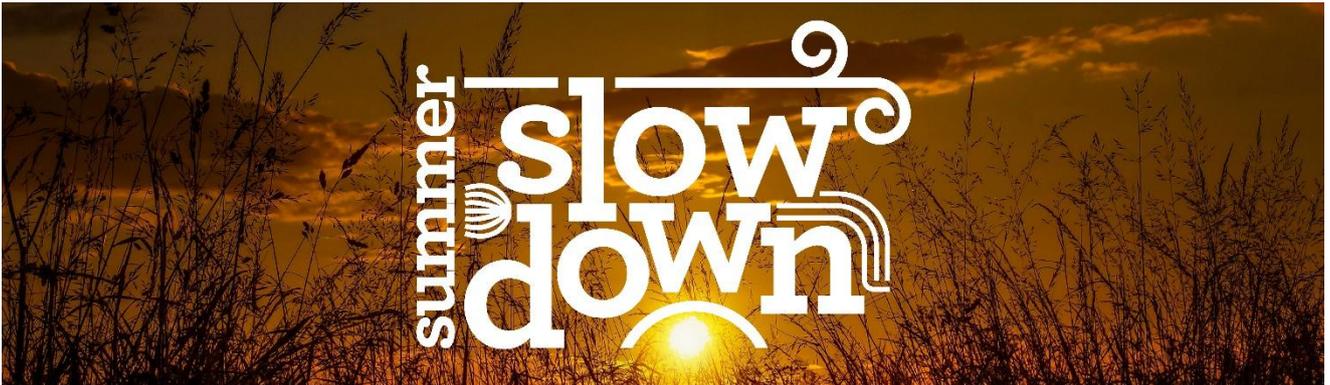


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Returning Well Rested

John 15:1-8

Three R's

Recently I was making the short drive down to Mairangi Bay from church and a sign caught my eye. It's a classic Mairangi Bay Village advertisement and uses three R's to announce what this beachside village has to offer.

"Relax, Revive, Retail!"

It's almost the perfect slogan for our Summer Slowdown series.

Today as we reach week four of the series I want to offer you three more R's inspired by our local village!

The first R is **Retreat**.

Our series so far has focused largely on retreat. On what we do to slow down externally and internally, and create space to be with God. The Kiwi summer provides many of us the time and, in an ideal world, the weather conditions, to retreat from work and study, and do the things we love with the people we love, in this beautiful country.

But as we all know the summer break doesn't last forever.

As a kid I dreaded seeing the "back to school" sales start to appear! Those advertisements sounded the death knell to my summer, meaning it was almost time to return to the

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classroom. Whether it's school, university, the office, the job site, or other responsibilities, many of us are returning to reality around this time of year.

We don't live in retreat (or it wouldn't be a retreat). We retreat from something and at some point, we need to return.

So that is our second R – **Return**.

The Desert Fathers were monastic Christians in the fourth century who made a drastic withdrawal from society to live in the desert. I've mentioned them before, I find them fascinating and I love learning from their writings and spirituality. If anyone was known for Retreat, for slowing their lives to be with Jesus – it was them. Not for a sabbath, or for a summer, but for decades.

These monks have often been accused of abandoning the world in favour of private contemplation and it's a natural criticism to make, but at the foundation of desert spirituality was the phrase: "*We retreat **from** the world, **for** the world.*"

Meaning they **retreated** to the desert to **become the kind of people** who when they **returned**, could offer something of value to the world. In this way their retreat was deeply missional because the impact of it would reverberate way beyond themselves.

Long before the desert Fathers, God was already in the business of forming people in the desert, notably the nation of Israel, and Jesus himself. And although Jesus didn't live his whole life in the desert, he was a master of retreating and returning. He modelled this back and forth in his life. Retreat and return. Time in the quiet with God. Time in the commotion of the crowds. Not living exclusively in either place but intentionally moving between the two.

Although Jesus is most known for his teachings and miracles, the gospel writers repeatedly show him retreating for life-giving time with his Father. And this abiding in his Father by the Spirit enabled Jesus to remain unhurried and present, in the midst of all the commotion that followed him around. Author and Philosopher Dallas Willard was once asked to describe Jesus in one word to which he responded: "*relaxed*".

