

Spiritual Exercises or Disciplines

PRAYER

Dallas Willard says prayer is routinely conversing and communicating with God for the purpose of aligning out thoughts, feelings, and lives with His. On the importance of prayer, Richard Foster writes, "When the apostles were tempted to invest their energies in other important and necessary tasks they determined to give themselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word."

In John 15:15, Jesus says, *I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.* We are to go to this friend in unceasing prayer with all our situations.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

- Philipians 4:6

SERVICE

The deliberate use of our resources such as time, energy, physical abilities, and wealth for the benefit of others. Richard Foster writes that this is "leadership not with a scepter, but with a towel." When Jesus washed His disciples' feet at the Last Supper, He was performing the ultimate act of service to them. Then, after rising, he said to them, *"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."* There is no wiggle room there. His followers are to serve. Period.

BIBLE STUDY

Studying the Scripture and learning all that you can for the purpose of knowing and obeying God more completely. Emphasis should be placed on how to apply the truth of the bible to one's daily life. Richard Foster says, "When we come to the Bible expectantly, attentively and humbly, we will experience the joy of losing ourselves in the great river of Life that is life, indeed. That is what the Bible is all about: human life eternally bound up in divine life." The Bible is a book that is do be lived out. It is about transformation and not simply information.

MEMORIZATION/MEDITATION

Memorization is just as it sounds. We are told in Deuteronomy 11:18 to store the word of God in our hearts. This is so very important as we need to be able to call on

the truth of God in both those difficult moments of life to seek God's comfort and wonderful moments to give Him praise. The Palmist writes *I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.*- Psalm 119:11

Meditation is the reflection on where you are with God and what God is teaching you. It may be focusing on and thinking about the nature of God, the work of Christ or a particular passage. It is always Biblically based and focused on God. Joshua 1:8 says, *This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.*

SABBATH

Practicing or keeping the Sabbath is setting aside one day of the week for the sole purpose of rest, reflection and enjoyment in the Lord. It is worth noting that of the 10 Commandments, the longest is the command to keep the Sabbath.

Tony Jones writes in *The Sacred Way*, "With the coming of Christ the Sabbath has taken on new meaning. As well as pointing backwards to creation, it points forward to the rest and peace we will have in Christ when He comes again. Thus, early in the church the Sabbath was shifted to Sunday - the day of Christ's resurrection. And instead of being bound with legalistic obligations, it became known as 'the feast day of the Lord.'" Sunday became a day for Christians together for worship, prayer, and a big agape meal, including the Lord's supper.

Theologian Jurgen Moltmann writes, "If I sum up the commandment and the reason for it, we get the following picture: God creates and shapes a rich and colorful world in order to celebrate the feast of creation with all His creatures on the Sabbath. Therefore the Sabbath is the consummation of creation; without it creation is incomplete and remains insignificant." And as we celebrate the Sabbath weekly, we have hope in God's final consummation -the return of Christ.

GIVING

The discipline of regularly giving a portion of your income to provide for the work of the Lord. This is most often done in the worship service as giving to the Lord is a way of worshiping the Lord. This discipline often means that we must practice living a simpler life. We are instructed to give in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. In Proverbs 3:9, we are told *Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops.* 2 Corinthians 9:7 says *Each of*

you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

COMMUNITY

The discipline of pursuing close relationship, friendships, with people who are committed to following Jesus in all areas of their lives and to help you do so as well. A community of believers is beautifully described in Hebrews 13:1-25 as well as Acts 2:42-47.

FASTING

While fasting from food is the common way to fast, fasting can be the self-denial of other things as well. Fasting has to deal with controlling our appetite for things and for self. Thomas a Kempis wrote "Arm yourself manfully against the wickedness of the devil; control the appetite, and you will more easily control all bodily desires."

Fasting is really a spiritual remedy to what is, really, a spiritual problem. To fast shows our reliance upon God for all things. It reminds us that we are, ultimately, spiritual beings. It helps us to understand that we are to live by and through Christ who is the bread of life. *Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.* -John 6:35

SILENCE/SOLITUDE

Thomas a Kempis wrote, "In quiet and silence the faithful soul makes progress, the hidden meanings of the Scriptures become clear, and he eyes weep with devotion every night. Even as one learns to grow still, he draws closer to the Creator and further from the hurly burly of the world." In Luke 6:12, it says of Christ, *In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. And in Matthew 6:6 we are told, But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

Another reason to practice silence and solitude is to discover what we can learn from ourselves when we turn off the external stimuli that are so much a part of our world. Interestingly, that silence often leads to what St John of the Cross called "the dark night of the soul." It seems one cannot pursue silence without coming to a place of deep, dark doubt. From the place of darkness, addressing our sins, we turn to confession and to Jesus who is the Light that has conquered our darkness.