

When I went in for my annual physical at the age of 30-something, my doctor said I had the body of an 18-year old. There were days I still acted like an 18-year old, but I was a lousy athlete in high school, so being physically 18 was nothing to brag about in my case. The doctor asked what I did for exercise, and I told him, "Running, bicycling and weight training." He said, "Hm. Do you know how to swim?" I said, "A little, but I really don't swim." He said, "You ought to have somebody show you a few strokes in the swimming pool. Then you could compete in a triathlon." I was like, "Pardon me?" I knew a kid who had done the ironman: you swim 2.4 miles, you get out of the water and bicycle 112 miles, then you get off the bike and run a marathon, 26.2 miles. The doctor said to me, "You've got two of the sports down already; you could pull it off." Believe me, I had a better chance of building my own rocket and shooting myself to the moon. Now, you could argue, no, you can do whatever you put your mind to, and I would agree – up to a point. It was a physical possibility, but it would have cost a lot in terms of time, dedication, diet, workouts, and the rearrangement of my life every day. I was not willing to give it what it needed, so I never even tried for that goal.

Whether it's the physical life or the spiritual life, we never reach some goals because we are unwilling to commit to them. At the Last Supper Jesus had one final chance to get his disciples committed to the right goal. He kept it pretty basic. He didn't say, "I want you to learn how to become public speakers," or "I think you should read more so that four of you can write gospel accounts of what happened here." He didn't say, "I want you to study psychology so you can help people going through times of trouble." None of that. Instead, he said, "Remain in me." He compared himself to a vine and them to branches. If you take a branch off the vine, it's not going to live. That branch will die. He and the disciples were one, but if any of them tried to go it alone, they were not going to make it.

If we separate ourselves from God, we feel it. If you don't go to mass for a while, or you don't say prayers each day, if you don't offer some regular service to those who are less fortunate, if you don't contribute to charities, or if you don't live the way other Christians live, you feel it. You know what it's like to be a branch apart from the vine. The same is true in our families: if you don't talk often with the ones you love, if children and parents don't spend time with each other, if your work or your school takes priority over the people you live with, you feel it. You know what it's like to be a branch, dying, apart from the vine.

At the Last Supper, Jesus foresaw all this. So he gives the most basic advice to his followers: "Remain in me." Keep close to the Word of God. Read the Bible. Meet with other Christians. Make time for people who rely on you. Pray often. It's not hard. It just takes a certain commitment. For some people, even these basic tasks seem as likely to do as competing in a triathlon. But you can probably do it. You can probably do whatever you put your mind to, if you set the right goal and you rearrange the parts of your life to reach it. You will bear fruit.