

Spiritual Disciplines



By Reid S. Monaghan

Spiritual Disciplines

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Discipline – Why Bother?

Discipline. What to make of it? We know its value, but seldom like to submit to her rule. The cyclist who wins the multiple titles in the Tour de France knows her well. The artist who has taken years to develop his craft is a sure acquaintance. Whether Lance Armstrong or a Leonardo Da Vinci, discipline is the constant companion of human progress wherever it is found. Yet there is a mood in our generation which despises the mere mention of the word discipline. We are a “me-centered,” get it now, don’t want to wait, self-obsessed, hope it all comes real easy sort of people. This is the cultural air we breathe and the water in which we swim. Some of you reading this may even think this is too long to read; you may become lazy and quit a few paragraphs in. Don’t. For a lack of discipline creeps into our spiritual lives as followers of Jesus and the result is a dead and boring faith. Knowledge and relationship with the infinite God and just bored; well that just sort of sucks, so please keep on reading.

It may be a little obnoxious to say, but it is real easy to forget that the word *discipline* and *disciple* are very close relatives. They actually both come from the Latin word *disciplina* which means teaching or learning. To be disciplined means to be dedicated to learning and a disciple is a learner, a follower, one who believes



his teacher knows what the heck he is talking about and then gets in line accordingly. To follow Jesus, to follow our teacher, to be His disciple, requires what we sometimes would rather avoid—it requires discipline. To say yes to Him, to love Him, to choose Him daily, to not be swept away by the currents of the world is a pretty big mountain facing us. In fact, without His power in us, we dare not start the ascent. Jesus wasn't kidding when



he said “Follow me” or “If you love me you will keep my commandments” or “He who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is not fit for service in the kingdom of God.” This requires us to be disciplined followers.

Paul, an early Christian leader, once told Timothy, a young man he was mentoring, that he was *to train himself for godliness* (1 Tim. 4:7,8). Training requires discipline. It involves following Jesus; it requires walking the paths God has given us which lead towards His purpose for our

lives. Why? God really desires to transform our lives, to change us for the better. He really does. Christian philosopher Dallas Willard articulates this well.

It is we who are in danger: in danger of missing the fullness of life offered to us. Can we seriously believe that God would establish a plan for us that essentially bypasses the awesome needs of present human life and leaves human character untouched? Would He leave us even temporarily marooned with no help in our kind of world, with our kind of problems: psychological, emotional, social, and global? Can we believe the essence of Christian faith and salvation covers nothing but death and after? Can we believe that being saved really has nothing whatever to do with the kind of persons we are?¹

In order for us to change, we must enter His school of training; yes, our joy depends on it.

Training to be Like Jesus

Christians are people that through faith in Jesus and His death on the cross have come to know God. One would guess that such an encounter with someone like...GOD, would change us. And such is reality; He really does a work in and through us. We know that God's purpose with us is to transform us to be more like Jesus. To make us more like Him in character, more like Him in what we love, more like Him in the way we go about our business here on the earth. Yet many just want to say a prayer, have an experience, get a spiritual buzz and "poof"—we become instant, mature, spiritual people. No sweat, no work, no struggle. After a while we find out that this just doesn't work.

The Christian faith is not a magic trick; it is daily discipleship to our Lord.

We must begin to ask some questions: How do we change? How does God train us, transform us, and make our lives different? The end of the journey we know is to love Jesus, be in relationship with Jesus, worship Jesus and end up becoming like Jesus. It is joy in a relationship, a dynamic love affair with the living God that we are after. Yet the path to that end is often not known, at the very least it is a road less traveled. So I am going to recommend something very old, very simple, which has been around for a long time. That God not only ordains *the end* for our lives, bringing Him glory in becoming like Jesus, but He also has designed *the means to that end*. He has designed the very *paths* which we walk towards that reality.

