

The Spiritual Disciplines

The disciple of Christ desires above all else to be like Him...Given this desire, a decision is made: the decision to devote oneself to becoming like Christ. The disciple is one who intent upon becoming Christlike and so dwelling in His 'faith and practice,' systematically, and progressively rearranges his affairs to that end. By these actions, even today, one who enrolls in Christ's training becomes His pupil or disciples." Dallas Willard

The process of becoming a disciple is not a formal process, but it's not formless – The spiritual disciplines are an inward and spiritual reality. "The purpose of the disciplines is liberation from the stifling slavery to self interest and fear." God has given us the disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving His grace. *The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that **He can transform us. The disciplines do not change us. They are a path.*** "The path does not produce change; it only places us where the change can occur."

He who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. Galatians 6.8

The Inward Disciplines	The Outward Disciplines	The Corporate Disciplines
Meditation	Simplicity	Confession
Prayer	Solitude	Worship
Fasting	Submission	Guidance
Study	Service	Celebration

Meditation – is listening to God's Word; Reflecting on God's works; Rehearsing God's deeds; Reflecting on God's law. The goal of mediation is to come to place where we can repent and obedience formed.

Prayer – Is life creating and life changing. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. Prayer in this context is the act of interceding on your own behalf and on behalf of others.

Fasting – Biblical fasting always centers on spiritual purposes. In Scripture the normal means of fasting involves abstaining from all food, solid or liquid, but not from water. In most cases fasting is a private matter between an individual and God. More than anything else fasting, reveals what controls us. Fasting is not so much asking God to do something for us personally or for someone else, but rather asking God to show us something about ourselves.

Study – The purpose of the Spiritual Disciplines is the total transformation of the person. The aim at replacing old destructive habits of thought with new life-giving habits. Paul teaches us that we are transformed through the renewal of the mind (Romans 12.2) The mind is renewed by applying to those things that will transform it. Jesus said, "You will

know the truth and the truth will set you free.” John 8.32 Good feelings will not free us. Getting ‘high’ on Jesus will not free us. Without a knowledge of the truth, we will not be free.

Meditation is devotional; study is analytical. Study asks the question, “What is this saying?” “What does this mean?”

Study involves four steps:

1. Repetition
2. Concentration
3. Comprehension
4. Reflection

Simplicity - simplicity is freedom. Simplicity brings joy and balance. This discipline is an *inward* reality that results in an *outward* life-style. Jesus calls those to follow Him to live a joyful life of carefree concern for possessions. “Give to every one who begs from you; and of him who takes away your goods do not ask for it back.” Luke 6.30

The central point of the discipline of simplicity is to seek the kingdom of God and the righteousness of His kingdom first and then everything necessary will come into it’s problem place. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of Jesus’ insight. Everything hinges upon maintaining the “first” things first.

The simple life is characterized by three inner attitudes.

1. If what we have we receive as a gift
2. if what we have is to be cared for by God
3. if what we have is available to others.

Solitude – Solitude should not be equated with loneliness. Loneliness is inner emptiness. Solitude is inner fulfillment. Solitude is a quality not a state, or a place. . It’s a posture of being more than an act of isolating. Inner solitude shows up by us having an inner dialogue with God in the midst of the chaos of life. He becomes your sufficiency or your strength.

Submission – Here’s how Jesus defines submission, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Jesus said, “If any one would be first, He must be last of all and servant of all.” And then He immortalized this principle by washing the disciples feet.

In practicing submission we lay down the terrible burden of always needing to get our own way. We give up the obsession to demand that things go the way we want them to go. In the discipline of submission we are released to drop the matter and forget about it. We don’t have to always be right, we can even stand to be misunderstood. We can say and believe the words of John the Baptist, “He must increase, and I must decrease.”

Service – As the cross is the sign of submission, so the towel is the sign of service. “I have not come to be served, but to serve. Jesus showed His disciples the full extent of His love. He washed their feet. John 13.14-15. Nothing disciplines the inordinate desires of the flesh like service, and nothing transforms the desires of the flesh like serving in hiddenness.

“Yes...But.” When we choose to be a servant we give up the right to be in charge.

Confession – Confession is not just an inward discipline but an outward action. “Confess your sins one to another and pray for each other that you may be healed.” James 5.16 The discipline of confession brings an end to pretense. It puts in a position of complete authenticity. Confession leads to repentance. Repentance leads to obedience and transformation.

Worship - To worship is to experience Reality, to touch Life. It is to know to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community. “*God inhabits the praises of His people.*” In worship we ascribe to God His worth to us, to the community and to the world. Brother Lawrence learned to practice the presence of God in the sacredness of the ordinary. Worship is not an event, rather it is an experience with the living God. This experience happens individually, and corporately.

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Colossians 3.16

Guidance - God publically led the people of Israel. It was a corporate guidance based on His Sovereignty and care of His people. God’s law and His love led the people to “a land flowing of milk and honey.”

There were 400 Biblical leaders in the Bible. Of those 400 only about 80 of those leaders are considered to have finished their lives well. Of those 80 they had five things in common.

1. They were humble.
2. Had great faith.
3. Were obedient to the law
4. Practiced intimacy in relationships with God and others.
5. Had the ability to receive wise counsel from others.

The Quakers believe in the idea of a Committee of Clearness. People who surround an individual to ask clarifying questions around God’s purpose and plan for a specific issue or direction. We as believers need people in our lives to help us crystallize God’s purpose. We must grow in the ability to receive wise counsel from others.

Celebration – Celebration is at the heart of the way of Christ. He entered the world on song of jubilation. “I bring you good news of great joy, cried the angel, which shall come to all the people.” Luke 2.10 Jesus left the world sharing His joy to the disciples: “These

things I have told you so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.” John 15.11 Our celebration must be of God, for God, about God. Anything less is a meaningless celebration of self.

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me— watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." Matthew 11.28-30 (The Message)