Jesus was a master of retreating and returning well.

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So for us, as we come toward the end of our series, if **retreat** is *essential*, and **return** is *inevitable*, the real question becomes: *how do we do return well?*

That brings us to our final R - which I'm sure you'll pick up quickly as we turn to our passage for today from John chapter 15:1-8.

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Remain

This passage comes from a long section of John's gospel where Jesus is teaching the disciples in preparation for His return to heaven. The Upper Room Discourse as it is known lasts a full five chapters in John. Here, with his remaining days among his friends numbered, Jesus tells them seven times to **“remain”** in him.

I imagine they understood what remaining in him meant while he was on earth in person: it meant following him, physically, listening to his teaching, learning from his example, carrying out his example.

But what did it mean to “remain in Him” when He was gone?

And honestly, that question has been echoing in my head as I've prepared for this message. What does it mean to remain in Jesus? What does it feel like? Do you know when you're doing it? What does it look like to not remain in him? And as it connects to our theme today, how does remaining in Jesus help us to return well?

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To help his disciples, and us, understand, Jesus uses vineyard imagery. Vines were important both culturally and economically in biblical times - and the vine is mentioned in the Bible more often than any other plant. Jesus describes himself as the True Vine, His Father as the gardener, and his followers as the branches. The key point is that the branches must remain in the vine in order to produce fruit.

The Greek word that the NIV translates as “remain” is “*menō*”, and another common translation is “abide”. Abide means to stay, to live, or to dwell. To take up permanent residence somewhere, hence we have the word abode, to refer to where someone resides. So, Jesus is saying that he is not a holiday home for us, or a building we visit on Sundays, He is our permanent residence.

To unpack this further I want to suggest three ways we can remain in the True Vine:

1. Remaining in the Word

Jesus hints at this twice in the passage: in verse 3 saying the disciples are clean because of the word he has spoken to them; and in verse 7 saying if his words remain in them they can ask whatever they wish from the Father.

The Word of God connects us with the presence of God. For us it's still essential that we abide in the Word of God. Creating rhythms of reading scripture, meditating on it, or memorising passages, means God's word can remain in us. We can stay connected to God by staying connected to His Word.

2. Remaining in the Spirit

This passage is sandwiched between two fundamental passages about the role of the Holy Spirit. In chapter 14, directly before the vine image, Jesus has promised the Holy Spirit will come to his disciples in his bodily absence, and then in chapter 16 he further unpacks the work of the Holy Spirit, who he calls the Counsellor.

The Holy Spirit is God and He helps us to connect with Jesus and the Father. As we create space to spend time with Jesus, to undertake spiritual disciplines, we give permission for the Holy Spirit to transform us and produce fruit. We remain in God by remaining open to His Spirit.

3. Remaining in Love

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In Verse 9, which we didn't quite read to, Jesus says to the disciples **"remain in my love"**. In his book *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, Henri Nouwen says when we remain in God's love, we are at **home**. He describes "home" this way:

Home is the center of my being, where I can hear the voice that says, "You are my beloved. On you my favor rests," ... I have heard that voice. It has spoken to me in the past and continues to speak to me now... When I hear that voice, I know that I am home with God and have nothing to fear.

And therefore, for him **leaving home**:

is a denial of the spiritual reality that I belong to God... Leaving home means ignoring the truth that God has "knitted me together in my mother's womb"... Leaving home is living as though I do not yet have a home, and must look far and wide to find one.

And **the fruit of leaving home**, of not remaining in the Father's love, are in Nouwen's experience not hard to spot:

Anger, resentment, jealousy, desire for revenge, lust, greed, antagonisms, and rivalries are the obvious signs that I have left home.

In contrast, remaining home in Jesus, remaining in the vine, over time, produces **good fruit** such as those listed in Galatians 5:22-23 which says: **the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.**

Such fruit comes about not by our striving, but through our connection with Jesus. Branches don't earn their way onto the vine by producing fruit. They produce fruit because they abide in the vine.

Retreating, Returning, and Remaining

We're getting towards the end so let's go over our three R's:

This world is busy, demanding, and noisy. So we need to **retreat** in order to regain perspective and listen to the voice of the Father. *But if we only retreated*, we'd be opting out of life, isolating ourselves unhealthily from others, and abdicating our responsibilities as God's representatives in this world.

