

DEEPER WALK

INTRODUCTION TO THE DISCIPLINES

By John Dobbs - <http://johndobbs.com/>

Introduction

1. This is an introduction into some ancient Christian practices known as “Spiritual Disciplines”. These practices serve as doorways through which we invite God to change our hearts and draw us closer to Him.
 - a. James 4:7-8a “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you...”
 - b. In order to have a walk that is deeper on a spiritual level, we must engage in some activities that bring about a spiritual focus.
 1. Modern Christianity seems to say “Be nice, Go to Church, Do the Right Thing.”
 2. Many Christians end up feeling empty with advice like that.
 3. We want to find some spiritual fuel for our lives that reminds us that God is real.
2. The goal of the Spiritual Disciplines is Spiritual Formation.
 - a. “Spiritual Formation is the process of transforming the inner reality of the self in such a way that the overall life with God seen in the Bible naturally and freely comes to pass in us. Our inner world becomes the home of Jesus, by his initiative and our response. (Foster in Graybeal and Roller, p. xi, xii).
 - b. We are seeking to form our lives and hearts into the image of Jesus Christ.
3. What are the Spiritual Disciplines that bring about this Spiritual Formation?
 - a. They include fasting and prayer, study and service, submission and solitude, confession and worship, meditation and silence, simplicity, frugality, secrecy, sacrifice, and celebration. (Foster in Graybeal and Roller, p. xii).
 - b. Spiritual disciplines can be described as behaviors that facilitate spiritual growth.
4. The primary requirement for investing ourselves in the Disciplines is a longing after God.
 - a. Psalm 42:1,2, 7 “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?... Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me.”
 - b. "Everybody thinks of changing humanity and nobody thinks of changing himself." -Leo Tolstoy
 - c. There are some realistic struggles as we begin this series of study.

1. STRUGGLES WE FACE WITH THE DISCIPLINES

A. Ignorance.

1. The Bible calls us to fasting, prayer, worship, and celebration but gives almost no instruction on how to do them.
2. How many sermons have you heard on fasting ... or on the importance of centering Prayer ... solitude?
3. This has not been a topic of discussion in Christian circles in any expansive way.

B. Turning the Disciplines into Mechanics.

1. Practicing the disciplines is not like a science project where you prove the outcome by demonstrating the process.
2. The effects of the Disciplines are inward, spiritual, and affect the heart.
3. Instead of “just tell me what to do” we need to be thinking “just tell me how to become”.

C. Turning the Disciplines into Laws.

1. These classes are not meant to suggest that those who do not practice the Disciplines are somehow not committed to Jesus.
2. We are not suggesting that God will like us better if we practice the Disciplines.
3. The Disciplines represent a search for intimacy with God, not a new set of rules.
4. “It is not the spiritual disciplines per se that transform us into the likeness of Christ. Without the work of God’s Spirit within, practices guarantee nothing.” (Calhoun, p. 18)

D. Seeking an Experience.

1. An experience with God is not to be refused, but we are not looking to create such.
2. We may not feel God’s nearness at all. That does not mean He is not near.
3. Feelings are a dangerous barometer of success or intimacy. What often happens when we fall into this temptation is that we reject reality in order to try to discover some other world of the Spirit. This temptation reveals the subtle belief that we cannot experience God in the world we are in, but rather must go beyond this world to experience the things that are truly spiritual. (Metamorphia website)

E. Trusting Willpower.

1. We need to grow beyond our dependence on willpower to overcome sin.
2. “Whatever may be the issue for us – anger, fear, bitterness, gluttony, pride, lust, substance abuse – we determine never to do it again; we pray against it, fight against it, set our will against it, but the struggle is all in vain and we find ourselves once again morally bankrupt or, worse yet, ... proud of our external righteousness...Willpower will never succeed in dealing with the deeply ingrained habits of sin.” (Foster, p. 4, 5)

F. Bearing little spiritual fruit. “...Spiritual gifts must be developed by discipline in order to bear spiritual fruit.” (Whitney, p. 23)

2. WHY STUDY THE DISCIPLINES?

A. They are a Means of Receiving Grace

1. “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.” (Foster, p.7)
2. Galatians 6:8 “The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life”
3. The Disciplines are a way of sowing to the Spirit ... getting us into the ground where God can work within us and transform us.
4. “As we place ourselves in them to seek communion with Christ, His grace flows to us

and we are changed.” (Whitney, p. 19)

B. A Means of Pursuing Godliness. 1 Timothy 4:7 “...discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness...”

C. Revelation of False Self-Conceptions and Idols of our heart. “Becoming aware of what is true and false about us is essential for spiritual growth, and it is not always comfortable.” (Calhoun, p. 19)

D. Jesus Expects us to Seek Him

1. “Throughout the centuries the disciplines of prayer, confession, worship, stewardship, fellowship, service, attending to Scripture and the Lord’s Supper have remained constant channels and disciplines of grace. These time-resilient disciplines give the church in every age and culture ways to keep company with Jesus.” Calhoun, p. 18
2. Matthew 11:29 “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

E. Jesus Modeled the Disciplines For Us. “Jesus was the most disciplined Man who ever lived and yet the most joyful and passionately alive. He is our example of discipline.” (Whitney, p. 24)

Conclusion

1. The undisciplined are like playwright George Kaufman, who was enduring a sales pitch from a gold-mine promoter. The salesman was praising the productivity of the mine in hopes of persuading Kaufman to buy shares in it. “Why, it’s so rich you can pick up the chunks of gold from the ground.” Kaufman said, “Do you mean I’d have to bend over?” The gold of Godliness isn’t found on the surface of Christianity. It has to be dug from the depths with the tools of the Disciplines. (Whitney, p. 22)
2. For the most part, the practicing of the disciplines will usually have two outcomes for our soul. The disciplines can either bring consolation (a feeling of closeness with God) or desolation (a feeling of God’s absence). (Coe)
3. God's Grace is unearned and unearnable, we are not trying to win God's love. We are simply putting ourselves in a place where God can change us (so that we can fulfill the potential God has created in us).

REFERENCES

- Albecht, Charles & Susie. www.wcg.org/lit/spiritual/group/discip1.htm
- Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 2005, InterVarsity Press.
- Coe, Dr. John. *Class Notes*, www.metamorphia.com
- Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline Special 20th Anniversary Edition*, 1998, Harper Collins.
- Graybeal, Lynda L. and Roller, Julia L. *Learning From Jesus*, 2006, Renovare, Inc.
- Whitney, Donald S. *Spiritual Disciplines For The Christian Life*, 1991, NavPress.

Introduction

1. Spiritual Journaling can be particularly meaningful, and it can be very difficult. What kinds of things make journaling difficult?
 - Worry that someone will read the journal
 - Feeling that it's too painful to go over a conflict
 - Disliking to write things down
 - Feeling obligated to write in it every day
 - Thinking you need to have a special sort of book
 - Other? (Johnson, p. 40)

2. A journal (diary) is a book in which a Christian records the works and ways of God in their life.
 - a. Other things in the journal include daily events, personal relationships, insights into Scripture, prayer requests. Quotations, interactions with readings, questions, poetry, memories – these are also acceptable journal subjects.
 - b. Jim Martin says, “My journal is a place where I will often dump a lot of anxiety, anger, and frustration. It is a place where I talk about my temptations and sins.”
 - c. There are some God-inspired journals in the Bible. Many psalms are records of David's personal spiritual journey with the Lord. The journal of Jeremiah's feelings about the fall of Jerusalem is the book of Lamentations.

3. Some Beginning Observations about Spiritual Journaling
 - a. Your journal is for you.
 - b. Your journal clarifies the reality of your life. Seeing things in print brings a different perspective. “Journaling is a way of paying attention to our lives...” (Calhoun, p. 57)
 - c. Your journal reminds you to live with authenticity and genuineness.
 - d. Your journal should be kept for future reference.

4. In her book *Gift from the Sea*, Anne Morrow Lindberg writes,

"I begin these pages for myself, in order to think out my own particular pattern of living, my individual balance of life, work, and human relationships. And since I think best with a pencil in my hand, I started to write..."

She describes the spiritual discipline of journaling. Many Christians have found journaling to be extremely important to spiritual growth and development. The practice has become one of the most significant disciplines in the ongoing spiritual development of many believers.

1. WHAT IS JOURNALING?

- A. Journaling is not the mere recording of facts about the day's events. It is more than keeping a log or diary.
- B. Journaling involves reflection and contemplation. Journaling as a spiritual discipline involves the contemplation of life in light of the spiritual center. For Christians, that spiritual center is probably best expressed in that ancient and profound creedal statement, "Jesus is Lord."
- C. Journals record successes and failures, prayers, depression, and other events and emotions in the lives of human beings who are serious about living under the will of God.

2. HOW CAN JOURNALING HELP ME PRACTICALLY?

- A. Journaling can enable one both to remember and to clarify thoughts, feelings and ideas.
 - 1. How many times have you had a keen insight or a significant thought and then it occurred to you, "I really need to write that down"? However, the idea, the feeling, the thought was never written and has since been long forgotten. Such ideas and impressions may forever be lost.
 - 2. "A journal is a place where we can give expression to the fountain of our heart, where we can unreservedly pour out our passion before the Lord. Since human thoughts and emotions range between extremes of exhilaration and despondency, we can expect to find both within the pages of our journal." (Whitney, p. 209)
- B. Journaling can help one become aware of patterns of behavior.
 - 1. Gordon MacDonald wrote concerning his practice of journaling:

At first it was difficult. I felt self-conscious. I was worried that I would lose the journal or that someone might peek inside to see what I'd said. But slowly the self-consciousness began to fade, and I found myself sharing in the journal more and more of the thoughts that flooded my inner spirit. Into the journal went words describing my feelings, my fear and sense of weakness, my hopes, and my discoveries about where Christ was leading me. When I felt empty or defeated, I talked about that too in the journal. Slowly I began to realize that the journal was helping me come to grips with an enormous part of my inner person that I had never been fully honest about. No longer could fears and struggles remain inside without definition. They were surfaced and confronted... (Gordon MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World*, p. 131)
 - 2. Journaling helps us see patterns that may be present in our lives. Are there recurring themes of anger, rationalization, and negative, destructive thought patterns?
 - 3. The purpose of discovering such a pattern is not simply self-exploration but the intersection of our lives with God's redemptive work in our world.

4. Perhaps there are entries which reflect that you are offended and angry quite regularly. As you read through the entries, ask yourself how a total stranger might perceive you upon reading the same entries.

C. Journaling gives the opportunity to reflect upon the day and week in light of our faith.

1. Unfortunately, too many days and weeks are lived without reflection and thought. Consequently, there may not be a real awareness of how faith is or is not being integrated into daily life.
2. So often weeks and months pass and there is not serious contemplation as to where we are in our spiritual journey. Keeping a journal allows a built-in time to review and examine the days and weeks in light of one's faith in Jesus.
3. "...Meaningful meditation requires a concentration not often developed in our fast-paced, media-distracted society. ... Sitting with pen and paper also heightens my expectation of hearing from God as I think on Him and His words in the passage before me." (Whitney, p. 208, 209)

D. Journaling may give important insight about the state of one's spiritual journey.

1. Reading journal entries from several years back can give insight into the past, the present, and the future.
2. "Over time repetitious themes, sins, compulsions, hopes, and concerns emerge. We begin to recognize our besetting sins, limitations and desires. During times of transition, travel, loss, joy, illness and decision making, journaling can provide a way of processing the hopes, fears, longings, angers and prayer of our heart." (Calhoun, p. 57)

E. Journaling helps maintain the other spiritual Disciplines.

3. HOW DOES A PERSON KEEP A JOURNAL?

A. Have a definite time each day for writing in the journal.

B. Select a journal that fits your preferences. Jim Martin writes, "At one time, I used college-ruled, spiral-bound notebooks. For several years I have been using bound notebooks (clothbound notebooks containing about seventy-five pages of blank, ruled paper). Most entries fill somewhere between one and three pages."

C. Write on a variety of topics. The entries might be varied; after all, the journal is for the writer and not the writer for the journal. In other words, make the journal useful to you. You are not doing this for anyone else. What kinds of things make good journal entries?

1. Reflection on the events of the day and their meaning in light of one's faith commitment.

2. Written prayers can help a person express to the Father some of the deepest longings of the heart. A written prayer list can bring to the awareness the situations and people who weigh heavily on the writer's heart.
3. Sins can be confessed and repentance offered before God.
4. Write freely, reflecting on the past and God's intervention in life.
5. Quotes & Reflections. From books, the daily newspaper, and other periodicals certain poignant quotes may jump out at you. The quote can be copied as well as some reflection of how this quote interacts with your own thinking.