If we neglect these paths we will be robbed of joy, robbed of God while looking for Him in all the wrong places. It is easy to see that you don't go out into the desert to go surfing, you don't drink light beer to quench your thirst, you don't go to the NASCAR race to hear a reading of poetry, and you don't go looking for God in a choose your own adventure book version of spirituality. You can bang your head into a brick wall thinking you will become spiritual; you'll just go home with a headache and a little uglier than you were before. So just what are the paths marked out for us to train to be like Jesus? Historically, people have used different descriptions. Some have chosen to



call them *the means of grace*, others the *spiritual disciplines*. Either way, they are the biblical patterns of life by which God moves upon believers to transform them into the image of Christ. They are the aqueducts by which the water of the Spirit flows into our lives. And it is to those disciplines we now turn.



The Spiritual Disciplines

Much could be written about the different ways God has designed for us to grow; many are so simple, so well known, that to some it may sound like an oversimplification of things. Yet God has not made knowing Him and pursuing Him to be exceedingly complex. It is not an easy path to walk; but it is not like trying to solve some obscure puzzle. Yet unless the Spirit of God Himself moves you, empowers you, gives you a love for Jesus, even these disciplines can become a dead work leaving you empty. But when God grabs you by the neck, lovingly embraces you, smacks you around a bit so you come to your senses, puts your feet on a rock and puts you in a new race, you'll find that these disciplines will place you in the direct flood of the work of God. There is no better place to be. Yet before we check out a few of the disciplines, let me

first comment on the nature of the disciplines. Are these disciplines for the individual, FOR ME, or are these paths to be for the corporate body, FOR US?

Our culture is overly individualistic; we focus on self at times almost exclusively. We are concerned with self-worth, self-esteem, self-image, self-actualization, self-help, blah, blah, blah. Yet in the Scriptures we see that God works in and through a people, a community, not simply individuals. Yet we cannot throw out babies with our cultural bath water. God has indeed made us unique, distinct, individual souls. Designed for community, yes, but we are created as individuals no less. God neither wants us to exalt our individuality at the expense of others, nor to obliterate it into some blobish oneness of being where no one is valued as unique. So it is no surprise that God has marked out *both* disciplines for the individual, for me, and others for the community, for us. Let us look at a few of each.

Disciplines of the Soul

The psalmist once echoed a cry uttered by followers of Jesus throughout history. *When can I go and appear before God!* (Psalm 42:2) God calls His people to an audience with Him. We are called into a relationship with our maker; where God speaks to us in His Word and calls us to interact with Him in the place of prayer. Many of the spiritual disciplines are

given by God as means to be fed by Him, spiritually commune with Him, to come to have the soul fixed upon God in worship amidst the rat races of the surrounding world. Some of these are simple; but their practice often left undone.

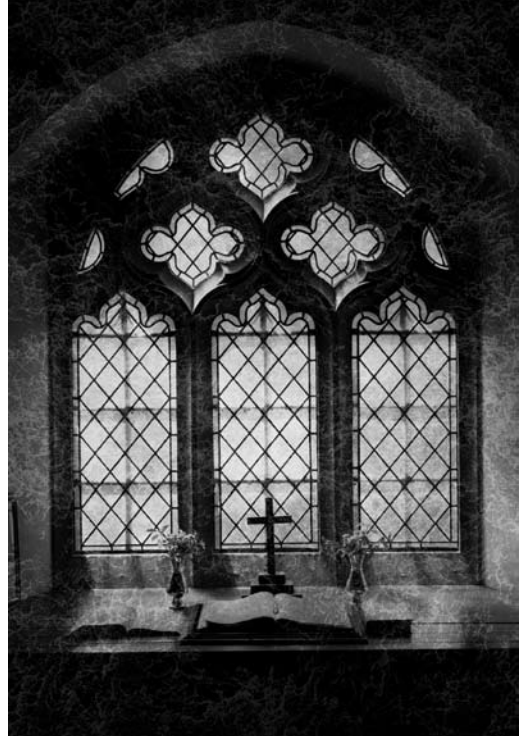
The Holy Scriptures

Much can be said about the Bible, the Word of God, and the importance it has in our lives as followers of Jesus. Author Donald Whitney is blunt and to the point in stating:

