

## **A FEW THOUGHTS ON “SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES”**

*“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,<sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” (Eph 3:20-21)*

### **I. DEFINITION: “Spiritual Discipline”**

- a spiritual habit formed and practiced consistently that leads over time to a closer walk with Jesus and others.

*“Anyone who claims to be intimate with God ought to live the same kind of life Jesus lived” (1Jn 2:6 MSG)*

### **II. THOUGHTS:**

- “If we are to enter more deeply into the invisible arena, into the realm of the spiritual, we will have to make a conscientious effort to move past the superficial in order to enter into a deeper knowledge of God.”  
(Benson and Benson, *Disciplines for the Inner Life*, IX)
- “As we are generally creatures of habit, we need a routine, a discipline, to cultivate the inner life” (Ibid.)
- Here’s the practical challenge: Are we willing to make the practice of spiritual disciplines a necessary part of our basic rhythm of life?

### **III. TWO STRONG PASSAGES**

Colossians 1:9-12

*For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,<sup>10</sup> so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,<sup>11</sup> being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience,<sup>12</sup> and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.*

1 Timothy 4:7<sup>b</sup>-8

... *train yourself to be godly.* <sup>8</sup> *For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.*

## IV. TYPES OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

**A. Abstinence:** the practice of abstaining from certain desires that are normally a part of life's rhythms.

Examples (not comprehensive)

- solitude
- frugality
- silence
- confession
- fasting
- so forth

**B. Engagement:** the deliberate practice of certain spiritual habits that should be a regular part of life's rhythms.

Examples (not comprehensive)

- Bible reading
- prayer
- Bible study
- confession
- Worship
- service

## V. BENEFITS AND CAUTIONS

### A. Quotes

J. Sidlow Baxter (then well into his eighties) once spoke of the spiritual discipline of prayer. He noted that learning to pray (to truly pray as a discipline of life) requires that one go through three stages:

Duty  
Discipline  
Delight

The inward journey is an exercise, something that is cultivated; it requires concentration and attentiveness. Above all, the inward journey requires the greatest sincerity of which we are capable. It entails a risk—the risk of shame if nothing is there, the risk of emptiness if one does not change as a result, the risk of one's own person—and this risk is no less than that encountered on the way to another person. For us moderns, perhaps, fear of being ridiculous in our own eyes is the greatest shame.

—From *Death by Bread Alone* by Dorothee Soelle

**B. Cautions:**

1. The spiritual disciplines are a means to an end, not the end itself.
2. The spiritual disciplines are not instantly beneficial; they require consistent practice over much, much time (an oak tree requires forty years of growth; squash only six months).
3. The spiritual disciplines should lead to a deeper walk with Christ; however, they could lead to spiritual pride ... beware!

Lord, Thou knowest better than I know myself that I am growing older, and will some day be old.

Keep me from getting talkative, and particularly from the fatal habit of thinking I must say something on every subject and on every occasion.

Release me from craving to try to straighten out everybody's affairs.

Keep my mind free from the recital of endless details—give me wings to get to the point.

I ask for grace enough to listen to the tales of others' pains. Help me to endure them with patience.

But seal my lips on my own aches and pains—they are increasing and my love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by.

Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally it is possible that I may be mistaken.

Keep me reasonably sweet; I do not want to be a saint—some of them are so hard to live with—but a sour old woman is one of the crowning works of the devil.

Make me thoughtful, but not moody; helpful, but not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom, it seems a pity not to use it all—but Thou knowest, Lord, that I want a few friends at the end.

—Anonymous

Mother Superior

## VI. SOME HELPFUL “SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES”

### A. Abstinence (some examples)

1. “Solitude”
  - (a) purposeful abstinence from interaction with others in order to gain a divine perspective on life and renewed strength to cling to Christ.
  - (b) practical ideas: solitary walk; half-day retreat; weekend getaway (cabin, camping ...).
2. “Silence”
  - (a) seeking quiet without music, talking, distracting noises in order to concentrate on God and perhaps hear (sense) His still, quiet voice.
  - (b) practical ideas: early morning (4am? 5am?) solitude; alone in a quiet place; combine with solitude and practice both together; so forth.

“in quietness and trust is your strength”  
(Isa 10:15 NASB)

3. “Fasting”
  - (a) abstaining from food (and drink?) for a time to focus one’s whole self upon complete, utter dependence on God and for increased spiritual clarity; “... man shall not live by bread alone ...” (Matt 4:4)
  - (b) practical ideas: missing a meal a day (time available for other spiritual disciplines); full day (or more) fasts with water (or juice); fasting or denying oneself other things other than food for a season; so forth.

### B. Engagement (some examples)

1. “Word of God”
  - (a) to consistently engage in the reading, hearing, and study (group and individual) of the Scriptures such that daily time in the word is the “food you eat” and “the air you breathe.”
  - (b) practical ideas: Bible reading programs; Quiet Times; sermons, tapes, videos, classes, radio; group studies; so forth.

2. "Prayer"
  - (a) to intentionally converse, communicate and commune often with God as in a trusted conversation in order to be transformed and conformed to seeking His will; "pray without ceasing" (1Thess 5:17).
  - (b) practical ideas: a part of daily Quiet Time; "closet times"; group praying; "spot praying"; prayer retreats; so forth.
3. "Service"
  - (a) intentionally taking the heart of a servant and engaging our goods and services (time, talent, treasure) for the benefit of others and the honoring of God (not self).
  - (b) practical ideas: serve in worthy organizations (e.g. Samaritan Community Center and others); random acts of kindness; serve in a capacity whereby I am training myself to avoid "arrogance, possessiveness, envy, resentment, or covetousness" (D. Willard); acts of service without expectation or desire for recognition.

## VII. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

(Select some or all as you wish)

1. Which of the following best describes your personal relationship with "spiritual disciplines"? (And why)
  - a. Clueless (this is completely new to me)
  - b. Confused (not sure how this fits into my life)
  - c. Convicted (I know I should be practicing certain disciplines but I haven't done so consistently)
  - d. Concerned (how do I add this to my busy schedule?)
  - e. Challenged (charged up and ready to try)
2. What do you think might be some major hindrances to beginning to sincerely practice certain spiritual disciplines? How might these hindrances be overcome?
3. In 1 Timothy 4 (note the text in point III.), Paul urges the believer to "train yourself to be godly." How might this phrase be connected to spiritual disciplines?
4. Which of the disciplines would be easiest for you to begin consistently? Which would be the hardest? (Explain)
5. Personal reflection: as a result of the teaching, I am resolved to \_\_\_\_\_