D. Absolute honesty is very important. We write to reveal ourselves to the Lord. Henri Nouwen kept a spiritual journal during his first year at L'Arche, a community in Toronto for adults who experience severe mental and even physical challenges. The journal reflects his move from serving as a professor at Harvard University to working with these adults in a very different environment. Nouwen displays his disarming honesty when he writes on Saturday, March 15:

I love Jesus but want to hold on to my own friends even when they do not lead me closer to Jesus. I love Jesus but want to hold on to my own independence even when that independence brings me no real freedom. I love Jesus but do not want to lose the respect of my professional colleagues, even though I know that their respect does not make me grow spiritually. I love Jesus but do not want to give up my writing plans, travel plans, even when these plans are more to my glory than to the glory of God. (Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak*, pp. 147-148)

E. Seek self-knowledge in the context of our repentance and God's redemption.

1. This activity of God in our lives is the thread that binds the days and weeks of our journals and lives together.
2. Romans 12:3 encourages us to have a balanced self-image. "A journal can be the means by which the Holy Spirit shows us areas of sin or weakness, the emptiness of a path we have chosen, insight into our motives, or other things that can transform the journal into an altar of seeking God." (Whitney, p. 207)

F. Summarize. Every month summarize the month's entries noting key events and themes.

G. Continue to journal during the dry times. "The novelty of journaling soon wears off. There will be days when you will have a spiritual version of 'writer's block'. At other times you just won't have any insights from scriptures or your experience with God which seem noteworthy ... plan for persistence." (Whitney, p. 220)

Many of these points were gleaned from four articles on Journaling found on Jim Martin's blog. I encourage you to read these in their unedited and more personal form. The links are below.

Jim Martin Posts on Journaling

<http://godhungry.org/?p=720>

<http://godhungry.org/?p=721>

<http://godhungry.org/?p=722>

<http://godhungry.org/?p=724>

Other Resources:

Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. Spiritual Disciplines Handbook.

Johnson, Jan. Reflection & Confession.

Whitney, Donald S. Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life.

Introduction

- “Our Adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry, and crowds. If he can keep us engaged in “muchness” and “manyness” he will reset satisfied... Though it may sound strange to modern ears, we should without shame enroll as apprentices in the school of contemplative prayer.” Foster, p. 15.
- “One sad feature of our modern culture is that meditation has become identified more with nonChristian systems of thought than with biblical Christianity...yoga, transcendental meditation, relaxation therapy, New Age Movement.... We must remember that meditation is both commanded by God and modeled by the Godly in Scripture.” (Whitney, p. 47)
- “Meditation runs counter to our busy culture, where speed reading, first impressions and skimming are as deep as we go. In meditation we gaze at something or someone long and longingly. We seek the treasure and truth of what we see.” (Calhoun, p. 173)
- What are the first images that come to your mind when you think of meditation?
- Do you feel comfortable and confident to meditate?
- Do you ever feel that meditation is too difficult, complicated or weird? Why?

1. What is Meditation

A. MEDITATION: The act of calling to mind some supposition, pondering upon it, and correlating it to one’s own life.

1. The Hebrew words for meditation primarily were derived from two separate roots. The first (*hagah*) literally means “to utter in a low sound.” The word is used to denote the growling of a lion or the cooing of a dove. Therefore it has been suggested that, in ancient Hebrew meditation, Scripture frequently was recited in a low murmur. The second root word (*siach*) has the basic meaning of “to be occupied with,” or “concerned about.”
2. Thus meditation is the repetitious going over of a matter in one’s mind because it is the chief concern of life.
 - a. “...Listening to God’s word, reflecting on God’s works, rehearsing God’s deeds, ruminating on God’s law ... in each case there is stress upon changed behavior as a result of our encounter with the living God.” (Foster, p.15)
 - b. “Deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture for the purposes of understanding, application, and prayer. Meditation goes beyond hearing, reading, studying, and even memorizing as a means of taking in God’s Word.” (Whitney, p. 48)
 - c. Christian meditation is an attempt to fill the mind (and our lives) with God and detach ourselves from the confusion around us. This allows us to focus on God and obtain an inner wholeness and an ordered life. (www.opensourcespirituality.com)
3. Jesus made a habit of withdrawing to a lonely place (Matthew 14:13) in order to be with God.

(see Matt. 4: 1-11; 14:23; Mark 1:35; 6:31; Luke 6:12, etc.) What did Jesus do time after time in those deserted hills?

B. Meditation is not reading, but reading can stimulate meditation.

C. Meditation is simple. No specific surroundings are necessary. No special instruction is really needed. Of course these things can be added and can influence an effective time, but by itself meditation does not demand any kind of outward set up.

D. Meditation is practical.

1. It is a matter of allowing your mind to soak in the word of God ... saturate your attitude and spirit with God's wisdom. It can make a great difference in the things you say, write, think, and experience during the day.
2. Meditation is the one thing that can sufficiently redirect our lives so that we can deal with human life successfully ...Meditation sends us into our ordinary world with greater perspective and balance. (Foster, 22)
3. "When we delight in God's Word we think about it, that is, we meditate on it, at times all throughout the day and night. The result of such meditation is stability, fruitfulness, perseverance, and prosperity." (Whitney, p. 49)
4. Meditation sets spiritual life in motion. There is no opening prayer and closing prayer. There is no 'bring us back again at the next appointed time'. For the things that we learn in our time with God will color our day. We will see God at work in the corners of our lives. The places that we used to glance over are now alive with His energy. No... they are not now alive. We only now see them. Our spiritual walk with God is different than it used to be. We have stepped out of the Matrix.

E. Meditation is the ability to hear God's voice and obey his word.

1. Jesus is alive and among us as our Priest to forgive us, our Prophet to teach us, our King to rule us, our Shepherd to guide us. (Foster, p. 17, 19).
2. "Whereas the study of Scripture centers on exegesis, the meditation of Scripture centers on internalizing and personalizing the passage. The written Word becomes a living word addressed to you. This is not a time for technical studies, or analysis, or even the gathering of material to share with others. Set aside all tendencies toward arrogance and with a humble heart receive the word addressed to you." Foster in Celebration of Discipline
3. Perhaps the major hope of meditation is to be sure that we have not clouded our reception with God. Our interests are not usually geared to the quiet or the subtle. We live in a loud world and the loudest voice has us. That is, unless we discovered through experience the life-change that can be brought about in this sacred hour. Perhaps we hear from God in a hundred inadvertent ways, but when do we ever purposefully stop our exciting lives to give God our undivided attention? Meditation answers that question.

A. "In meditation we are growing into what Thomas 'a Kempis calls 'a familiar friendship with Jesus'" (Foster, 19).

1. What happens in meditation is that we create the emotional and spiritual space which allows Christ to construct an inner sanctuary in the heart... We who have turned our lives over to Christ need to know how very much he longs to eat with us, to commune with us. (Foster, 20)

2. We seek for our desires and aspirations to be more and more conformed to his way.

3. Scriptures that speak of meditation

A. Joshua 1:7 "Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

B. Psalm 1:1-3 "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers."

C. Psalm 19:13-14 "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer."

D. Psalm 48:9-10 "Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love. Like your name, O God, your praise reaches to the ends of the earth; your right hand is filled with righteousness."

E. Psalm 77:11-13 "I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds. Your ways, O God, are holy. What god is so great as our God?"

F. Psalm 104:33-34 "I will sing to the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the LORD."

G. Psalm 119:15-16, 23-27, 47-48, 78, 97-100 "I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word....Though rulers sit together and slander me, your servant will meditate on your decrees. Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors....Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders. ...For I delight in your commands because I love them. I lift up my hands to your commands, which I love, and I meditate on your decrees.... May the arrogant be put to shame for wronging me without cause; but I will meditate on your precepts. ... Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.... I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word. My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises. Hear my voice in accordance with your love; preserve my life, O LORD, according to your laws."

H. Psalm 145:4-6 "One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty

acts. They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works. They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds.”

- I. Psalm 143:4-6 “So my spirit grows faint within me; my heart within me is dismayed. I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done. I spread out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. Selah”

4. Meditation Requires Sitting Still

- A. I need to sit still so that I will be able to search my heart with honesty. “In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Selah” (Psalm 4:4)
- B. I need to sit still so that I can perceive His guidance. “He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” (Psalm 23:2-3)
- C. I need to sit still so I can observe the victorious reign of God in a broken war-torn world, and seek refuge in Him alone. “He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.” (Psalm 46:9-11)
- D. “Simple physical exercises like stretching, sitting comfortably and breathing deeply can help us pay attention, listen deeply and even curb our distractability.” (Calhoun, p. 173)
- E. We’ve all become excellent multi-taskers. With just a lower level of acceptable quality, quantity can be increased significantly. This works in some settings, but not in the kingdom. Modern believers cannot accept meditation because it seems that there should be something else going on also. To sit and quietly contemplate our life in God seems like such a waste. After all, while you’re doing that, you could be folding the towels or taking out the garbage or checking your e-mail...

5. Preparing to Meditate

- A. We learn to meditate by meditating.
- B. A time to meditate is good, but we are aiming for the ability to meditate whenever we have opportunity.
- C. A place to meditate. “Find a place that is quiet and free from interruption. No telephone should be nearby. If it is possible to find some place that looks out onto a lovely landscape, so much the better.” (Foster, p. 28)

6. Forms of Meditation

- A. Meditation upon Scripture – the central reference point by which all other forms of meditation are kept in proper perspective. This is the process of internalizing and personalizing the passage.
 - 1. Do not rush over Bible passages superficially – this reflects our internal state of hurry.
 - 2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer recommended spending a whole week on a single text. Take a single event

or parable, or a few verses or even a single word and allow it to take root in you.

3. Donald Whitney recommends this format for meditating on Scripture: (Whitney, p. 52ff)

a. Select an appropriate passage. "Verses that conspicuously relate to your concerns and personal needs are clearly targets for meditation." (p. 52)

b. Repeat in different ways ... turn it around like a diamond to see every facet (p. 53). Think deeply about each word in the passage.

c. Rewrite it in your own words (p. 54).

d. Look for applications of the text (p. 54). Like chewing without swallowing, so meditation is incomplete without some type of application.

e. Pray through the text. Psalm 119:18 "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law."

f. Don't rush – take time. It is better to understand a small amount of Scripture and meditate on it than to read an extensive section without meditation. Choose to read less in order to have more time with the text. (Whitney, p. 55)

B. Re-collection or "Centering Down" – a time to become still, to enter into the recreating silence, to allow the fragmentation of our minds to become centered. (Foster, p. 30) "Collecting" all that which worries us, handing it over to God, and then receiving his replacements e.g. give up pride, receive humility.. (Palms down, Palms up). (Open Source Spirituality)

C. Meditation upon the Creation. Focus on the created order ... the trees, a flower, the creatures of the earth. The heavens declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1). Let these lead you to a calm spirit.

D. Do not be discouraged if in the beginning your meditations have little meaning to you. There is a progression in the spiritual life, and it is wise to have some experience with lesser peaks before trying to tackle the Mt. Everest of the soul. (Foster, 32)

E. Open Source Spirituality suggests the following method for meditation:

1. During the week try and find time (about 20-30 mins.) to practice meditation.

2. Open your Bible to the chosen Bible reading. Leave it open in front of you.

3. Enter into God's presence in prayer, asking that His Spirit will bring His word to life for you.

4. Slow down. Consciously slow down your breathing; breathe deeper, more gently, invite the Holy Spirit into your life. With every deep breath in say, "I breathe in the Holy Spirit", with every deep breath out say, "I breathe out the Love of God". Allow the Holy Spirit to penetrate every part of your being. Picture that happening.

5. Now read the scripture passage slowly. (Do not analyze or study it.) Allow the Holy Spirit to teach you what He wants.

6. When a word or phrase "lights up" or "rings a bell", put your bible down. Concentrate on God's

word to you by repeating it (gently, not mechanically). Do not force any response/emotion; allow the Holy Spirit to work.

7. As you become aware of the impression (feeling/attitude) God's word has made on you, respond to God in prayer, or in silence if you wish. Be with Christ, bask in His love.

8. As distractions set in, close your prayer off in whatever way you want (you may wish to say the Lord's Prayer).

F. A recent comment on John Alan Turner's blog suggested reading the Psalms thus:

The Psalms - one per week, three times per day
Once through the lens of OT
Once through lens of Jesus
Once as personal prayer.

Conclusion:

Is purposeful meditation on the word of God a regular practice in your life?

I think we can see that this practice goes beyond reading, beyond lesson preparation, beyond commentary.