No Spiritual Discipline is more important than the intake of God's Word. Nothing can substitute for it. There is simply no healthy Christian life apart from a diet of the milk and meat of Scripture. The reasons for this are obvious. In the Bible God tells us about Himself, and especially about Jesus Christ, the incarnation of God. The Bible unfolds the Law of God to us and shows us how we've all broken it. There we learn how Christ died as a sinless, willing substitute for breakers of God's Law and how we must repent and believe in Him to be right with God. In the Bible we learn the ways and will of the Lord.²

Jesus tells us the importance of the Bible in quoting Deuteronomy 8.3—“Man shall not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” The Psalmist eloquently tells us about the treasure of the Word of God:

*⁷The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure,
making wise the simple;
⁸the precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
⁹the fear of the Lord is clean,
enduring forever;
the rules of the Lord are true,
and righteous altogether.
¹⁰More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.
- Psalm 19:7-10 (ESV)*



The most desirable possession we have been given is the very words of God. The Bible is the solid food for our lives which align us with the heart of God. He speaks through the

Scriptures, which the author of Hebrews describes as “living and active, sharper than any double edged sword.” (Heb. 4:12) Paul told Timothy that the inspired Scriptures are useful for “teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness” to prepare our lives for everything God will call us to do. The importance of the Bible

cannot be overstated. If we love God, we will love His Word; we will realize that without a word from God we would wither away spiritually and die.

The believer therefore will desire to be intimately involved with the Bible. She will want to hear it *taught* and *preached* regularly. She will want to *memorize* it, hiding it in her heart. She will want to *meditate*, think deeply upon, and ponder the wisdom of the Word of God. She will want to *read* it daily for encouragement and *study* it deeply so to grasp its truth. She will want

to know the Word in order to know God and thereby be able to lead others to the same fountains to drink. The Word is foundational in the life of the believer and is intimately connected to other disciplines and paths God has for us. In God’s Word He speaks to us. In our time in prayer we enter an intimate conversation with the Almighty. To prayer we turn our thoughts.



A Life of Prayer

Perhaps the greatest privilege you have as a believer is that of prayer. The fact is the creator of the universe desires for you to intimately communicate with Him each day. Prayer can be viewed as simply talking with God, sharing with Him your thoughts, concerns, and desire to walk closely with Him. In prayer we can find help, guidance, and strength to face life's many tough challenges. In prayer we also find that the very One who made all things desires an audience with you; for you to worship Him, to confess your sins to Him, to thank Him for all things, and to petition Him with your needs.

But to be honest, most of us get too spazzed out in life to have any real prayer life. The cell phones ring. TVs buzz. Instant messenger, e-mails, reading blogs, etc. make us a rather distracted people. I know I personally struggle to carve out time to pray during the day. Peter reminds us of a very important aspect for a life of prayer when he writes, "The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers" (1 Peter 4:7). We must be self-controlled, mindful of eternal realities, and focused on the coming of Jesus. This is precisely why we so need to sit our butts down to be alone and pray. How it dries up the soul to run around all the time without quiet, peace, and the company of God. In prayer we can find the mercy and help we need in every struggle (Heb. 4:16), we see God align our wills to His own (Matt. 6:9-13), we find grace and forgiveness for sin, and we enjoy the presence and nearness of God. Oh how we all need to make time for prayer!

Finally, there may be times when you just don't feel like praying. In these times I have found an acrostic from John Piper to be greatly helpful. First, we ask God to "**Incline**" our heart towards Him (Ps.



119:36-37), then to "**Open**" our eyes to His truth (Ps. 119:18), to "**Unite**" our passions and desires in Him (Ps. 86:11), and to "**Satisfy**" our hearts with good things (Ps. 90:14, Ps. 107:9). Beginning prayer with these **I.O.U.S.** can kick-start your conversation with God.³ One final note on prayer; it is amazing how many Americans know the Lord's Prayer. I knew it growing up, not from the Bible, but because our public High School football team used to say it before going to battle on Friday nights. Right before we would scream "Let's kick their \$#^@&#!" we would bow the knee for the "Our Father" prayer. What we seldom realize is that Jesus gave us this prayer in answer to a request from His guys. It was a simple request: *Lord, teach us to pray*. If we want to know how to pray, we need look no further than the life of Jesus. In His prayer habits, in His words captured in the Lord's Prayer, we find a modeling of the heart and posture of prayer for us...for all time.

