BE BEFORE YOU DO (PT2)

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INTRODUCTION

Two weeks ago Andrew introduced the series "***Emotionally Healthy Discipleship***," and started with "***Moving Beyond Shallow Discipleship***." Last Sunday David covered part one of "Be before you do". This morning I carry on the subject of "**Be before you do**" from where David ended last Sunday.

A statement made by David last Sunday:

> "A person who practices **being before doing** operates from a place of emotional and spiritual fullness, **deeply aware of themselves, others, and God**. As a result, their **being with God** is sufficient to sustain their **doing for God**".
> Peter Scazzero

The key to this is moving away from **an unbalanced life** and developing **a balanced life**.

Today we will examine 4 ways of being with God before doing for God.

4 WAYS TO "BE WITH GOD" BEFORE "DOING FOR GOD"

1. Make a radical decision.
2. Feel your feelings.
3. Integrate silence.
4. Commune with Jesus throughout the day.

1. MAKE A RADICAL DECISION

As an example of making a radical decision I want us to catch up on a bit of church history, particularly, the beginning of the monastic movement. **The Desert Fathers**, as they were called, of the 3rd to the 5th Century, were folk who had experienced that the church had grown shallow and indistinct from the rest of the surrounding culture.

We have seen a similar trend in the modern church over the last 50 years. We had a saying in the 1970s that went like this: "***The church is so worldly and the world so churchy that one cannot tell the difference***."

In response, they did something radical and extraordinary by fleeing to the deserts of Egypt to be with God. It was a movement that started in AD 270, when a twenty-year-old named Anthony went to live alone with God in the desert. Other Christian men and women followed his example in large numbers, leaving their cities and villages on the Nile Delta, to live a holy life by separating themselves from the worldly culture that had infiltrated much of the church.

They understood themselves to be following the ancient path of Moses, Elijah, and John the Baptist, each of whom had spent much time alone in the desert with God. Over time, they gathered in communities and became known as the **Desert Fathers and Mothers**. The Desert Fathers had a major influence on the development of Christianity.

Everyone from ordinary people to emperors then began to travel to the desert to meet with them for guidance and wisdom. With their deep knowledge of God and the human heart, they were, in a sense, the psychologists and spiritual directors of their day. Eventually, their wisdom and insights, known as the "**Sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers**," were written down.

Their radical decision to move into the desert resulted in a movement in which they grew very close to God. They progressed to **being with God** instead of **doing for God**.

Right now you might be thinking something like this: "Do you expect all of us to move to a literal desert?" The answer, of course, is no. But the drastic nature of the decision we must make is similar, in that it requires making a clean and total break from our present habits and lifestyle rhythms.

The radical decision is to end our addiction to doing tasks for God. We must move away from a life of over-commitment to doing, and living rushed lives with too much to do in too little time, in order to learn how to **be** before we **do**.

This radical decision is grounded in a deep inner determination.

2. FEEL YOUR FEELINGS

Many folk struggle to 'feel and face' their feelings and share or discuss them with others. They also find it difficult to express affection or resolve conflicts maturely.

Many of us were never taught how to share our feelings, especially anger, sadness, fears, insecurities and so on.

When we are not able to share our feelings we lock up our emotions and tend to go through cycles of 'cloud-burst' when we blow a fuse; or go into a time of sulking; or avoid contact with someone who we feel has done us harm.

We move into a lifestyle of denial and hide behind the words, "I am blessed", when in fact we are falling apart internally.

For pastors and church leaders the focus of their spiritual life is often to grow our church, reach people for Christ, release others for ministry, learn how to be a better leader, and so on. The emphasis is strongly on **doing things for God** more than on **being with God**.

In contrast, all the Desert Fathers and Mothers, were actually very earthly minded. They spent time coming to terms with their inner struggles — those untamed emotions, less-than-pure motives, and thoughts that shape our behaviours. They understood that a necessary condition for growing into a mature disciple is having the courage to meet the honest truth about ourselves head on instead of running from it.

When we're not in touch with what is going on inside us, we are not in **reality** but in **illusion** or **denial**. And when we are not in reality, we are not in spirituality, because the **authentic spiritual life is not an escape from reality but an absolute commitment to it**.

We are very open and accustomed to God speaking to us through Scripture, prayer, sermons, a prophetic word, and sometimes circumstances — but not our emotions!

We're not open to God speaking through feelings such as sadness, depression, anger, grief, an unhappy spouse, constant failure, or a life that periodically spins out of control. Sadly, our failure to recognize what is going on in our 'interior world' causes us to miss many gifts from God.

This slowing down to feel is essential if we are to **be** before we **do**. Journaling is one way to get into the practice of coming alive to our feelings.

Once we start writing down our feelings we may discover God saying things to us that we never heard because we were ignoring our feelings.

3. INTEGRATE SILENCE

If we are going to do for God out of our being with God, we must practice silence and stillness in order to nurture our relationship with him. Switch off the phone, the Tablet, the computer, the TV, and whatever else will distract us.

In fact, without the practice of **intentional silence** before the Lord, it is almost impossible to mature into spiritual adulthood. Why? Because we are so full of distractions, worries, and planning our lives, that our inner world is jam-packed, allowing limited room for God to fill us.

Note: Integrating silence and stillness utterly transforms the way we follow Jesus and the way we minister.