Do you have some specific practices that aid you in meditating on the Word?

Is life too fast to even consider taking time to do this?

Do we let the reading of devotional material take the place of reading the Scriptures?

Do you couple meditation with journaling?

References

Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*.

Foster, Richard. *Celebration of Discipline*.

John Alan Turner's Blog (<http://blog.faith20.org>)

Open Source Spirituality (www.opensourcespirituality.com)

WCG.ORG (<http://www.wcg.org/lit/spiritual/group/discip7.htm>)

Whitney, Donald S. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*

Introduction:

- "Prayer catapults us onto the frontier of the spiritual life. Of all the Spiritual Disciplines prayer is the most central because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father." (Foster, p. 33)
- Is prayer the stranger in your life that you always wished were your friend?
- We all struggle with prayer. Well, I mean we struggle with a certain kind of prayer.
- Richard Foster writes, "All who have walked with God have viewed prayer as the main business of their lives...prayer was no little habit tacked onto the periphery of their lives; it was their lives."
- Foster also writes, "God always meets us where we are and slowly moves us along into deeper things."
- Prayer is fascinating ... intriguing ... mysterious ... simple ... elusive ... effective.
- In what way has prayer been your friend ... and in what way has it been a stranger?

1. OBSTACLES TO PRAYER (www.jwipn.com)

A. Conscious unconfessed sins (Ps.66:18; Isa.59:1-2).

- Ps. 66:18 "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened"
- Isa. 59:1-2 "Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save nor His ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear"

2. Idolatry - occult involvement (Ezek.14:3 "Son of man these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them enquire of Me at all?")

3. A Stingy and covetous Spirit (Prov.21:13; 1 Tim.6:10)

- Prov. 21:13 "If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered"
- 1 Timothy 6:10 "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs"

4. Unbelief and doubt (James 1:6-8 "But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does")

5. Unforgiveness and bitterness (Matt.6:14-15 "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.")

6. A wrong attitude towards your spouse (1 Pet.3:7 "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.")
7. Haughtiness/Pride (James 4:6 "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.")
8. Selfish motives in prayer (James 4:3 "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.")
9. A critical spirit (Matt.7:1; Rom.14:10)
 - Matthew 7:1 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged"
 - Romans 14:10 "You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgement seat".
10. Ingratitude (1 Thess.5:18 "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.")
11. Love for the world and worldliness (1 John 2:15 "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.")
13. When you do not pray in Jesus' Name (John 14:14 "You may ask me for anything in my Name, and I will do it.")
14. When you do not pray according to the will of God (1 John 5:14 "This is the assurance we have in approaching God; that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.")

2. LEARNING TO PRAY ("Lord, teach us to pray" Luke 11:1) (Whitney, pp. 70-77)

- A. Prayer is a learning process. "No matter how weak or strong your prayer life is right now, you can learn to grow even stronger."
- B. We learn to pray by Praying. "Reading a book about prayer, listening to lectures and talking about it is very good, but it won't teach you to pray. You get nothing without exercise, without practice. I might listen for a year to a professor of music playing the most beautiful music, but that won't teach me to play an instrument." (Andrew Murray)
- C. We learn to pray by Meditating on Scripture.
 1. There should be a smooth, almost unnoticeable transition between Scripture input and Prayer output so that we move even closer to God in those moments. This happens when there is the link of meditation in between.

2. Psalm 19:14

3. Meditation allows us to take what God has said to us and think deeply on it, digest it, and then speak to God about it in meaningful prayer.

4. Matthew Henry said about Psalm 19:14, "David's prayers were not his words only, but his meditations; as meditation is the best preparation for prayer, so prayer is the best issue of meditation. Meditation and prayer go together."

D. We learn to pray by Praying with Others. Most of the great movements of God can be traced to a small group of people He called together to begin praying.

E. We learn to pray by reading about prayer. We would not want this to take the place of prayer, but it is a valuable way to learn.

3. POSTURES FOR PRAYER (Calhoun, p. 276-277)

A. Stand – standing is a way of honoring the presence of another and giving him or her your full attention. Stand before the majesty of God. (1 Kings 19:11; Mark 11:25; Gen. 18:22)

B. Outstretched Arms – Lifting up our arms or hands pulls our awareness toward heaven. It is a posture that opens the core of our body toward God. (Psalm 141:2; Psalm 63:4; Psalm 77:2; 1 Timothy 2:8)

C. Uplifted Eyes – looking up to heaven with open eyes draws our attention above earthly realities to eternal things. We are not alone. God is watching us. (Psalm 123:1-2; Mark 7:34; Mark 6:41; John 17:1)

D. Kneeling – Kneeling is a way we express humility and reverence. (1 Kings 8:54; Acts 9:40; Daniel 6:10; Mark 1:40)

E. Prostrate – lying face down or bowing low to the earth reminds us that we were created from dust and to dust we will return. It is a posture of submission and obedient worship. (Genesis 17:3; Exodus 4:31; Neh 8:6; 2 Chron 20:18; Luke 5:12; Luke 8:47; Psalm 72:11; Psalm 66:4)

4. BE DEVOTED TO PRAYER (Colossians 4:2-6 *"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."*)

A. A person devoted to prayer becomes more of what God calls him to be.

1. Likewise, a church full of people devoted to prayer will bring about massive regime change from self to Lord.

2. Right after Paul tells us to devote ourselves to prayer...to be watchful and thankful, he begins to turn us inside out.

B. Prayer leads us outward.

1. Why? It leads us Godward. Whenever we grow toward God we grow toward the lost.
2. "...Pray...that God may open a door for our message..."
3. We cannot ascend in godliness without also ascending in awareness of those around us who need Jesus - and our ardent desire to see them saved. "Pray that I may proclaim it clearly..." The Spirit-filled Apostle Paul asking for prayer like this? His heart is evident. Whatever opportunity is before him, he would like to clearly tell them about Jesus. It is never far from his mind.

C. Prayer changes the way we view people, and also the way we talk to them.

1. Watch for opportunities to speak grace into the lives of sinners.
2. Get some grace on your lips! How? By devoting yourself to prayer. You cannot pray without realizing that you are talking to someone who should have squashed you like a bothersome gnat - and could have - but chose instead to love you. Grace.
3. Prayer will turn us inside out because...

*It shifts focus from ourselves to our God.

*It bends our hearts toward His Will, above our own.

*It begins to adopt the ways and thoughts of God.

*It drives us to look for ways to share the Good News with those who need it.

*It washes our mouth out with gospel soap and gives us words of grace to bless and encourage.

Dearest Lord, may I see you today and every day in the person of your sick, and, whilst nursing them, minister unto you. Though you hide yourself behind the unattractive disguise of the irritable, the exacting, the unreasonable, may I still recognize you, and say: 'Jesus, my patient, how sweet it is to serve you.' Lord, give me this seeing faith, then my work will never be monotonous. I will ever find joy in humoring the fancies and gratifying the wishes of all poor sufferers.

O beloved sick, how doubly dear you are to me, when you personify Christ; and what a privilege is mine to be allowed to tend you.

Sweetest lord, make me appreciative of the dignity of my high vocation, and its many responsibilities. Never permit me to disgrace it by giving way to coldness, unkindness, or impatience.

And O God, while you are Jesus my patient, deign also to be to me a patient Jesus, bearing with my faults, looking only to my intention, which is to love and serve you in the person of each one of your sick.

Lord, increase my faith, bless my efforts and work, now and forevermore, Amen.

– Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Introduction In our last lesson on Prayer we talked about some obstacles to prayer, where we learn to pray, some postures for prayer and the Bible's instruction to be devoted to prayer. "As with any relationship, our relationship with God must be cultivated ... the reason that we are spiritually dry is, among other things, because we do not spend quality time in prayer. Yet, we sometimes feel too spiritually dry to pray, and so it goes" (Walston). In this lesson we want to learn about various kinds of prayer – which will give us powerful tools to keep our prayer life from becoming dull or boring. In his paper, Ric Walston mentions four kinds of prayer: petitionary, intercessory, thanksgiving, and warfare. These prayer types focus on content. We will also look at some prayer types that relate to format.

1. Petitionary Prayer

A. This is a formal request. "It is a solemn supplication or request to a superior authority; in the case of prayer, that superior authority is God" (Walston).

B. James 4:2

2. Intercessory Prayer

A. An "earnest request in favor of another, especially a prayer or petition to God in behalf of another" (Walston).

B. John 17:15-21

3. Thanksgiving Prayer

A. This is "giving thanks to God for (1) who He is and (2) for what he has done on our behalf" (Walston).

B. Exodus 15:1-13, 18 – the song of Moses and the Israelites who rejoiced after crossing the Red Sea on dry land.

C. Luke 1:46-55 – the prayer of Mary who expresses thanks for God's favor in choosing her to bear the Messiah.

4. Warfare Prayer

A. "Warfare prayer is the kind of 'prayer' in which we wage war against an enemy. It is prayer that is undertaken to destroy or undermine the strength of the devil...We engage in warfare prayer every time we pray for the souls of others" (Walston).

B. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:11-18

5. Breath Prayer (Calhoun, p. 205-206)

- A. "God is the oxygen of our soul, and we need to breathe him in all day long"
- B. Breath prayer has been practiced in the church for millennia. The eastern Orthodox Church in particular has seen breath prayer as a way of living out Paul's instruction to "pray without ceasing."
- C. The "Jesus Prayer" is a breath prayer described in *The Way of the Pilgrim*:

Take a seat in solitude and silence. Bend your head, close your eyes and breathing softly, in your imagination, look into your own heart. Let your mind, or rather, your thoughts flow from your head down to your heart and say, while breathing: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." Whisper these words gently or say them in your mind. Discard all other thoughts. Be serene, persevering and repeat them over and over again.

- D. Breath prayer is to be a living breathing rhythm of surrender. It is a constant reminder of the one in whose presence you stand. Often the rhythm involves breathing in with a name of God, and out with the desire of your heart.
- E. The breath prayer can be any phrase that expresses a deep desire of your heart ... brief enough to be repeated over and over throughout the day. Examples:

Abba... I belong to you.

Healer... speak the word and I shall be healed.

Shepherd ... bring home my lost son.

Holy One Keep me true.

Lord ... here I am.

Jesus ... have mercy on me.

6. Centering Prayer (Calhoun, p. 207)

- A. Centering prayer is a form of contemplative prayer where the pray-er seeks to quiet scattered thoughts and desires in the still center of Christ's presence.
- B. Centering prayer is an ancient form of prayer that joined meditation on a word of Scripture with prayer.
- C. Centering prayer leads us to sit in the presence of God and give him our undivided love and attention. Generally the only words that are spoken in centering prayer are the prayer words that continually bring our drifting attention back to God. The prayer word is simple, such as Jesus, love, peace, father, or a phrase from Scripture.
- D. In Centering prayer the goal is to so dwell in Christ that the fruit of this dwelling begins to show up in your life. Centering prayer may 'do' nothing at the moment. You sense no rapture, no mystical bliss. But later as you move out into the busyness of life, you begin to notice that something has shifted. Your quiet center in Christ holds.

E. A short method for Centering Prayer

1. Set aside a minimum of 15 minutes. Set a timer if that helps you be less concerned about when to stop.
2. Settle into a comfortable position.
3. Intentionally place yourself in the presence of God, in the center of his love.
4. Choose a simple word, phrase or verse from Scripture that expresses your desire for God (e.g. love, peace, grace, Jesus, great Shepherd). Let this word guard your attention.
5. Take time to become quiet. It is not unusual for the first minutes to be filled with many noisy thoughts. Don't worry about them or pay attention to them. Let them go. Gently return your attention to the Center of God's presence and love by repeating your word.
 - Use your imagination – God gave you the ability!
 - Imagine God's river of life running through you. Deep down, the river is calm and slow. But on the surface there is rushing and debris. Imagine your distracting thoughts are a part of the debris floating in the current. Don't try to capture these thoughts; release them and let the river of God's life carry them away.
6. As you are resting in God's love, trust the Holy Spirit to connect you with God.
7. Take several minutes to come out of prayer. Don't hurry. Offer yourself to God for the tasks awaiting you (e.g., *"I am yours,"* or *"Remain with me"*)

7. Take A Prayer Walk (Whitney, p. 84-85)

- A. One of the most common struggles in the practice of spirituality is maintaining mental focus in prayer. Walking as we pray - either in a large place indoors or outdoors – keeps the mind from wandering as easily.
- B. Bring a small Bible to prompt prayer periodically during the walk.
- C. Abraham's son Isaac is an example from Scripture of walking while thinking on the things of God. Genesis 24:63 reports, "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field."
- D. George Muller wrote, "I find it very beneficial to my health to walk thus for meditation before breakfast, and ... generally take out a New Testament ... and I find that I can profitably spend my time in the open air. I used to consider the time spent in walking a loss, but now I find it very profitable, not only to my body, but also to my soul ... for ... I speak to my father ... about the things that He has brought before me in His precious Word."