So You Want me to be a Monk?

Some disciplines which are in the Scripture simply sound weird to us hustle and bustle people. For instance, when you hear the words fasting, solitude, and meditation, you may get pictures of hooded dudes chanting in Latin or Buddhist guys in orange garb going about with their begging bowls. But we may miss something if we ignore certain biblical disciplines by dismissing them to the cloister. We'll just look at these in a really brief way, but these ancient paths, combined with the Word and prayer, lead to a place of intimacy and much glory; even the throne of God.

Fasting

Fasting has long been a part of the lives of the followers of Jesus, but many times it can be misunderstood or altogether neglected. Put very simply, fasting is the abstinence from something for spiritual reasons. Richard Foster has defined it this way: Fasting is *the voluntary denial of a normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity*.⁴ In the Bible people would abstain from food, at times water as well, and married couples from sex for times of prayer (really, see 1 Cor. 7:1-5). Fasting is a way to express the worth of God over temporal things, to seek Him in concentrated prayer, to confess sin and show contrition of heart. Both the Old and New Testaments show believers fasting. We'll take just a quick peek.

In the Old Testament Moses fasted before receiving the law of God (Deut. 9:9), the Jewish people fasted for Queen Esther before she went before a king (Esther 4), King David fasts and prays when his son is stricken ill (2 Samuel 12), and the nation of Israel fasts corporately on several occasions to show repentance, consecrate themselves to God and ask His favor (2 Chron. 20, Joel 2, Nehemiah 9). Additionally every Jew would fast on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-31) as the people went to God for atonement for sin. Even the Ninevites fasted to show repentance at the preaching of Jonah.

In the New Testament, Jesus implicitly assumed His followers would fast when He said to them:

“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:16-18, emphasis added).

Jesus expected us to fast in certain seasons for dedicated times of spiritual pursuit, where we say before God, “You are more valuable to me than my normal needs and schedule.” One point of emphasis needs to be made; we should always fast to seek God Himself,

not as a way to manipulate His hand to give us what we want. It is a declaration that what we desire is in fact our God, not only the gifts He may give to our lives...be they food, drink, marital intimacy, or even television.

A good fast in modern times is to give up media (iPod, internet, movies, TV) for a period of time to intentionally seek the Lord. These things can be good for our enjoyment, but you would be surprised at how the Lord would speak to you if you set aside time to be alone, in silence, with His Word, for prayer. I commend such fasts to you today. Many helpful books have been written recently to assist the church in fasting. I would recommend John Piper's *A Hunger for God: Desiring God Through Fasting*.⁵ In fact it is available free online at <http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/OnlineBooks/ByTitle/>.

Solitude

Being alone is a lost art in our culture where we are constantly surrounded by noise and lots of people. But the example of Scripture is clear; women and men need to be alone with God in order to focus on Him, reflect on our lives, and being silent before Him. Many know the injunction to “Be still and know that I am God,” (Ps. 46:10) but it takes intentionality to actually pull away from life. Many examples can be seen in the Bible of people taking the path to be alone with the Father. Moses spends time alone in the wilderness before God called him to service. Elijah is alone on a mountain top in 1 Kings 19:9-13

when God speaks to him in a still small whisper. The apostle Paul spends time alone in Arabia after his conversion; God preparing him for the journey ahead. Jesus is perhaps our greatest example of one who consistently sought solitude with the Father. Even a cursory read of the gospels will see that He consistently pulled away for time alone to pray (Matt. 4, 14:23; Mark 1:35, Luke 4:42). One final thought on solitude—we do not seek to be completely alone, but alone before God, before our maker with nothing to hide and without distraction. God is powerfully seen and savored in such moments of solitude and silence.