In silence we are able to let go, surrendering our will to God's will. At the core of God's words to us, is the invitation to surrender control of our lives — to practice letting go, moment by moment, of the illusion that we are the centre of the universe. In prayer, we surrender our desire for control, for approval and security.

Silence will actually change the way we intercede! So many of our prayers for the people around us come out of our self-will – our understanding of the

situation. In practicing silence, we let go of our willfulness (self-governance, trying to control everything).

Our approach to prayer changes from focusing on getting God to do what we want, to positioning ourselves so that we want what God wants. God always knows what is best for us and others.

It is not always easy to accept what God wants us to do. And at the same time, nothing is more wonderful than opening our lives to His plan for us.

In silence we let go of our agendas, allowing communion with God to become the core of our lives. We come to God in prayer not to get something from him, but simply to be with him.

Silence slows us down enough to receive God's love without distractions. We realize our very existence as human beings is an expression of God's generosity and love flowing to us.

In silence we let go, allowing God to deeply transform us. The Spirit searches through our whole life history, and in the process, the Spirit separates the essential from the nonessential, the junk from the treasures.

In silence we let go, opening ourselves to hear God speak. Imagine having a relationship with a person and all they do is speak. Words. Words. Words. Requests. Requests. Requests. That is a one-way relationship.

When we integrate **intentional silence** into our prayer life, we enter into a two-way relationship, one that allows us to abide with God, be held by God, and listen to God. It revolutionizes our relationship with God in Christ.

4. COMMUNE WITH JESUS THROUGHOUT THE DAY

A central theme of the monastic life is that each of us needs to go alone to our selected place of silence (an outside venue or our room), sit before God in silence, and persevere in His presence. It is a space set apart to meet with Him.

Jesus taught us in Matthew 6:

Matthew 6:6-8 (NLT2)

> *6 But when you pray, **go away by yourself**, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father **in private**. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. 7 "When you pray, don't babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. 8 Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!*

We need a time of silence with God on a regular basis.

However, the goal of spending time alone with God is not just to devote that time to prayer, but to become a person who prays always. A person who

prays always has a continual awareness of God's presence at all times — while working, exercising, playing, cooking, leading a meeting, driving, visiting friends, as well as during worship, prayer, and Bible study. In other words, the goal is to be continually conscious of God, remembering him, abiding in him, every waking hour.

Our life is normally compartmentalized, divided into what is known as sacred and secular compartments. We have time for devotions, Bible study, and prayer, but we easily spent large portions of the day without remembering or communing with God at all.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NKJV)

[17] pray without ceasing,

1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NIV)

[17] pray continually;

ILLUSTRATION:

Many years ago the then head of the Salvation Army, William Booth, was walking down a street in Amsterdam with a friend, when the friend suddenly realised that William had stopped almost a block back. He walked back to William and asked what was wrong. William said he felt he had lost connection with the Lord and His presence, so he was not moving until it was restored.

William Booth was a brilliant example of what we all should be like in our relationship with Jesus.

The goal of the Christian life is to abide in Jesus all day, remaining in communion with him in everything. The great problem, however, is that our **doing-for** Jesus often gets beyond our **being-with** or abiding in Jesus.

Most Christians believe that if they have a short devotional time every day they are doing extremely well.

Two Scriptures to challenge us out of this false feeling:

David practiced **set times** of prayer **seven times** a day

Psalm 119:164 (NLT2)

*[164] I will praise you **seven times** a day because all your regulations are just.*

Daniel prayed **three times** a day even when commanded not to do so.

Daniel 6:10 (NLT2)

*[10] But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed **three times** a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God.*

Devout Jews in Jesus's day prayed **three times a day**. The purpose of the set times is to create a rhythm that enables us to stop at set times in order to be present with God during all of our active hours.

And we tend to pat ourselves on the back when we spend **one short time with God** daily. I think we are missing something.

Stopping three to four times a day to be with God can utterly transform our spiritual life because it causes us to be aware of Jesus's presence in all we do for him.

NOTE:

> **It takes creativity and perseverance, as well as trial and error, to make the transition from merely practicing spiritual disciplines to actually being with God as the source of your doing for him.**

Spiritual disciplines, such as reading the Bible, prayer, fellowship, and worship, does not save us. But if we are not implementing these **core practices**, it is unlikely we are growing much spiritually.

Always remember: God has made each of us different. Your combination of doing and being will be different from mine. God has crafted each of our personalities, temperaments, life situations, passions, and callings in a unique way.

The choice **to be** before **you do** is a radical one. You will encounter resistance if you try to be more than do. The greatest opposition you encounter will come from within yourself! So be patient with yourself.

2024 is a year of getting into true discipleship and not just branding yourself as Christian.

So, to wrap things up, we covered four ways today to be with God before doing for God:

1. Make a radical decision.
2. Feel your feelings.
3. Integrate silence.
4. Commune with Jesus throughout the day.

EXTRA NOTES

I Know My Doing Exceeds My Being When . . .

- I can't shake the pressure I feel from having too much to do in too little time.
- I am ignoring the stress, anxiety, and tightness of my body.
  I am concerned with what others think.
- I am often fearful about the future.
- I am always rushing.
- I am defensive and easily offended.
- I am preoccupied and distracted.
- I fire off quick opinions and judgments.

- I feel unenthusiastic about or threatened by the success of others.
- I spend more time talking than listening.