8. Use Prayer Prompts (Whitney, p. 91-92)

- A. Beside a highway that I travel several times each week sits a big sign that's hard to ignore. Whenever I notice it, I use it as a reminder to pray for a particular person. At another point along that road is a panoramic view of my city. I use the sight to remind me to ask the Lord for reformation and revival upon his work in our area. Whenever I see a certain time on a digital clock, it's a memory-jogger to pray for my wife and daughter. These are things use to remind one to pray.
- B. Christians have always used commonplace things as ways to turn their thoughts heavenward. When dressing in the morning, many Puritans made a habit of praying briefly for a different matter with each article of clothing they pulled on. I know several believers who pray whenever they hear a siren.
- C. Philippians 1:3-4
- D. Why not transform something from your routine into a prayer prompt? A sight, a smell, sound, thought, event, or experience.
- E. You might also use common objects ... or even religious objects.
- crosses, prayer beads, etc. as aids ... but they should never be considered as having power other than as a reminder.
 - Praying with beads is an ancient practice that can be individualized.
 - Cross: Lord's Prayer
 - Large Bead: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight.
 - 4 medium beads - The Jesus Prayer - Lord Jesus Christ Son of God Have Mercy on Me
 - 7 Small beads - Prayers of Praise
 - 7 Small beads - Intercessory prayers
 - 7 Small Beads - Confessions and Requests
 - 7 Small Beads - Prayers of Thanksgiving

Conclusion: Conforming Prayer (Foster)

1. *"I determined to learn to pray so that my experience conformed to the words of Jesus rather than try to make his words conform to my impoverished experience."*
- A. Prayer is not about receiving everything we want.
- B. Prayer is about living within His will and kingdom.
- C. We should speak freely and ask with abandon for those blessings we desire. At the same time we should not expect a blank check in order to receive everything.

2. In some paradoxical way the Christian is to express his heart's desire to the Father and at the same time temper his requests into alignment with the known will of God. Remember as we deal with expectations in prayer that it is perhaps on our end of the stick that mistakes or misjudgments are being made....not on God's.
3. One of our key prayer goals is to so align ourselves with God that we are praying in the Spirit and our desires flow within Kingdom streams. James 4: 3 "You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."
4. Our prayers are to be aligned with His will, which we understand by reading His word. Meditation on the Scriptures is an essential part of our prayer life.
5. In such a way we might even ask God what we should pray for. "When I bring specific people in my church by name to God during times of intercession and petition, instead of simply rattling off the various things that I know that he or she needs, I take the time to wait on God, asking Him to tell me what to pray for concerning them." (Walston)
6. A prayer from Anselm

O Lord Our God, Grant Us Grace
 To Desire You With Our Whole Heart,
 That so Desiring We May Seek And Find You,
 And So Finding You, May Love You,
 And Loving You, May Hate Those Sins
 From Which You Have Redeemed Us
 – Anselm (1033 - 1109)

Homework

Idea from www.opensourcespirituality.org.za :

During the week set aside specific time to spend in prayer. You may only feel ready to spend 10 mins, 4 times during the week., or you may want to spend 30 mins, 3 times a day, every day, it's up to you. Remember don't try to run a marathon unless you are fit enough, and have been training for a long time. Allow the Holy Spirit to lead and guide you.

Think about using these Bible readings and pray in response to what they evoke in you. Again, you may use them in any order you want, and spend as long as you need on each one:

<u>READING</u>	<u>FOCUS</u>
Matthew 6: 5-15	The pattern of prayer.
Psalm 103	The prayer of worship.
Psalm 51	The prayer of repentance.
Psalm 150	The prayer of thanksgiving.
Matthew 26: 36-46	The prayer of guidance.
James 5: 13-18	The prayer of faith.
Mark 9: 14-29	The prayer of command.

References

- Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*.
- www.opensourcespirituality.org.za below
- Walston, Ric. *A Study of the Balance Between the Spiritual Disciplines as Works and Righteousness with a Special Look At The Discipline of Prayer*. From a 1997 D. Min. term paper. E-mail Ric to see the entire paper: CES@ColumbiaSeminary.edu.
- Whitney, Donald S. *Simplify Your Spiritual Life*.

Introduction

1. "In a culture where the landscape is dotted with shrines to the Golden Arches and an assortment of Pizza Temples, fasting seems out of place, out of step with the times" (Foster, p. 47).
 - a. "...Fasting is the most feared and misunderstood of all the Spiritual Disciplines....We're afraid that it will make us suffer dreadfully and give us a generally negative experience" (Whitney, p. 159).
 - b. Foster reports that in his research he could not find a single book published on the subject of Christian fasting from 1861 to 1954 – a period of nearly 100 years.
2. Why Has Fasting Faded From our Focus?
 - a. We would rather indulge than fast.
 1. We prefer to gratify every desire rather than exercise discipline in our bodies and souls. We tend to eat too much, and we even waste about twenty-five percent of our food every day.
 2. "...The constant propaganda fed us today convinces us that if we do not have three large meals each day, with several snacks in between, we are on the verge of starvation" (Foster, p. 47).
 - b. We do not like self-discipline and self-control.
 - c. It can be uncomfortable. "Fasting is one of the disciplines of abstinence. When you abstain from something, you miss it and feel its absence." (Johnson)
3. Is fasting mandatory for Christians?
 - a. "Although I do not think that fasting is mandatory for believers today, I do believe the discipline is available to strengthen you spiritually and to help you overcome barriers that might keep you from living the victorious Christian life." (Towns, p. 13)
 - b. There simply are no biblical laws that command regular fasting (Foster, p. 51).
 - c. However, in the context of giving and praying, Jesus gave instruction on fasting. And he said "when you fast" not "if you fast". (Matthew 6:16) Jesus does not, though, say "you must fast".
 - d. In another text a question by the disciple of John the Baptist questions Jesus about fasting. Matthew 9:15 indicates that it is only when the bridegroom has been taken away that the disciples would fast. Jesus expected his disciples to fast after he was gone.

1. What Is Fasting?

A. Fasting is abstinence from food – or anything that is legitimate in and of itself - for some spiritual purpose.

1. “Biblical fasting always centers on spiritual purposes” (Foster, p. 49)
2. In Scripture it is abstaining from all food, solid or liquid, but not from water.
3. A partial fast is a restriction of diet but not total abstention. (Daniel 10:3)
4. Absolute fasts: abstaining from food and water (Esther 4:16; Acts 9:9). This fast is the exception, and should be engaged for no more than three days.

B. Fasting is a means of worship to God.

1. “Fasting is not an end to itself; it is a means by which we can worship the Lord and submit ourselves in humility to Him. We don’t make God love us any more than He already does if we fast, or if we fast longer.” (Towns, p. 17)
2. “When ye fasted...did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?” (Zechariah 7:5) Fasting must be centered on God. It must be God-initiated and God-ordained. (Foster, p. 54).
3. “Fasting can be an expression of finding your greatest pleasure and enjoyment in life from God. That’s the case when disciplining yourself to fast means that you love God more than food, that seeking Him is more important to you than eating” (Whitney, p. 176).

2. Why Fast?

A. Over Indulgence. One of the major problems in our country is that we have such an abundance of everything. We are an indulged society. Jesus warns us about the dangers of living in a society such as ours. In Luke 21:34 he said, “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.” He was speaking to the church. What was he warning them about? Dissipation. Drunkenness. Eating and drinking more and more.

B. Appetites. One of the areas of modern life in America where we have a great battle on our hands is in the area of Jesus' Lordship over our appetites. Every time our stomach's growl or feel the slightest bit empty our natural reaction in our culture of plenty is to feed it. It is not unusual for us to eat three meals a day and snack in between and after. Obesity is a plague in our country and Christians ...are often the worst offenders. In so many ways our bellies have become our gods. When that lord speaks or even gives the slightest whisper we rush to its aid to give immediate comfort and satisfaction. We simply do not know how to tell our stomach's "no, you are not lord." (Littleton)

- C. Gluttony. In Titus 1:12 we read that the Cretans were known as lazy gluttons. It is quite easy to practice gluttony in our society. We live in an age of gluttony. Here we can eat again and again, even in the middle of the night. And we eat even when we are not hungry. Have you ever noticed how, when you are watching a movie or television program in which people are eating, all of a sudden you will go into the kitchen to find something to eat even when you are not hungry? This is our problem, and the spiritual discipline of fasting will help us to learn and exercise the self-control we need.
- D. Mastery. "Fasting reveals the measure of food's mastery over us – or television or computers or whatever we submit to again and again to conceal the weakness of our hunger for God." (Piper, p. 20)
- E. Priorities. Fasting helps us define and establish godly priorities. Jesus, who was the perfect example of someone with godly priorities, started his ministry with fasting. Matthew 4:1ff. We often mention that Jesus was prepared for his confrontation with the devil by his knowledge of scripture but he also prepared for it through fasting. If you knew you would be tempted by the devil for 40 days, wouldn't you want to be well fed and prepared? When Jesus prepares to go into the wilderness to face the devil, he fasts for 40 days to prepare himself. (Dabbs)
- F. Spiritual Fullness. But fasting is just as much about filling up as it is about emptying. You don't want to remain empty. You want to fill yourself up with God's word and with prayer. You may want some time to meditate and think about God for an hour or so each day while you fast. (Dabbs)
- E. Survival. Fasting reminds us that we are sustained "by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

3. When Should We Fast ?

- A. On Predetermined Days. During the time of Jesus, Some Pharisees, such as the one who prayed to himself in Luke 18:12, fasted twice a week. Mondays and Thursdays were market days and these Pharisees would also go to the market in this gloomy and miserable condition. Why do you think they did that?
- B. Often. Paul was in "fastings often" (2 Corinthians 11:27).
- C. When facing sickness and death, wars or serious disasters like long-term droughts or plagues. (Judges 20; 1 Samuel 31; Nehemiah 1; 2 Chronicles 20; Joel, 2 Samuel 12)
- D. When needing guidance. In Acts 13 and 14 the apostles fasted and prayed for guidance before they sent out Paul.
- E. When preparing to serve God. Jesus fasted forty days in preparation for his ministry.
- F. In longing for the appearance of Jesus. Jesus prophesied that his disciples would fast in his

absence. (Matthew 9:14-15)

4. Qualities of Christian Fasting

- A. Fasting is voluntary and private.
- B. We should fast as we are led by the Spirit of the living God, and, thus, our fasting ought not to be mechanical and Pharisaical.
- C. It is a means to accomplish spiritual purposes.
- D. It trains us in self-denial, which is a key mark of a Christian. (Johnson p. P. 9)
- E. It empties us so we become hungry for things that really matter. (Johnson, p. 9)
- F. The discipline of abstinence teaches us to be in the world but not of the world. (Johnson, p. 9)
- G. Negative qualities:
 - 1. We should never fast in order to be seen and applauded by men.
 - 2. We ought not to appear sad and gloomy.
 - 3. Fasting is not meritorious.
 - 4. Fasting is not a way to spiritually twist God's arm so that he will do something for you. As a spiritual discipline it can help you practically develop humility, dependence on God and a prayerful spirit as you learn to feed on Christ. (Feldman)

5. Spiritual Activities During Fasting

- A. Bible reading.
- B. Confession of sins. In 1 Samuel 7:6 we read how the Israelites fasted and confessed their sins before the Lord. "We have sinned against the Lord," they said.
- C. Mourning and grieving. Ezra fasted and wept for the unfaithfulness of Israel, as we read in Ezra 10:6, "Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and went to the room of Jehohanan son of Eliashib. While he was there, he ate no food and drank no water, because he continued to mourn over the unfaithfulness of the exiles." There is a mourning, a grieving, because we feel that we have offended God.
- D. Humble ourselves. In Psalm 35:13 we read, "Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting."
- E. Accompanied by serious prayer. We see this in Ezra 8, Psalm 35, and Acts 13. Fasting must

be accompanied by worship and prayer. "Fasting is one of the best friends we can introduce to our prayer life" (Whitney, p. 166).

F. Should be done in the context of loving God and his people. We are to help the poor, cover the naked, practice justice and mercy, and so on, as we read in Isaiah 58.

6. Prayer During Fasting

A. Sickness. We pray for those who are ill.

B. Revival. We read about that in Ezra 10, Nehemiah 1, and Daniel 9. Have you ever prayed, "O God, the state of your church is so cold, so frozen. And not only that, your people are glorying in their frozen condition. O God, have mercy upon your church!" We must pray for revival with fasting.