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So we need to **return** to the world, the work, and our responsibilities. *But if we only retreated and returned the same.* It would be pointless. There would be no transformation, and no noticeable difference between us and those who don't know the Father's rest.

However, when we bring all these together, when we intentionally **retreat** and **return**, all the while **remaining** in Jesus, we are transformed into people who bring the fruits of the Spirit into the world.

People who carry **patience** into a frantic Maccas drive-through.

People who carry **peace** into heated boardrooms.

People who carry **kindness** into hospital theatres.

People who carry **self-control** onto sports fields.

People who carry **joy** into anxiety-fuelled study sessions.

People who carry **love** into couples therapy appointments.

People who carry **faithfulness** defying teenage peer pressure.

People who carry **goodness** into a gossiping break room.

People who carry **gentleness** into the comments section.

I don't need to work hard to convince you that such people will stand out in an anxiety-fuelled world. The world needs people who live out the fruit of the Spirit, and therefore the world needs people who remain in the True Vine.

This week I saw an Instagram post from a popular DJ Fred Again. If you haven't heard of him it doesn't matter, What struck me was the way he had decided to end his shows recently. He shared how he has always struggled with the abrupt way music concerts finish allowing no time to process. So, what he's done is create a 30-minute space where calm music continues to play and people can in his words *"just take a minute and sit down or pause or whatever they need."* His Instagram post showed images from these pause moments which look like they could be taken on a Sunday night at Easter camp.

It was one of those posts that struck me as significant before I realised why. As I reread the sentiment, I understood he was doing something very similar to what we're doing today.

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Attempting to create space for people to process what they've experienced, and take it with them as they go. A way to help people return to reality well.

So today as we finish we're going to leave space for you to linger. To process with God what you've experienced over Summer and what you sense Him inviting you to carry into the rest of the year.

You may like to start by attempting a simple **breath prayer** based on our passage.

- As you exhale thinking: **“remain”**
- As you inhale in thinking: **“in me”**

You may like to invite God to bring your focus to one **fruit of the Spirit** to pray for. Or you may already have one in mind you would like to pray for growth in.

You may like to **reread some of the key verses** from our series.

The time is yours to **abide with Jesus** and then I will close our time together with a prayer.

Closing Prayer

Spirit of gentleness, love, and peace,

Fill us with yourself and help us to

Become non-anxious presences.

Teach us to abide in you daily,

Remaining in You,

Even in the midst of busyness,

For ourselves, for our neighbours, for the world,

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Amen.



Reflecting on Sunday 18th January 2026:

Last week Heather spoke on opening ourselves up to Jesus. Did you have an opportunity to slow down and ask God to search your heart this week? What did you notice in that experience?

These questions help you think more about this message. We hope they might be a conduit for conversation and reflection, encouraging us to wrestle with how this message might practically work itself out in our lives.

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1. St. Seraphim of Sarov once said: *“acquire inner peace and thousands around you will be saved.”* It’s a big call! What do you think? How do you think it connects to the message on remaining in God?
2. How do you think the fruits of the Spirit may display themselves to the world around us?
3. What are some of the challenges we face when trying to return well from rest with God?
4. What is one practice that can help you remain in God this week?

If you’d like to chat with someone about your spiritual journey or anything else going on in your life, please contact us at care@windsorpark.org.nz; **we’re better together and no perfect people are allowed.**

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Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email info@windsorpark.org.nz and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. Aidan referenced Henri Nouwen's book **The Return of the Prodigal Son**. It's a classic impactful book which dives deep into the idea of remaining at home in the Father. You can purchase a copy here:
https://www.thenile.co.nz/books/henri-jm-nouwen/the-return-of-the-prodigal-son/9780385473071?srsItid=AfmBOooWZWYnTWWpMxD5Z8R46C7F1-7CWmpyUnUDyv2VnVk1aYZ_dsDW
2. This Bible Project article explores the fruit of the Spirit and its meaning in the Bible:
<https://bibleproject.com/articles/fruits-spirit-and-their-meanings-bible/>