Meditation

Meditation today is a concept which has almost been completely hijacked by a conception of the word found in Eastern philosophies. Eastern meditation, of the Hindu and Buddhist varieties, is a practice in which a person attempts to empty the mind, even obliterate the self into the oneness of being. It is a looking inward towards nothingness with the mind completely disengaged. Biblical meditation is a completely different sort and it is lacking today in the lives of God's people.

Meditation of the biblical species is a contemplation of God and His works. It is a filling of the mind with wonderful thoughts of God; His work in saving us, His works in creation, His works in history and in the world today. It is allowing the Word of God to dwell, to linger, to simmer in our souls deeply. Colossians 3:16 encourages us to *Let the*

word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. The goal of biblical mediation is to **arouse the affections**, to still the heart and to set it aflame. Mediation should lead us to prayer; something which meditation will help us find a little easier to do. Here are a few practical suggestions to incorporate biblical meditation in our lives; I think we will see how the disciplines are beginning to combine together in our times with the Lord.

Practical Suggestions for Meditation:

- Find a place of solitude and freedom from distraction—we should approach meditation with the goal of meeting with God.
- We need to be memorizing the Word of God—work to memorize larger chunks, as well as individual verses. When you have the Word in your heart, it is easier to meditate on.
- You need time...Take the time on Sunday afternoons to meditate on a passage of Scripture. Pull out the passage taught in your church to think about how it connects to your life. Take as long as you need.
- Use good songs and hymns as material to provoke meditation. An old school hymnal may even be a great help in provoking meditation.



- Meditate on the cross—think upon what Jesus underwent for us, how He lovingly and joyfully endured shame and pain on our behalf to bring us to God forgiven.
- Engage in soliloquy or discursive meditation—that is just some big words for speaking to oneself before God...we see folk in the Psalms do this sort of thing (See Ps. 42, 43). Psalm 42:5-6 are a great example: *Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my salvation and my God. Talking to yourself before God does not mean you are nuts, yet it sometimes helps you remember the truth.*
- Finally, ask God for application to your life...

Evangelism – The Great Privilege of Ambassadorship

Evangelism is as neglected a Christian practice as any in our day. Sharing Jesus with others scares the mess out of folks for some reason. Yet, God desires to get our eyes off ourselves so that we might extend His love and grace to others. In fact, being a friend to someone who does not yet know Jesus is a great experience. Being used by God to lead another to the cross of Christ has been one of the highlights of my life. In 2 Cor. 5, the apostle Paul uses a great term to describe our role in the world. He calls us Christ's ambassadors, people who make an appeal on His behalf to others. What is our message and ministry? It is to declare that God has reconciled sinners to

Himself in Christ; to urge others to be reconciled with God. A great book in learning to talk to others about the Savior is Randy Newman's *Questioning Evangelism: Engaging People's Hearts the Way Jesus Did*.⁶

With the Scriptures ever in view, connecting with God in prayer, combined with periodic fasting, getting alone with God in solitude, meditating on God, His Word, and His works, with a regular outflow to others in evangelism, we will live in the ways of God and find a great delight in our souls. Jesus is a very personal God who desires to meet with each of you; in fact He has arranged the date. Show up! Yet follow the directions so you end up in the right place. Through the Bible, prayer, fasting, solitude, mediation and evangelism...Show up, He will...and don't be late.

Connective Disciplines for the Community

As we have looked at some paths for our personal lives, we now will turn briefly to the disciplines of the community. There are many regular paths and patterns which God has given to "us" —to the church, the local community of faith. These practices and disciplines we do together, knitting us in community as the body of Christ, and bringing all of us closer to our God. These are not to be neglected and are given by God for "our" edification, building us up together. Many of these are extensions of the individual disciplines which are now shared in a congregational setting; one is very unique and only can be celebrated as a

community. We will begin with the most central of these, that of Holy Communion, the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper.