C. Guidance. We should pray with fasting for guidance. The New Testament church engaged in this activity of prayer and fasting before they sent out missionaries, as we read in Acts 13 and 14.

D. Deliverance. We are to fast and pray for deliverance from our enemies. Mordecai, Esther, and others fasted for seventy-two hours without eating or drinking, and God brought about great deliverance.

E. The salvation of our loved ones.

7. How to Fast

A. Imperfectly. You don't have to be Olympic-skilled. You might begin by fasting from people (solitude), conversation (silence), spending (frugality), media or using the telephone. Perhaps you'd like to experiment with abstaining from overpackaged highly processed foods, from lack of exercise (or fitness mania), or from living with an overpacked schedule. Or you may attempt a partial fast of eating no rich food, meat, or wine (Daniel 10:3). (Johnson, p. 28)

B. Start Small. You could start by skipping one meal or fasting for one day. You could start fasting for a night or for three days.

1. For a one-day fast Wallis actually recommends a noon-to-noon fast, or to begin after the noon meal one day and break the fast at the noon meal the next. In that case you are actually only skipping the evening and morning meal. (Littleton)

2. Foster suggests a progression should be observed.

a. Begin with a partial fast of 24 hours ... lunch to lunch.

b. Drink fresh fruit juices during the fast.

c. Do this once a week for several weeks.

d. Monitor the inner attitude of the heart.

e. Break your fast with a light meal of fresh fruits and vegetables and a good deal of inner rejoicing. (p. 57)

3. After that level, Foster suggests a 24 hour fast drinking only water.
4. The next level is a 36 hour fast. "Three to seven days is a good time period and will probably have a substantial impact on the course of your life." (Foster, p. 58)

C. Media. It is good also to fast sometimes from the television, radio, newspapers, and magazines.

D. Personal. Fasting is a personal matter between the individual and God. When you fast, you should tell only those who need to know. For instance, I generally only let my wife know when I am going to fast so that she can pray for me. She is usually careful not to eat in front of me or to cook anything really savory while I am fasting. I suggest that you ask at least one other believer to be praying for you when you plan to fast because my own experience has taught me that it can be a powerful spiritual battleground. (Feldman)

8. Beginning Your Fast

A. Physical condition. If you have any kind of physical problems, you should consult with your doctor before you begin to fast. If you have diabetes, high blood pressure, or any other physical condition that would be affected by fasting, you should not begin to fast without medical advice.

B. Objectives. We must pray for something, and it is good to begin with our own needs. Tell God how oblivious you are to your own sins and needs and ask him to reveal them to you. You should pray for the needs of your family and the needs of the church. You should pray for the needs of our nation and the world.

C. Perseverance. Be sure to persevere in it. We are not used to fasting, and we may experience headaches or other discomforts that make us want to quit. But we should persevere as we seek God. Eat lightly before and after fasting. Eat fruits and light foods rather than heavy foods like steak. You want to ease your body into the fast and break it gradually.

D. Drink. Drink lots of fluids--water and juice--during your fast.

F. Repent. Repent, confess, pray, and intercede for others during the fast.

G. Private. Avoid showmanship when you fast. Look normal and don't call attention to your fasting.

9. Benefits of Fasting. What, then, are the benefits to be gained from the practice of fasting?

A. Self Discipline. Fasting for spiritual purposes teaches us self-discipline. Jesus said to deny ourselves, meaning we must say "No" to the demands of our flesh. We are to say "No" to illegitimate demands as well as to certain legitimate ones. Fasting enables us to have self-discipline so that we can say "No" and make it stick. And it trains us to say "Yes" to God in terms of prayer, confession, and doing what is right.

- B. Dependence. Fasting helps us to understand how much we depend on God. When we stop eating, what happens? We experience pain and trouble. We may even think we are about to die. When we fast, we begin to understand that we need God to give us daily bread, and that realization should give us a little humility. We realize that we live, move, and have our being in God.
- C. Time. When we fast, there is more time to seek the kingdom of God . There is no cooking, no eating, and no washing of dishes. A lot of time is released so that we can really engage in spiritual activity.
- D. Sympathy. Fasting enables us to endure suffering and sympathize with others. As we feel pain from fasting, we can better sympathize with others who are suffering.
- E. Money. Fasting generates money. When we fast, we save money that would otherwise be used for food. In the second century the church used such money for the relief of the poor.
- F. Alertness. Fasting contributes to spiritual and mental alertness. When we fast, our minds and perception get sharper because we are focusing less on temporal things and more on eternal realities. We are not rushing through our prayer. We are really thinking things through. Our souls become more alert.
- G. Earnestness. Through fasting we are telling God that we are earnest in our prayer. Fasting signals earnestness and urgency. Prove yourself by serious fasting and prayer, and see whether or not God will help you. Fasting demonstrates our earnestness, urgency, and diligence.
- H. Self-Examination. Fasting enables us to perform true self-examination. We are a generation that is steeped in the philosophy of self-esteem. We dislike the concept of sin and are always whitewashing ourselves. But when we fast and pray, God shows us in increasing degrees our own corruption. And when that happens, we are enabled to confess and forsake our sins.

Conclusion: Do you have a mild case of fasting-phobia? We think about missing a meal or two for the sake of becoming more like Jesus and we get anxious. And yet we willingly miss meals sometimes while shopping, working, recreating, or otherwise occupied. (Whitney, p. 179)

Resources:

- Dabbs, Matt. Class outline at <http://mattdabbs.files.wordpress.com/2008/03/031807-fasting-and-prayer.pdf>
- Feldman, Adam. <http://adamfeldman.typepad.com/adamfeldman/2007/08/spiritual-disci.html>
- Johnson, Jan. Simplicity and fasting: Spiritual Disciplines Bible Studies, InterVarsity Press.
- Littleton, Paul. <http://middlekid.typepad.com/paul/2007/08/spiritual-disci.html>
- Mathew, P. G. notes located at http://www.gracevalley.org/sermon_trans/1997/Fasting.html
- Piper, John. A Hunger For God.
- Towns, Elmer L. Fasting For Spiritual Breakthrough, Regal Books, 1996.
- Whitney, Donald S. Spiritual Disciplines For The Christian Life.

DEEPER WALK

STUDY

By John Dobbs - <http://johndobbs.com/>

Introduction

- The purpose of the Spiritual Disciplines is the total transformation of the person. They aim at replacing old destructive habits of thought with new life-giving habits. Nowhere is this purpose more clearly seen than in the Discipline of study. (Foster, p. 63)
- We are transformed through the renewal of our minds (Romans 12:2)
- Paul suggests a number of things to think about in Philippians 4:8.
- Jesus said that the knowledge of the truth would set us free (John 8:32)
- "...No factor is more influential in shaping a person's moral and social behavior than regular Bible reading." (Whitney, p. 33)

1. What is Study?

A. Study is a specific kind of experience in which through careful attention to reality the mind is enabled to move in a certain direction. (Foster, p. 63)

1. The OT instructs the Israelites to write the Laws on gates and doorposts and bind them to their wrists (Deut. 11:18).
2. The purpose of this is to direct the mind repeatedly toward certain modes of thought about God and human relationships.
3. The NT replaces the law on the doorpost with laws written on the heart that lead us to Jesus – our “ever present and inward Teacher” (Foster, p. 64)

B. Study is different from meditation.

1. Meditation is devotional; study is analytical.
2. Meditation will relish a word; study will explicate it.

C. The principle task of study is a perception into the reality of a given situation, encounter, book, etc. We can go through a major crisis, for example, without any perception of the real nature of the tragic situation. But if we carefully observe and reflect upon what occurred, we can learn a great deal.

2. Foster's Four Steps of Study (p. 64-66)

- A. Repetition. This channels the mind in a specific direction, thus ingraining habits of thought.
- B. Concentration. Concentrate on what is being studied in order to increase learning.
- C. Comprehension. This focuses on the knowledge of the truth.
- D. Reflection. This defines the significance of what we are studying. It helps us to see things from God's perspective.

3. Four Practical Suggestions for Consistent Success in Bible Study (Whitney, p. 33ff)

A. Find the Time!

1. A tape recorded reading of the Bible can go through in 71 hours. The average person in the US watches that much television in less than two weeks.
2. Reading 15 minutes a day can take you through the Bible in less than a year.
3. Five minutes a day take you through the Bible is less than three years.

B. Find a Bible Reading Plan.

1. One plan is to read three chapters every day and five on Sundays and you will go through the Bible in a year.
2. Whitney suggests reading an equal number of chapters in five places each day.

a. Genesis (Law)	or	a. Genesis
b. Joshua (History)		b. Job
c. Job (Poetry)		c. Matthew
d. Isaiah (Prophets)		
e. Matthew (New Testament)		

C. Find at least one word, phrase, or verse to meditate on each time you read.

D. Write. Observations about the text, record questions, look up cross references, use a concordance, Outline the chapter.

4. Use the Tools

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| A. Bible Dictionary | B. Bible Concordance |
| C. Bible Commentaries | D. Bible Word Studies |
| E. Bible Atlas | |

5. Memorization (Whitney, p. 41-47)

- A. Supplies spiritual power. When Scripture is stored in the mind, it is available for the Holy Spirit to take and bring to your attention when you need it the most. (Psalm 119:11 “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”)
- B. Strengthens your faith. Proverbs 22:17-19 “Pay attention and listen to the sayings of the wise; apply your heart to what I teach, for it is pleasing when you keep them in your heart and have all of them ready on your lips. So that your trust may be in the LORD, I teach you

today, even you.”

- C. Equips you for unexpected witnessing opportunities. You need that information available.
- D. Prepares you to hear God’s Guidance. (Psalm 119:24 “Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors.”)
- E. Stimulates meditation. When you have the Word in your mind you can meditate on it anywhere at any time when opportunities come available. (Psalm 119:97 “Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.”)
- F. Keys to Memorization
 - 1. Have a plan. Decide on a topic or verses that help with a habit you want to kick.
 - 2. Write out the verses. First on paper, then on cards ... put them on your screen saver.
 - 3. Draw picture reminders.
 - 4. Memorize the verses word-perfectly. Don’t be satisfied with almost!
 - 5. Find a method of accountability – meet with someone regularly to review the verses.
 - 6. Review and meditate every day.
 - 7. Remember that the goal of memorization is not to meet a quota, the goal is Godliness.

Conclusion

- 1. The first and most important book we are to read is the Bible. Start small and build up.
- 2. 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”
- 3. Psalm 119:9, 11 “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. ... I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”
- 4. Robert Sumner, in his book *The Wonder of the Word of God*, tells of a man in Kansas City who was severely injured in an explosion. His face was badly disfigured, and he lost his eyesight as well as both hands. He had just become a Christian when the accident happened, and one of his great disappointments was that he could no longer read the Bible. Then he heard about a lady in England who read Braille with her lips. He sent for some books of the Bible in Braille, but the nerve endings in his lips had been too badly damaged to distinguish the characters. One day as he brought a Braille page to his lips his tongue happened to touch a few of the raised characters and he could feel them. At the time Robert Sumner wrote his book, the man had read through the entire Bible four times.

If he can do that can we discipline ourselves to read the Bible? (Whitney, p. 35)

Book Recommendations For Bible Study:

Bible study instruction: *How to Read the Bible For All It's Worth* – Gordon D. Fee, Douglas Stuart

Study Bible: Thompson's Chain Reference Bible or The NIV Study Bible

Compact Information on every book:

Halley's Bible Handbook

New Testament Survey by Merrill C. Tenney

A Book By Book Survey of the Old Testament by Rubel Shelly

A Book By Book Survey of the New Testament by Rubel Shelly

Word Studies: Word Studies in the Greek New Testament by Kenneth S. Weust

Great Set: The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible (5 Volumes)

Online Recommendations:

Bible Gateway www.biblegateway.com

Study Light www.studylight.org

Bible Explorer www.bible-explorer.com

Bible Maps www.biblemap.org

Free Commentary
On Entire Bible <http://collegepress.com/bsts-i-36.html>

DEEPER WALK

SIMPLICITY

Introduction

- The disciplines we have studied to this point are called the “inward” disciplines, as they relate to the heart of the individual disciple of Jesus. We are now entering into another set of disciplines we may call the “outward” disciplines ... the attitudes of heart that re-arrange the outward way we live day by day. The first of these outward disciplines is SIMPLICITY. Calhoun says, “There has never been a more complicated, cluttered, bureaucratic society than the one we live in today.”

