 12:33; Luke 13:6-8). (["A-B-I-D-E: The Experience of Knowing Christ Today"](#) explores five key aspects of divine, fruit-bearing intimacy.)

## **Jesus' Rhythm of Life in Mark's Gospel**

The Gospel of Mark highlights Jesus' inside-out rhythm of life. [i] Nine times Mark gives examples of Jesus going on spiritual retreat either alone with the Father or joined by his disciples. Because of his nourishing time of abiding with the Father Jesus was able to bear tremendous fruit for the kingdom.

In his times of extended prayer Jesus received guidance and power from the Father which helped him to make wise ministry decisions, feed and heal thousands, and apprentice leaders to follow his ways of love. He practiced Sabbath rest in a special way in these spiritual retreats and he carried this demeanor of submission to the Father and rejoicing in him into his daily life and ministry.

An outline from Mark's Gospel shows the abiding and fruit-bearing rhythm of Jesus' life:

### **Mark 1:9-13**

Jesus went on pilgrimage to be baptized and spent forty days in the desert praying in silence, solitude, meditating on Scripture, and fasting. His spiritual disciplines connected him deeply to his Father, nourishing him and strengthening him. On this wilderness retreat he solidified his mission for his public ministry and how he would carry out ministry. He was empowered by the Father and by Scripture to overcome Satan. After his pilgrimage Jesus was ready to launch his public ministry and to start inviting people to follow him as his apprentices.

### **Mark 1:35**

Early in the morning Jesus had a custom of going out to lonely places to pray. Undoubtedly, his prayer times included meditating on passages from the Psalms and the prophets that he had memorized. In this instance, his prayer time gave him the discernment to leave Capernaum and go to minister in Galilee.

### **Mark 1:45**

Jesus went out to lonely places to pray. And people came to him for ministry. (Later, in Luke 11:1-4 when the disciples saw the priority of Jesus' private prayer times, his affectionate intimacy with the God he called "Abba," and the power and glory that came from him as a result of his connection to the Father, they cried out, "Lord, teach us to pray!" And so he taught them *how* he prayed in what we call the Lord's Prayer.)

### **Mark 3:13**

Jesus went alone to a mountainside to pray all night. Then with guidance from the Father he gathered and appointed his 12 apostles. (Luke 6:12-13 gives more detail.)

### **Mark 6:30-32**

Jesus went out on a retreat with his disciples by boat. John the Baptist died and they needed to grieve together and comfort one another. And the disciples had just finished a mission trip and wanted to talk with Jesus about it. But the crowds of people interrupted their retreat! You'd think that Jesus might set a boundary because he had his own needs to take care of. Certainly, we can sympathize with the disciples getting irritated with the crowds at this point! But Jesus' regular patterns of abiding in prayer provided a deep storehouse of grace that he could tap into in times of stress like this. Jesus patiently and generously ministered to the people. Miraculously, he fed 5,000 men (and many more women and children) with just five loaves and two fishes.

### **Mark 6:45-46**

Jesus went up to a mountainside to walk and pray in the quiet solitude and beauty of nature. From a distance he saw his disciples in their boat on the Sea of Galilee caught in a storm. In the power of God Jesus went out to them, walking on the water!

### **Mark 9:2-13**

Jesus took Peter, James, and John to climb a mountain for a spiritual retreat. They were renewed in the beauty of nature. They talked. They prayed. They rested on the mountaintop. Then Jesus went out a ways from the three disciples, perhaps a hundred feet, so that he could abide in prayer. And suddenly right before their eyes Jesus engaged in conversation with Moses and Elijah and he was transfigured so that they saw his glory radiate like the sun! Jesus showed the disciples his divine nature as the Son of God and it changed their lives *and ours* forever! We see Jesus' glory and we know that his connection to the Father is the source of our life and transformation.

### **Mark 14:12-31**

Jesus and his disciples went to the Upper Room for the Last Supper. This was more than a meal – it was a mini-retreat. There was food, drink, conversation, laughter, singing, teaching, and the sacrament of communion (the first one). This was an important time of renewal and preparation for the trials of the cross that were coming.

### **Mark 14:32-42**

Jesus took Peter, James, and John to the Garden of Gethsemane. There in the olive grove they watched and prayed

in a night vigil of preparation for the cross. The disciples fell asleep, but Jesus persisted in deep prayer. He surrendered his will to the Father over and over and over – he gathered his resolve to take on the sin of the world, to be tortured, to have Satan and all hell unleashed on him, to be crucified so he could save us, to trust the Father’s love for him in all this, to rely on the Holy Spirit to raise him from the dead. He was ready! He was connected to Abba! He was empowered!

## Jesus Practiced Spiritual Disciplines

These examples from Mark’s gospel show that Jesus could not have gone to the cross and risen from the dead without his continual, deep abiding in the Father’s love. He could not have carried out his world-transforming ministry without a profound lifestyle of prayer.

Our Bible study from the Gospel of Mark also shows us that Jesus practiced a variety of spiritual disciplines in his personal rhythm of life. Spiritual disciplines are ways to “grow in grace” (2 Peter 3:18). Dallas Willard divides spiritual exercises into two categories: “disciplines of abstinence” (self-denial) and “disciplines of engagement”. This is another key to understanding Jesus’ life with God.

Jesus used disciplines of self-denial like solitude and silence, fasting, Sabbath, and submission. And he used disciplines for connecting like meditation on Scripture, fellowship, worship, praying the Psalms, and service. (See our [“Spiritual Disciplines List.”](#))

We need to practice both self-denial and relational connection. The two types of disciplines work together like the cross and the resurrection. We die to sin and to self-rule in order to walk in new life with Christ (Romans 6:1-14). We put off the old self and put on the new self (Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9-10).

We deny ourselves to make space to embrace God and his life and to love others in Jesus’ name.

## Don’t Be Legalistic or Proud!

Practicing disciplines in our spiritual life does *not* mean that we’re better Christians. We must be careful not to do spiritual activities to earn God’s approval or to prove that we’re good. The purpose of spiritual exercises is to help us to grow in our reliance upon God’s grace. They are simply means to help us to open our hearts to God and receive what he has for us.

They are ways to follow Paul’s advice: “Train yourselves to be godly” (1 Timothy 4:7). Using prayer practices is like exercising to get in shape – it doesn’t always feel good, but it is good for us! We exercise ourselves spiritually to be alert to God and ready to participate in what he is doing (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

## Jesus says, “Follow Me!”

**Easy-Yoke-Cover-Front**

If Jesus needed to go into spiritual training to deny himself and live in the Spirit, to abide in the Father’s love and bear fruit, then how much more this is true for you and I!

Jesus set the general pattern for us to follow – inside-out spirituality. He modeled self-denial and engagement with God and others.

Your Best Life In Jesus’ Easy Yoke will help you apprentice yourself to Jesus Christ and live and work in his rhythms of grace.

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[i] I learned this analysis of Jesus’ pattern in the Gospel of Mark from my friend and colleague, Paul Jensen, in his

book, *Subversive Spirituality*, published by Pickwick Publications, 2009.