

Introduction to the Spiritual Disciplines

Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people. The classical Disciplines of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into the depths. They invite us to explore the inner caverns of the spiritual realm. They urge us to be the answer to a hollow world...[Their] purpose is liberation from the stifling slavery to self-interest and fear.

Richard Foster

Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth

The Inner Life

John 3:1-12

There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. ² After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you."

³ Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God." ⁴ "What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?"

⁵ Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. ⁷ So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit." ⁹ "How are these things possible?" Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰ Jesus replied, "You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don't understand these things? ¹¹ I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won't believe our testimony. ¹² But if you don't believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things?"

2 Cor. 4:16-18

We never give up even though our outer person is decaying, **yet our inner person is being renewed day by day.** For our momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while **we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.**

Ephesians 3:14-19

¹⁴ For this reason I bend my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, **to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner self,** ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to all the fullness of God.

1 Peter 3:3-4

Your adornment must not be *merely* the external—braiding the hair, wearing gold *jewelry*, or putting on apparel; but **it should be the hidden person of the heart**, with the imperishable *quality* of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.

Why the Spiritual Disciplines Have Almost Disappeared from Our Experience and Practice

- Materialistic Base of Our Age
- The Arrogance and Deception of Our Culture
- The Shallowness of Casual Christianity
- Ignorance in How to Explore and Cultivate the Inner-Life

The Purpose and Value of the Spiritual Disciplines

“The spiritual disciplines are those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are habits of devotion, habits of experiential Christianity that have been practiced by God’s people since biblical times.” – Don Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*

The Spiritual Disciplines are Biblical Habits of Devotion and Intentional Experiences.

- **Biblical** because the Holy Spirit knows what’s best for our spiritual health and how we most effectively can facilitate spiritual maturity.
 - Otherwise, we might make an inadequate list of our own that only appeals to us rather than trains us in godliness: “meditation might work for you, but gardening (or exercise, walking on the beach) is my spiritual discipline.”
- **Habitual & Intentional**

Deuteronomy 6:4-8

⁴“Hear, Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! ⁵And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. ⁷And you shall repeat them diligently to your sons and speak of them when you sit in your house, when you walk on the road, when you lie down, and when you get up. ⁸You shall also tie them as a sign to your hand, and they shall be as frontlets on your forehead. ⁹You shall also write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

- There are **Personal** and **Communal Aspects** to Many of the Spiritual Disciplines.

Meditation * Learning * Prayer * Fasting * Worship * Celebration

Serving * Silence * Solitude * Simplicity * Stewardship

Trust * Giving * Chastity * Spiritual Friendship

Submission * Confession * Gratitude * Rest * Journaling * Hospitality

The Spiritual Disciplines are Training Activities.

- They are practices, things you do.
- They are not character qualities, attitudes, or the fruit of the Spirit.
- They are ways to train for the purpose of godliness.

1 Timothy 4:7-10

Train yourself to be godly. "Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come." This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it. **This is why we work hard and continue to struggle, for our hope is in the living God, who is the Savior of all people and particularly of all believers.**

Hebrews 5:11-14

Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is* difficult to explain, since you have become poor listeners. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the actual words of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is unacquainted with the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, **who because of practice have their senses trained to distinguish between good and evil.**

1 Cor. 9:24-27

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? **Run in such a way that you may win.** ²⁵ **Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things.** So they *do it* to obtain a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶ Therefore I run in such a way as not *to run* aimlessly; I box in such a way, as to avoid hitting air; ²⁷ but **I strictly discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.**

The Spiritual Disciplines are Means, Not Ends.

- The Spiritual Disciplines only facilitate a means of receiving God's grace.
- They are ways by which we can place ourselves in the path of God's transformative change.
- They are ways we prepare the soil of our hearts – plowing, watering, and planting so that the Spirit grows a crop for harvest.

Galatians 6:8

For the one who sows to his own flesh will reap destruction from the flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit.

A farmer is helpless to grow grain; all he can do is provide the right conditions for the growing of grain. He cultivates the ground, he plants the seeds, he waters the plants, and then the natural forces of the earth take over and up comes the grain. This is the way it is with the spiritual disciplines—they are a way of showing to the spirit. The discipline our God's way of getting us into the ground; they put us where he can work within us and transform us. By themselves the spiritual disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where something can be done. They are God's means of grace the inner righteousness we seek is not something that is poured on our heads. God has ordained the disciplines of the spiritual life as the means by which we place ourselves where he can bless us.

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A Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth

- **Beware of Turning the Disciplines into Laws (Legalism)**

- Making the Disciplines an external display of righteousness blocks the path to God's transformative grace, and reduces them to religion, and the celebration of Self in pseudo-devotion to God.

Matthew 5:20; 6:1-8

"For I say to you that unless your righteousness far surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven..."

"Take care not to practice your righteousness in the sight of people, to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. ² "So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, so that they will be praised by people. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. ³ But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your charitable giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you. ⁵ "And when you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they will be seen by people. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. ⁶ But as for you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you. ⁷ "And when you are praying, do not use thoughtless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ So do not be like them..."