Communion

Jesus established the Lord's Supper, or Communion, for His people as a lasting sacrament and ongoing ordinance of the New Covenant. A covenant is a promise from God; the New Covenant is a promise sealed in Jesus' own blood. It represents a promise that in Christ, God has purchased His people for Himself, forgiven them, reconciled them to Himself, and made them right in His sight. In Communion this promise of the gospel is celebrated and displayed in the church. In Communion we do many things together. We remember and celebrate His body and blood which were broken and shed for our sins. We also meet with Jesus in a special way, as He indeed is present with us at His table where He ministers to us by the Spirit. Communion is a time for confession, repentance, and rededicating our lives together before God. It is a time of declaring our allegiance and dependence upon Jesus for all things; it is also a visible picture to the world that the eternal is mingled with our present and that Jesus is still calling people to become His own. It is not to be minimized or sidelined in the churches as it is a central and unique aspect of Christian worship. It marks us as His people and is an intimate time for the bride of Christ before her Lord.

Hearing the Word

Just as the Word is savored in the life of the individual, the Scriptures, the very Word of God, are to be proclaimed, taught, heard and obeyed by the people of God together. The Bible is meant to be read publicly (1 Timothy 4:13) and heard as well as read by people in the church. The Word is living and active (Hebrews 4:12) and will change us as we hear it. A preacher's duty is not only to bring "how to" seminars to people with spiritual themes, but rather to bring God's very Word to their ears so that they are changed by it. Christians are exhorted to keep getting together regularly (Hebrews 10:24-25), to gathering as the church. In part, this is for us to participate in the practice of Communion and hearing the Bible read and preached.

Corporate Prayer

Prayer is also something we do together as well as alone. Times of prayer and confession are appropriate for all believers. Life in Christ is full of celebration, but it is also full of trials and many burdens. A church which does not pray is a church that is operating without dependence upon God. Prayer truly declares that we need Jesus, love Jesus, and know that He alone is the source of our life and peace. The church ought to gather to adore God, confess sin, thank God for blessing and suffering, as well as ask Him for our needs.

Giving to God

Finally, God has called His children to be stewards, people responsible for the resources He gives us. Giving is a central part of Christian worship by which we joyfully return to God a portion of what He has given us.

Christian giving should be regular (1 Cor. 16:2), in all circumstances (2 Cor. 8:2), in proportion to our means (2 Cor. 8:3), generous and patterned after Jesus' self giving in the incarnation (2 Cor. 8:9). By giving, a believer says that money/things are not his god. By giving, a Christian declares God's ownership of all things. By giving, a Christian helps the poor and those in need. By giving, Christians worship and rejoice in the giver of all good things. Giving is not to be done out of guilt, reluctantly, under compulsion, or in order to get something in return; the TV guys begging for money

notwithstanding. Rather the Bible teaches us that God loves a cheerful giver; one who gives without tension in his soul for he knows that in generosity he is worshiping his Lord.



As we close this brief treatment on corporate disciplines, I wanted you to read something from a Justin Martyr, a 2nd century writer (around 150 AD) describing the gathering together of Christians. I do pray you see the family resemblance. We are called together in the same fashion today:

*And we afterwards continually remind each other of these things. And the wealthy among us help the needy; and we always keep together; and for all things wherewith we are supplied, we bless the Maker of all through His Son Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Ghost. And on the **day called Sunday**, all who live in cities or in the country **gather together to one place**, and **the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.** Then we all rise together and **pray**, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, **bread and wine and water are brought**, and the president in like manner **offers prayers and thanksgivings**, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a **participation of that over which thanks have been given**, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, **give what each***

*thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, **He taught them these things**, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration.⁷*