- The desire of simplicity is to uncomplicated and untangle my life so I can focus on what really matters. Simplicity aims at loosening inordinate attachment to owning and having. Simplicity brings freedom and with it generosity. (Calhoun)

- The Christian Discipline of simplicity is an inward reality that results in an outward lifestyle. Calhoun says that these things may include:
 - *assessing the things and activities that keep life convoluted, complicated and confusing
 - *setting priorities that flow from loving God above all else
 - *downsizing possessions
 - *cutting back on shopping and discretionary spending
 - *eating simple foods
 - *enjoying simple pleasures that require no expense
 - *removing distractions and preoccupation with things

- The Fruit of Simplicity (Calhoun)
 - *living an uncluttered life
 - *becoming clearer, more distilled as a person
 - *creating more space in your life for loving and serving God
 - *using simple, honest speech without dissembling and double meanings.
 - *experiencing freedom from envy and entitlement
 - *being able to let go
 - *staking your identity in God’s love, not accumulations and possessions

- We must live in the modern world, and we are affected by its fractured and fragmented state. We are trapped in a maze of competing attachments.... Our need for security has led us into an insane attachment to things. We must understand that the lust for affluence in contemporary society is psychotic ... it has completely lost touch with reality. We crave things we neither need nor enjoy.... Until we see how unbalanced our culture has become at this point, we will not be able to deal with the mammon spirit within ourselves nor will we desire Christian simplicity. (Foster, p. 80-81)

1. THE BIBLE AND SIMPLICITY. The Bible challenges nearly every economic value of contemporary society.

A. We are not to trust wealth.

- “...Though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them.” Psalm 62:10

- "Whoever trusts in his riches will fall..." Proverbs 11:28

B. What did Jesus say? Jesus speaks to the question of economics more than any other single social issue.

1. "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." Luke 16:13
2. "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort." Luke 6:24
3. "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:19-21
4. "... Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Luke 12:15
5. "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it." Matthew 13:44-46

C. The Epistles also speak against trusting in riches / wealth / possessions.

1. 1 Timothy 6:9 "People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction."
2. A bishop is not to be a "lover of money" (1 Timothy 3:3). A Deacon is not to be "greedy for gain" (1 Timothy 3:8).
3. Hebrews 13:5 "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have..."
4. Paul lists greed alongside adultery and thievery and declares that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 5:11).

D. God intends that we should have adequate material provision.

1. Forced poverty is evil.
2. The Bible does not condone extreme asceticism.
3. Creation is good and to be enjoyed.

- E. Simplicity is the only thing that sufficiently reorients our lives so that possessions can be genuinely enjoyed without destroying us. Without simplicity we will either capitulate to the “mammon” spirit of this present evil age, or we will fall into an un-Christian legalistic asceticism. Both lead to idolatry.

2. TWO INNER ATTITUDES OF SIMPLICITY

- A. To receive what we have as a gift from God.
1. We are dependent upon God for the simplest elements of life: air, water, sun.
 2. What we have is not the result of our labor, but of the gracious care of God.
 3. It only takes a little drought or a small accident to show us how dependent we are for everything.
 4. “The spirit of ‘emptying’ lies at the very heart of Christianity. Thus, unwillingness to empty one’s cupboard, whether literal or spiritual, is a serious impediment to the pilgrim heart finding its way to God. For one thing, God has much to offer us, but if we are already full – of ourselves or the things of this world – then we have no room to receive.” Darryl Tippens, *Pilgrim Heart*, p. 40
- B. To have our goods available to others.
1. We cling to our possessions rather than sharing them because we are anxious about tomorrow.
 2. We share because we know that God will care for us. If someone is in need, we are free to help them.
 3. Ordinary common sense will define the parameters of our sharing and save us from foolishness.

3. THE OUTWARD EXPRESSION OF SIMPLICITY. Ten controlling principles for the outward expression of simplicity.

- A. Buy things for their usefulness rather than their status. Cars should be bought for their utility, not their prestige. Clothes should be bought because we need them, and not to impress people.
- B. Reject anything that is producing an addiction in you. Eliminate or cut down on addictive, nonnutritional drinks: alcohol, coffee, tea, Coca-Cola. Chocolate is an addiction for some people. Television, radios, stereos, magazines, videos, newspapers, books. If money has a grip on your heart, give some away.
1. Simplicity is freedom, not slavery. Refuse to be a slave to anything but God.
 2. Addiction is something that is beyond your control. Watch for undisciplined compulsions.
- C. Develop the habit of giving things away. If you find that you are becoming addicted to some possession, consider giving it to someone who needs it. De-accumulate! Masses of things that are not needed complicate life. They must be sorted and stored and dusted and resorted and restored.
- D. Refuse to be propagandized by the custodians of modern gadgetry.

1. Timesaving devices almost never save time. Often “new features” seduce us into buying what we do not need.
2. Whitney talks about the increasing prosperity and technology ... along with increasing opportunities and options ...that can even affect our spiritual practices. Instead of sitting in a comfortable chair by a sunny window with our bible, journal, and pen, now we can:
 - *Receive devotional readings sent daily by automatic email.
 - *Read the Bible in several translations, including those on our computer
 - *Make journal entries via keyboard or voice-recognition software
 - *Develop our devotional experience with worship-enhancing audio and / or video
3. Whitney also mentions that there is less time for church involvement, but more church activities to choose from. ... Many areas of our lives are productive and prosperous yet we’ve never felt so spiritually withered. Our calendars are full, but our souls are empty. (Whitney, Simplify Your Spiritual Life, p. 17)

E. Learn to enjoy things without owning them. Enjoy public beaches, parks, and libraries.

F. Develop a deeper appreciation for the creation. Walk when you can. Listen to the birds. Smell the flowers. Marvel in the rich colors. Discover once again that “the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” (Psalm 24:1)

G. Look with a healthy skepticism at all “buy now, pay later” schemes. They are a trap and only deepen your bondage. Use extreme caution before incurring debt.

H. Obey Jesus’ instructions about plain, honest speech. “Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.” Matthew 5:37 Make honesty and integrity the distinguishing characteristics of your speech.

I. Reject anything that breeds the oppression of others. Racism, sexism, and nationalism are signs of oppression.

J. Shun anything that distracts you from seeking first the kingdom of God. Johnson says, “as we practice simplicity, the Holy Spirit trains us to cut busyness and hurry out of our lives by remaining focused on God and god’s Kingdom. We refrain from participating in activities and owning possessions that are superfluous and do not further our union with God. The result is singleness of heart so that we are deliberate and purposeful in everything we do and say and think.” (Simplicity and Fasting, p. 11)

HOMEWORK:

Spend some time reflecting on the following questions. Perhaps use them as Journal entries.

1. How has the “more is better” mentality shaped you?
2. How much of your identity is wrapped up in what you own and where you go? Who are you without all these acquisitions and opportunities?
3. What is it like for you to give away things you still want and like?
4. When have you downsized? What was it like for you?

EXERCISES:

1. Uncomplicate your life by choosing a few areas in which you wish to practice “letting go.” Clean out the garage, basement, closet, or attic. Go on a simple vacation. Eat more simply. What will this look like in your life?
2. Where have you complicated your life with God? Consider what actually brings you into the presence of Christ. Spend time there.
3. Intentionally limit your choices. Do you need six different kinds of breakfast cereal, hundreds of TV channels or four tennis rackets? What is it like to limit your choices? Does it feel free, or do want and envy surface? Talk to God about this.

DEEPER WALK

SOLITUDE

Introduction

- Solitude and silence go together so perfectly that they are considered together.
- We must seek out the recreating stillness of solitude.

1. SOLITUDE AND SILENCE

A. Silence

1. Whitney says, "The Discipline of silence is the voluntary and temporary abstention from speaking so that certain spiritual goals might be sought. Sometimes silence is observed in order to read, write, pray, and so on. Though there is no outward speaking, there are internal dialogues with self and with God." (Whitney, p. 184)
2. "It is difficult to find silence in an age of technology and information. Silence challenges our cultural addiction to amusement, words, music, advertising, noise, alarms and voices both silence and waiting make us uncomfortable. They seem so unproductive. We can't tell if we are doing anything in them. So when we come upon silence, we fill it." Calhoun, p. 108
3. "We are so afraid of silence that we chase ourselves from one event to the next in order not to have to spend a moment alone with ourselves, in order not to have to look at ourselves in the mirror." Dietrich Bonhoeffer (via Calhoun, p. 111)

B. Solitude is the Spiritual Discipline of voluntarily and temporarily withdrawing to privacy for spiritual purposes. The period of solitude may last only a few minutes or for days.

1. Solitude involves scheduling enough uninterrupted time in a distraction – free environment that you experience isolation and are alone with God. (Calhoun, p. 111)
2. Solitude is a 'container discipline' for the practice of the other spiritual disciplines. (Calhoun, p. 111)

2. STEPS INTO SOLITUDE (Foster/Whitney)

A. Take advantage of the "little solitudes" that fill our day.

1. Early in the morning before the family awakens.
2. When traffic comes to a halt.
3. Short walks.
4. Slip outside just before bed and enjoy the silent night.
5. One family has a special chair; whenever anyone sits in it he or she is saying, "Please don't bother me, I want to be alone."
6. Whitney talks about "minute retreats".

B. Find places outside the home: a park, a church sanctuary kept unlocked, a retreat center. Calhoun suggests that we need to find some time / place where we are not in competition with social contact, noise, or stimulation.

C. Attempt to gain control over your words and make them few and full.

- D. Four times a year withdraw for three to four hours for the purpose of reorienting your life goals. What do you want to have accomplished one year from now? Ten years from now? Keep a journal of what comes to mind during these times. Ask God to show you new alternatives for the future.
- E. Daily Silence and Solitude. "I think the devil has made it his business to monopolize on three elements: noise, hurry, crowds ... Satan is quite aware of the problem of chaos" (Jim Elliot)
- F. Develop Special Places that become a refuge for you when seeking solitude and silence.

3. REASONS FOR SILENCE AND SOLITUDE (Whitney)

A. Follow Jesus' Example.

1. Jesus inaugurated his ministry by spending forty days alone in the desert (MT 4:1-11).
2. Before he chose the twelve he spent the entire night alone in the desert hills (Luke 6:12).
3. After John the Baptist's death, he "withdrew from there in a boat to a lonely place apart" (Matthew 14:13)
4. After feeding the five thousand Jesus "went up into the hills by himself..." (MT 14:23)
5. In other times of his life, Jesus spent time alone (Mark 1:35; Mark 6:31; Luke 4:42; Luke 5:16; Matthew 17:1-9; Matthew 26:36-46).

B. To Hear the Voice of God Better. As we contemplate Scripture and inquire of God, busyness and noise tend to drown out any insight we may receive.

C. To Express Worship To God

1. The worship of God does not always require words, sounds, or actions. Sometimes worship consists of a God-focused stillness and hush.
2. Habakkuk 2:20 says, "But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him."

D. To Express Faith in God

1. The simple act of silence before the Lord, as opposed to coming to Him in a wordy fret, can be a demonstration of faith in Him.
2. Psalm 62:1,2 "My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken."

E. To Seek the Salvation of the Lord

1. Lamentations 3:25-28 "The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. Let him sit alone in silence, for the LORD has laid it on him."
2. In what circumstances do you seek God's deliverance?

F. To Be Physically and Spiritually restored

1. We all need to restore the resources of the inward and outward person.
2. Mark 6:31 "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

G. To Regain A Spiritual Perspective. There's no better way to step back and get a more balanced, less worldly perspective on matters than through the Disciplines of silence and solitude.

H. To Seek the Will of God. "After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper." (1 Kings 19:12)

I. To Learn Control of the Tongue

1. The Bible says that the religion of the person with no tongue control is worthless.
2. James 1:19 "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry."

4. FRUIT OF SILENCE AND SOLITUDE (Calhoun, p. 107, 111)

A. Being attentive to the voice of Jesus

B. Having freedom from negative habits of speech (deception, gossip, impulsive chatter, small talk, impression management, the need to express your opinion or critique.)

C. Freedom from addictions to noise or sound (radio, TV, phone, iPod, etc.); the need to be occupied and stimulated.

D. Receiving quiet from the chaos and noise in your life.

E. Having deeper intimacy with God

F. Growing in self-awareness as the silence invites the subconscious to move into deeper levels of knowing

G. Developing increased listening skills

H. Moving away from letting the world squeeze you into its mold (Romans 12:2).

EXERCISE

1. If silence is new to you, begin with ten minutes. Setting a timer can help a novice who keeps watching the clock. As you become quiet what do you hear: voices, traffic, your breath, wind, your heart, distracting thoughts? Let the noise go. Continue to let the quiet deepen. Be with God. After ten minutes reflect on what it was like for you to simply become still enough to hear the backgrounds.