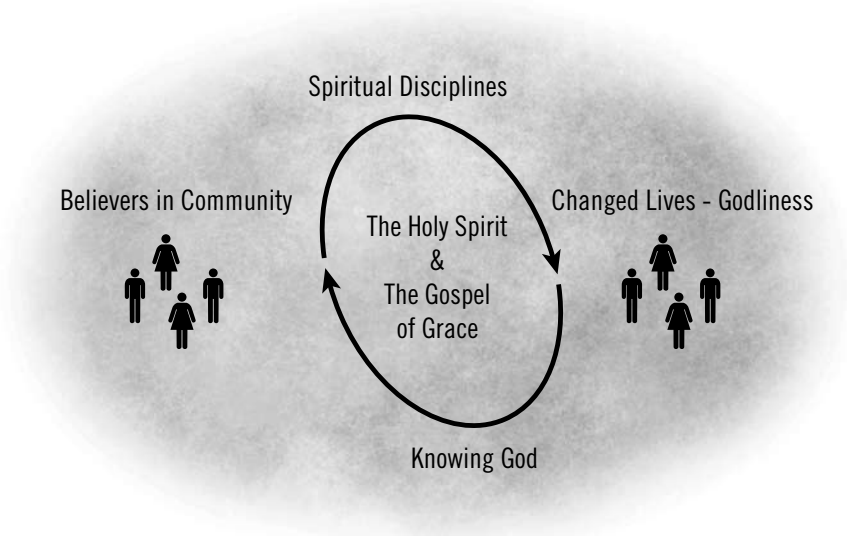


Wait a Minute!!! – I Want to Love God, Not “Disciplines”

As we close I want to answer one objection. Some may say “I want God, I want relationship” I do not want disciplines. To that I say “Amen!!! Me too!” and I would only add one small secret. God desires that we have Him,

and love Him, and be in relationship with Him. And He has designed the paths, means, ways, and the disciplines to take us on the journey from our heart to His. These disciplines are great gifts of God to know Him, to love Him, and commune with Him. If we neglect these pathways we will not grow in our intimacy and love for God. The following picture is designed to show that there is an unbroken connection between knowing God and the disciplines. You do not have one without the other.

Figure 1: *The integral connection of the disciplines with knowing God*



There is another great risk that many of us run; that we would turn these disciplines into a “to do” list devoid of life and relationship. We do not need our Christian to-do list, we need God. We do not need a heart that says “just do it” when we read the Bible, but rather a heart which cries out, with full emotion, “I’m seeking Jesus.” We are not looking for gold stars to pin on our shirts to award ourselves for reading the Bible and praying every day. No, we want nothing of that sort. We only desire to go deep with our Lord and be changed, so we joyfully walk in the disciplines He has given and designed to this end. To know Jesus, that is the point. We want to become like the One we worship and to love Him more deeply in spiritual communion. And this happens along the paths where God blesses.

In summary, we do not know God apart from the disciplines, but the disciplines are only a means to the end of knowing God. They are married forever; God designed it this way. It is true that we can experience God in the every day, in every detail, in everything we do. But we cannot neglect food in life; and God has set the table before us with the *spiritual disciplines*. These paths are the way we waste time with God⁸ and find life and satisfaction in Him.

One Final Comment on Community

These disciplines we live as disciples together in community. As we live the disciplines in community, we might desire to walk more intimately with Him individually. As individuals walk in intimacy with God they bring life to their sisters and brothers around them. This is how a body works...each its own individual part, yet all united together. Your time with the Lord will give life to our community; by God's grace our community will spur you to intimate times alone with the Lord. In our community, we do not wish to slouch towards legalism, but love one another under the gospel of grace. We reject a works based spirituality by putting ourselves under the flood of God's Word because we desire Him. We also reject the idols of sloth, self, and egotism for a life of discipline, love of God, and service of others. Your joy depends upon it—don't be stupid enough to think you will find life by obsessing about "me time." That is being tried by countless masses of Americans in our day and the therapy bills, broken lives, and constant anxiety alone show that life simply ain't there. Together, let us choose a different path; let us learn to waste a little time with God.

Soli Deo Gloria,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Reid S. Monaghan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Reid S. Monaghan

Endnotes

- ¹ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 38.
- ² Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1991).
- ³ I found this helpful acronym in John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God - How to Fight for Joy* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 151-153.
- ⁴ Quoted in Whitney, 160.
- ⁵ John Piper, *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1997).
- ⁶ Randy Newman, *Questioning Evangelism: Engaging People's Hearts the Way Jesus Did*. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004).
- ⁷ Justin Martyr, *The First Apology, Chapter Lxvii*.
- ⁸ The phrase "Wasting Time with God" is taken from the title of Klaus Issler, *Wasting Time with God: A Spirituality of Friendship with God* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2001).

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