DEEPER WALK

SUBMISSION

Introduction

“A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, servant to all.” – Martin Luther

The Discipline of Submission Is...

- The desire to have Jesus as the Master of my life in absolutely every way.
- Aligning my will and freedom with God’s will and freedom. God’s will for us includes freely submitting to each other out of love and reverence for Christ.
- A means of releasing the burden of always having to have our own way. Richard Foster says, “The obsession to demand that things go the way we want them to go is one of the greatest bondages in human society today.” (Celebration, p. 111)

Almost all church fights and splits occur because people do not have the freedom to give in to each other. We insist that a critical issue is at stake; we are fighting for a sacred principle. Usually it is not. Only in submission are we able enabled to bring this spirit to a place where it no longer controls us.

- A biblical teaching on submission focuses primarily on the spirit with which we view other people.
- A fulfillment of Jesus’ astonishing statement, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34).

The Discipline of Submission (Self Denial) is Not...

- Self denial does not mean the loss of our identity.
- Self denial is not the same thing as self-contempt.
- Self denial is not the same thing as becoming a doormat for others, or a weak-willed follower.

Self denial is the freedom to give way to others....to hold others’ interests above our own.

SUBMISSION AS TAUGHT BY JESUS

1. Jesus Lived the “Cross Life”
2. Philippians 2:8 “And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!”
3. He shattered the customs of his day by taking women seriously and being willing to meet with children.

4. He lived the cross life when he took a towel and washed the feet of the disciples.
5. Jesus did away with all the claims to privileged position and status.
6. Jesus called his followers to live the cross life.
 - Mark 8:34 "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."
 - Mark 9:35 "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."
 - John 13:15 "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."
7. The "cross life" is the life of voluntary submission; freely accepted servanthood.

SUBMISSION AS TAUGHT IN THE EPISTLES

1. Philippians 2:4-7 "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."
2. 1 Peter 2:21-23 "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."
3. . Ephesians 5:21 "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."
4. Philippians 2:3 "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves."
5. Colossians 3:18-4:1 ... Wives, Husbands, Servants all instructed to be in submission to one another.

THE ACTS OF SUBMISSION

1. Submission to God.
 - A. We are to seek God's will, no matter where it leads, and do it.
 - B. Foster: "As the first words of the morning are of submission, so are the last words of the night. We surrender our body, mind, and spirit into the hands of god to do with us as he pleases through the long darkness." (Celebration, p. 122)
 - C. George Matheson's hymn:
 - Make me a captive, Lord, And then I shall be free;
 - Force me to render up my sword, And I shall conqueror be.
 - I sink in life's alarms, When by myself I stand;
 - Imprison me within Thine arms, And strong shall be my hand.

2. Submission to the Scriptures. We yield ourselves to hear the word, to receive the word, and to obey the word.
3. Submission to our Family. We are to freely and graciously make allowances for each other.
4. Submission to our Neighbors and those we meet in the course of our daily lives.
 - A. If they are in need, we help them. We perform small acts of kindness and ordinary neighborliness: sharing our food, baby-sitting their children, mowing their lawn, sharing tools, etc.
 - B. "To have no opinion of ourselves, and to think always well and highly of others, is great wisdom and perfection." Thomas a Kempis
5. Submission to the believing community, the body of Christ. Three areas...
 - A. Sin: How do you respond when someone points out sin in your life? Do you get defensive? Do you get angry? Do you begin listing all their faults? Or do you examine the truth of what they are saying? Do you consider that this person might not be acting "holier-than-thou" but rather in your best interests? http://www.watersedge.tv/disciplines_servicesubmission.htm
 - B. Body Life: If there are jobs to be done and tasks to be accomplished, we look at them closely to see if they are God's invitation to the Cross-life. We cannot do everything but we can do some things.
 - C. Discipleship: We should allow others to mentor, disciple, teach, correct, and guide us.
6. Submission to the Broken and Despised. It is the helpless and undefended to which we are to be drawn (James 1:27).
7. Submission to the World.
 - A. We do not live in isolation.
 - B. We have an environmental responsibility that affects people around the world and generations yet to come.
 - C. We are to be determined to live as a responsible member of an increasingly irresponsible world.

THE FRUIT OF SUBMISSION

1. Being free from the need to be in charge.
2. Teachability.

3. Esteeming and honoring others more than yourself.
4. Being free from a rebellious and autonomous spirit.
5. Surrendering and losing your life to find it.
6. Developing approachability, gentleness, and humility
7. Expressing a deep regard for others and what they might have to offer.

Conclusion

1. There are dangers in submission ... deciding to despise ourselves rather than deny ourselves. There is the submission to things that would bring us or others harm. We should use wisdom and discernment in making these decisions.
2. Other questions arise as we live the 'cross life' ... but those questions should not keep us from pursuing this Spiritual Discipline of Submission.

EXERCISE: Take an open look at your life. Is there some area where you have not submitted to God? Perhaps there is an area of life where you are demanding your own way when it does not actually have to be your way. Ask God to give you the strength to behave differently in these settings. Act upon what you now know and record your feelings and reflections in your journal.

Online Resources: http://www.watersedge.tv/disciplines_servicesubmission.htm

DEEPER WALK

SERVICE

Introduction: Learn the lesson that, if you are to do the work of a prophet, what you need is not a scepter, but a hoe. – Bernard of Clairvaux

- Having lived out a life of service before them, Jesus called his disciples to the same: “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you” (John 13:14,15)
- In service we must experience the little deaths of going beyond ourselves.
- Service is a way of offering resources, time, treasure, influence, and expertise for the care, protection, justice, and nurture of others. Acts of service give hands to the second greatest commandment “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Calhoun, p. 144)

Self-Righteous Service Versus True Service

- Self-Righteous Service comes through human effort. True service comes from a relationship with God, watching for opportunities He places before us.
- Self-Righteous Service is impressed with the ‘big deal’. True service finds it almost impossible to distinguish the small from the large service. The true servant is often drawn to the small service, not out of false modesty, but because he genuinely sees it as the more important task.
- Self-Righteous service requires external rewards. It needs to know that people see and appreciate the effort. True service rests contented in hiddenness. It does not fear attention, nor seek it. The divine nod of approval is sufficient. “Only the eye of God ever sees the larger, hidden part of it” (Whitney, p. 116).
- Self-Righteous service is highly concerned about results. It eagerly waits to see if the person served will reciprocate in kind. It becomes bitter when the results fall below expectations. True service is free of the need to calculate results. It delights only in the service.
- Self-Righteous service picks and chooses whom to serve. Sometimes the high and powerful are served because that will ensure a certain advantage. Sometimes the low and defenseless are served because that will ensure a humble image. True service is indiscriminate in its ministry.
- Self-Righteous service is affected by moods and whims. It can serve only when there is a ‘feeling’ to serve. True service ministers simply and faithfully because there is a need.
- Self-Righteous service is temporary. True service is a life-style. “When God calls His elect to Himself, he calls no one to idleness” (Whitney, p. 117).
- Self-Righteous service fractures community. It centers on the glorification of the individual. True service builds community. It draws, binds, heals, builds.

Motives Leading To Service (Whitney, p. 118-123)

- Motivated by the desire to obey God. We disobey God when we are not serving others.
- Motivated by Gratitude. Do you remember your life before you gave it to Christ? Do you ever think about everything that God has done for you and the great price that was paid to give you eternal life? That should move us to serve others.
- Motivated by Gladness. "Serve the Lord with gladness" (Psalm 100:2). Serving others in the name of Christ is not a burden, but a privilege.
- Motivated by Forgiveness. Not by guilt! We do not serve in order to be forgiven, but because we are forgiven!
- Motivated by Humility. Jesus was the perfect Servant. His greatness is seen in his lowliness. He was willing to experience in order to serve the most basic needs of His twelve friends (John 13:12-16).
- Motivated by Love. "You my brothers were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love" (Galatians 5:13).

Service and Humility

- Of all the Spiritual Disciplines, service is the most conducive to the growth of humility. When we set out on a consciously chosen course of action that accents the good of others and is, for the most part, a hidden work, a deep change occurs in our spirits.
- Nothing disciplines the inordinate desires of the flesh like service, and nothing transforms the desires of the flesh like serving in hiddenness. William Law urged that every day should be viewed as a day of humility. He suggests we do this by serving others.

Law continues... If we want humility, "*...condescend to all the weaknesses and infirmities of your fellow-creatures, cover their frailties, love their excellencies, encourage their virtues, relieve their wants, rejoice in their prosperities, compassionate their distress, receive their friendship, overlook their unkindness, forgive their malice, be a servant of servants, and condescend to do the lowest offices to the lowest of mankind.*"

- Hesitancy: People will take advantage of me.

Right here we must see the difference between choosing to serve and choosing to be a servant. When we choose to serve, we are still in charge. We decide whom we will serve and when we will serve.

When we choose to be a servant, we give up the right to be in charge. There is great freedom in this. If we voluntarily choose to be taken advantage of, then we cannot be manipulated. We become available and vulnerable.

Service in the Marketplace

- Service must begin to take place in the marketplace of our daily lives. Service is not only for the one served, but for the one serving.
- The Service of Small Things. Like Dorcas, we find ways to make “coats and garments for the widows” (Acts 9:39). We discover that the real issues are found in the tiny, insignificant corners.
- The service of guarding the reputation of others. Paul taught us to “speak evil of no one” (Titus 3:2). We may clothe our backbiting in all the religious respectability we want, but it will remain a deadly poison. There is a discipline of holding one’s tongue.
- The service of being served. When Jesus began to wash the feet of those he loved, Peter refused. He would never let his Master stoop to such a menial service on his behalf. Those who, out of pride, refuse to be served are failing to submit to the divinely appointed leadership in the kingdom of God.
- There is the service of common courtesy. We should not despise the rituals of relationship that are in every culture. We are “to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all men” (Titus 3:2).
- There is the service of hospitality. Peter urges us to “Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another” (1 Peter 4:9). Paul makes this one of the qualities of a bishop.
- The service of listening. We do not have to have the correct answers to listen well. Answers can sometimes get in the way. To listen to others quiets and disciplines the heart that transforms the affections, even the priorities, of life.
- The service of bearing the burdens of others. “Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). When we are with those who are going through the valley of the shadow, weeping is far better than words.
- The Service of sharing the word of Life with one another.

Conclusion: From Whitney, p. 128: When I think of faithful willingness to serve, I remember a quiet little man from a church where I was a staff member. On Sundays his arrival was always unnoticed, for he would come long before anyone else. Yet he burrowed his old car into an obscure corner of the parking lot to leave the best places for others. He unlocked all the doors, got the bulletins, and then waited outside. When you walked up he’d give you a bulletin and a big smile. But he couldn’t talk. He was embarrassed when newcomers asked him questions. Something had happened to his voice long ago. When I met him he was into his sixties and living alone. When he had car trouble, which was often, he never let anyone know and so would walk more than a mile to church. Because of his vulnerability he was robbed and beaten several times, at least twice during the three years I was in that church. ... He had extensive arthritis, which

stooped his shoulders and prevented him from turning his neck. It made hard work of unlocking doors and handing out bulletins. But he was always there, always smiling, even though he couldn't speak a word. Everything about his life worked to keep him unheralded and in the background...yet despite his drawbacks, setbacks, handicaps, and a plethora of potential excuses, he willingly served God.

Suggested Prayer for each day: *Lord Jesus, as it would please you bring me someone today whom I can serve.*

Exercise:

Spend some time meditating on the story of the good Samaritan found in Luke 10:25-37. Become quiet and ask the Lord to speak to you. Give your imagination to God. Read the story slowly and aloud, savoring the words. What stood out to you? Read the passage a second time, imagining you are the Levite. What are your concerns? Why are you in a hurry? Then put yourself in the place of the priest. What are your concerns? Why do you pass by? Imagine you are the Samaritan. Why do you stop to help? How do you feel about incurring all the expenses for another's care? Who of these three characters do you tend to be like? Who in your life receives your care: family? Friends? Who else? (via Calhoun, p. 146)

THE INWARD DISCIPLINES

Meditation
Prayer
Fasting
Study

THE OUTWARD DISCIPLINES

Simplicity
Solitude
Submission
Service

THE CORPORATE DISCIPLINES

Confession
Worship
Guidance
Celebration

DEEPER WALK

CONFESSION

Introduction

1. "The confession of evil works is the first beginning of good works." – Augustine of Hippo
2. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:8-9)
3. Confession is the desire to surrender my weaknesses and faults to the forgiving love of Christ and intentionally desire and embrace practices that lead to transformation. (Calhoun, p. 91)
4. What does confession involve? (Calhoun, p. 91)
 - a. Admitting to God the natural propensity to rationalize, deny, blame, and self-obsess
 - b. Examining the 'sin network' in your life as evidenced in presumptuous sins, besetting weaknesses, self-centered habits, and broken relationships.
 - c. Replacing sinful habits with healthy ones.
 - d. Seeking God's grace to change.

1. The Value of Confession

A. It brings about objective change.

1. Confession is more than psychologically therapeutic. It is a means of healing and transforming the inner spirit.
2. "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit." (Psalm 32:1-2)
3. Calhoun: Keeping company with Jesus as he helps you with how much or how little you change.

B. It is part of the ongoing work of sanctification in our lives.

1. Philippians 2:12 "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."
2. Confession helps the believer to grow "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:13)
3. Proverbs 28:13 "No one who conceals transgressions will prosper, but one who

confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.”

C. It challenges our pride. (Tippens, p. 106)

D. Thinking of yourself with sober judgment, awareness of your blind spots (Calhoun, p. 91).

E. Gaining insight into your temptations and God’s work in your life.

F. Having compassion toward others in their faults.

G. Seeing yourself as God’s loved and forgiven children no matter what you have done.

H. Living in thankfulness for God’s work in your life.

I. Savoring the gift of salvation.

J. It brings Freedom from bondage. “There is no stronger sin than sin that remains hidden. Secret sins are the most destructive force in the spiritual life. They chain us into a life of duplicity and spiritual mediocrity, if not spiritual bankruptcy. However, when we practice confession, our sin is no longer hidden. Such transparency brings an incredible freedom. What were once iron chains of bondage fall off as if they were made of paper.”
(<http://www.watersedge.tv>)

2. Is Confession Private or Corporate?

A. It is a private act. “There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” 1 Timothy 2:5.

1. The prayer of “examen” – asking God to stir up an awareness of our sin. We ask God to test us, search us, and know our hearts (Psalm 139:1). (Tippens, 107)

2. . Other ways of opening our spiritual need to God: journaling, reading of Scripture, meditating on the Lord’s prayer, private retreats. (Tippens (107)

B. It is a corporate act. “Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another...” James 5:16

1. The Bible teaches public and shared confession. The model prayer: “*Our* Father in heaven... Give *us* this day *our* daily bread...” (Matthew 6:9-13) (Tippens p. 108)

2. In large assemblies, where Christians may not have meaningful relationships and where they may not even know one another, “Public confession” is deeply problematic. Such venues are not necessarily spiritually or psychologically safe. The chances of abuse, embarrassment, and misunderstanding are considerable. (Tippens, p. 108)

3. Suggestion: use of confessional prayers such as Psalm 51 or the Lord’s prayer ... or a

prayer like this from *The Book of Common Prayer*:
Most merciful God,
We confess that we have sinned against you
In thought, word, and deed,
By what we have done,
And by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
Have mercy on us and forgive us;
That we may delight in your will,
And walk in your ways,
To the glory of your Name. Amen. (Tippens, p. 108-109)

4. For individual needs a small group where people have covenanted together to tell the truth about their lives, in safety and in confidentiality....or with an authentic soul-friend.

3. The Challenge of Confession

A. We can see others as being better Christians than we are.

1. Confession is difficult for us because we all too often view the believing community as a fellowship of saints before we see it as a fellowship of sinners. We often hide ourselves from one another and live in veiled lies and hypocrisy.
2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person. As long as I am by myself in the confession of my sins everything remains in the dark, but in the presence of a brother the sin has to be brought into the light."
3. Tippens: What if Christians came to the assembly expecting to lay down their burdens, their griefs, and their grievances before each other? What if they refused to go forward with their worship and their countless religious activities until they had made amends with their brothers and sisters in the faith? ... Could it be that our congregations are unnecessarily burdened by pain because we have failed to confess our faults to one another? (p. 105)

B. Our Culture. (Tippens)

1. There are countless social forces that tempt us to soften the truth, to spin the facts, or merely to stay superficial. For one thing, we live in a harsh and competitive world. The cost of truth-telling can be extraordinarily high, especially in communities of faith, where everyone is expected to look better than they are." (p. 99)

2. The truth is found in two facts: Everyone who lives is deeply hurt by others. Everyone who lives has deeply hurt others.

3. We have all wounded and offended God.

4. Acts 2:37 "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?""

C. Hidden Dangers (Tippens). The Christian who is not confessional is in peril:

1. A danger to himself

2. A danger to the community

3. A necessary premise of Good News is that something very bad is going on in our lives for which the Good News is the welcome remedy. If we cannot see the bad news in our lives and confess it, we block the one pathway to hope.

4. Three Qualities of Confession. St. Alphonsus Liguori writes, "For a good confession three things are necessary: an examination of conscience, sorrow, and a determination to avoid sin."

A. An Examination of Conscience

1. A time when we are pierced in our soul in the presence of God, helps us to become conscious of the things that must be forgiven and put right before we can continue to love One whose care has been so constant.

2. We bring our sins in specific...both outward sins and the sins of the heart.

B. Sorrow

1. It is necessary to a good confession.

2. Sorrow as it relates to confession is an abhorrence at having committed the sin, a deep regret at having offended the heart of the Father.

3. Sorrow is a way of taking the confession seriously.

C. A determination to avoid sin

1. This is the will to be delivered from sin that we seek from God as we prepare to make confession.

2. We must desire and be conquered and ruled by God.

5. To Whom Should we Confess?

A. Not a gossip. It is an unfortunate fact of life that some people seem to be unable to keep a confidence.

B. Key Qualities: spiritual maturity, wisdom, compassion, good common sense, the ability to keep a confidence, and a wholesome sense of humor.

C. There is danger in confessing to improper people at improper times. Jesus taught us to take care not to cast what is most precious before those who will treat it unworthily or with contempt (Matthew 7:6).
(Tippens, P. 107)

6. How Should I Receive Confession?

A. Humility. We learn to live under the cross.

1. We can escape being horrified by the sin of others and feeling superior to others – to know the grace and mercy of God’s acceptance. Once we know the awfulness of sin we know that regardless of what others have done, we ourselves are the chief of sinners.
2. By living under the cross we are delivered from the danger of spiritual domination. We feel no need to control or straighten them out.

B. Indwelling. We need to pray for the light of Christ within us ... so that our presence will speak of the love and forgiving grace of God.

C. Wisdom. We need to pray for an increase in the gift of discernment.

D. Quiet. When others are opening their grief to us we discipline ourselves to be quiet. We should not relieve tension with off-handed comments, nor prying out more details than are necessary.

E. Prayer.

1. Inwardly and imperceptively you are sending prayers of love and forgiveness for the person who is confessing.
2. Prayer for the healing of the inner wounds that the sin has caused. Prayer in this manner is best accompanied by “laying on of hands” – a means through which God communicates his life giving power (Hebrews 6:1-2 “Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.”).

7. Forgiveness is to be Received. Absolution is the pronouncement of the glorious truth that we have been released from our burden. (Tippens, 109-110)

A. All Christians ought to hear that God is a good and gracious God, ready to forgive, ready to welcome them home.

B. It is true that only God forgives, it is also true that we can benefit from hearing divine

forgiveness explicitly pronounced.

C. 1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”

D. 1 John 2:12 “I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.”

E. Christ called us to speak words of truth to one another. We can emphatically affirm that Christ receives and forgives penitent people.

Conclusion

1. The discipline of Confession brings an end to pretense. God is calling into being a Church that can openly confess its frail humanity and know the forgiving and empowering graces of Christ. Honesty leads to confession and confession leads to change.
2. Tippens: Confession is a joint process involving a sincere speaker and an attentive, responsive listener. The confessor speaks his or her weakness; but the speaker must be heard, held, and loved by someone – first and foremost by God, but also by a brother or sister who embodies the patience of Christ.

EXERCISES (Calhoun, p. 93)

1. Imagine you are in a safe place, surrounded by the love of God. Ask God to help you see yourself as He sees you. Remember he sees you absolutely and with love. Using the Ten Commandments as a guide, journal your sins. When you have finished, go through each commandment one at a time, asking God to forgive you and help you to change. Then burn your list in a symbolic act of what it means to have God remove your sins from you.
2. Set aside some time for confession and self-examination. In the presence of God ask for light to pierce your defenses. Then ask yourself, Who have I injured recently through thoughtlessness, neglect, anger, and so on? As the Holy Spirit brings people to mind, confess your feelings about these people to God. Ask God to forgive you and if need be to give you grace to forgive them. Write an apology, make a phone call or confess out loud in an attempt to put the relationship back on track.
3. Enter into a covenant group or an accountability relationship where you cannot hide. Tell the truth about who you are and ask your partners to pray for you and help you change.

Introduction

- “To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.” William Temple
- *Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth. (John 4:23-24)*
- Worship is our response to the overtures of love from the heart of the Father. Forms and rituals do not produce worship, nor does the disuse of forms and rituals.
- The word ‘worship’ comes from the Saxon word which became worthship. To worship God is to ascribe the proper worth to God, to magnify His worthiness of praise, or better, to approach and address God as he is worthy. (Whitney, p. 87)

THE OBJECT OF OUR WORSHIP

1. Matthew 4:10 “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”
2. Exodus 20:3 “You shall have no other gods before me.”
3. “The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him.” (A. W. Tozer)
4. To see who the Lord is brings us to confession. “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” (Isaiah 6:5)
5. God has revealed Himself that we might focus on Him. (Whitney, p. 88)
 - a. Through Creation (Romans 1:20)
 - b. Through His Word (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21)
 - c. Through Jesus Christ (John 1:1, 14; Hebrews 1:1-2)
 - d. We are not worshiping if we are not thinking about God!

THE PRIORITY OF WORSHIP

1. Mark 12:30 “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”
2. Our lives are to be punctuated with praise, thanksgiving, and adoration.
3. Service flows out of worship.
4. “The first exercise of the Discipline of worship is to develop the habit of faithfully assembling with other believers in meetings where the primary purpose is to worship God.” (Whitney, p. 92)

PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP

1. Come to worship times with a holy expectancy.
2. Enter ten minutes early. Lift your heart in adoration to the King of glory. Contemplate his majesty, glory, and tenderness as revealed in Jesus Christ. Invite the real Presence of the Lord. Pray for the preacher and worship leaders.
3. Notice those coming in ... taking note of those who need your intercessory prayer. Perhaps they seem sad or burdened. Pray that God would lift their burdens. Give them some prayer attention during the service. What could happen if several of us would do this?

AVENUES INTO WORSHIP

1. Still all humanly initiated activities. “The Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before him” (Hab. 2:20)
2. Praise. The Psalms are the literature of worship and their most prominent feature is praise. “Praise the Lord!” is the shout that reverberates from one end of the Psalter to the other. Singing is meant to move us into praise. It provides a medium for the expression of emotion. We express our joy, our thanksgiving. We become centered, poised toward God.
3. The Bible describes worship in physical terms. The root meaning for the Hebrew word we translate worship is “to prostrate”. The word bless literally means “to kneel.” Thanksgiving refers to “an extension of the hand.” We are to present our bodies to God in a posture consistent with the inner spirit in worship. Standing, clapping, dancing, lifting the hands, lifting the head are postures consistent with the spirit of praise. Kneeling, bowing the head, lying prostrate are postures consistent with the spirit of adoration and humility. Physical response to worship is not to be manipulated in any way. We are to give each other freedom to respond to the moving of God upon the heart.

STEPS INTO WORSHIP

1. Learn to practice the presence of God daily. “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Have personal times of inner worship and confession and Bible study and attentiveness to Christ, your present Teacher. "The waters of worship should never stop flowing from our heart, for God is always God and always worthy of worship." (Whitney, p. 96)

2. Find ways to prepare for the gathered experience of worship. Go to bed early on Saturday night, go over hymns and Scripture passages that will be used on Sunday, Gather early before the actual worship service and pray for God's presence to fill the room.
3. Absorb distractions with gratitude. If there is noise or distraction, rather than fussing and fuming about it, learn to take it in and conquer it. If little children are running about, bless them!
4. Learn to offer a sacrifice of worship. Many times you do not "feel" like worship. Perhaps you have had so many disappointing experiences in the past that you think it is hardly worth it. Go anyway. Isaac Pennington says that when people are gathered for genuine worship, "They are like a heap of fresh and burning coals warming one another as a great strength and freshness and vigor if life flows into all."

THE FRUIT OF WORSHIP

1. If worship does not propel us into greater obedience, it has not been worship. To stand before the Holy One of eternity is to change.
2. Colossians 3:16 "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."