**PRACTISING SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES**

The disciple needs to begin to practise spiritual disciplines. The spiritual disciplines are the personal and corporate means of spiritual growth (Colossians 2:20-23 and 1 Timothy 4:7,8). The way to spiritual maturity is through discipline. God uses three primary agents to bring change in the believer: *people* (Proverbs 27:12), *circumstances* (Romans 8:28) and *spiritual disciplines*. The word translated discipline in the New Testament is a Greek word *gumnasia* from which we get the English word *gymnasium* and *gymnastics*. The spiritual disciplines can be thought of as spiritual exercises.

Spiritual maturity is not primarily concerned with outward performance - it concerns who we are. When we substitute activity for communion with God, we live our spiritual lives on the surface. The primary method that God has given for the nurturing of the spiritual life is *discipline*. A disciple by definition is a disciplined person. Communion with God is not going to just happen - it is not spontaneous. Discipline is required if we are going to go deeper with God and have fellowship with Him.

The practise of spiritual disciplines have always been regarded as a vital part of faith development. By definition, **a spiritual discipline** is *the intentional practise of some aspect of the Christian life* (such as prayer or reading Scripture) *in a regular and habitual manner.* Practising spiritual disciplines is like learning to play the guitar: drudgery during the early stage, but in the long run the effort is worthwhile.

The benefits of spiritual disciplines: **(1) They Help us Develop Intimacy with God** - the goal of the disciplines is not salvation - we are saved by faith in Christ (Romans 10:9-10) but as we practise them, we are helped in our walk with Jesus and develop intimacy with God. **(2) They Help us Become like Christ** - they also shape us into godly people (1 Timothy 4:7). We need them because we are weak, enslaved to ingrained habits, and cannot live a Christlike life on our own. As we live under the discipline of God we are able to overcome these weaknesses and habits. **(3) They Help us Receive the Grace of God** - in a sense the spiritual disciplines are a means of grace - they put us in the path of God’s grace.

Various books describe and help people to apply the spiritual disciplines, such as: *Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People* by Keith Drury; *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster; *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald Whitney; *The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard; and *Disciplines of the Holy Spirit* by Dr. Siang-Yan Tan. Different writers suggest ways in which to categorise the disciplines:

Keith Drury divides the disciplines as follows: **(1) Inner Personal Disciplines:** *grudges -* releasing old hurts; *thought life* - overcoming impure thoughts; *humility -* putting off pride; *ambitions* - abandoning selfish ambition. **(2) Interpersonal Disciplines:** *restitution* - making things right; *restoration* - restoring a fallen Christian; *honesty* - speaking absolute truth; *peacemaking* - mending broken relationships.

Richard Foster divides the disciplines in this way: **(1) Inward Disciplines:** meditation; prayer; fasting, study. **(2) Outward Disciplines:** simplicity; solitude; submission, service. **(3) Corporate Disciplines:** confession; worship; guidance, celebration.

Dallas Willard suggests that the spiritual disciplines can be grouped into two categories: **(1) Disciplines of Abstinence** (things you do without): solitude, silence, fasting, simplicity, chastity, secrecy and sacrifice. **(2) Disciplines of Engagement** (things you do): study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession and submission.

**SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE #1: MEDITATION**

Christian meditation is the ability to hear God’s voice and obey his word. Richard Foster says that meditation creates an emotional and spiritual place which allows Christ to construct an inner sanctuary in the heart. This kind of inner fellowship transforms the inner personality. Dr. Siang-Yang Tan says that meditation is pondering over Scripture verses or passages in such a way that the written Word of God becomes a living Word of God applied to our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

**Misconceptions of Meditation**

Meditation is a greatly misunderstood aspect of the devotional life. It is not synonymous with Eastern meditation - the goal of which is detachment from the world. While detachment plays a role in Christian meditation, it is simply the path to attachment. As we detach ourselves from the confusion of all that is around us, we go on to a richer attachment to God. Another misconception is that mediation is too difficult and should be left to professionals. This is simply not true! Another misconception is that meditation is out of touch with the twenty first century. In fact, meditation helps us to engage with life more fully, and not escape from it.

**Preparing to Meditate**

The best way to learn how to meditate is to meditate. **(1) A time for meditation** - it is wise to find a regular time each day to engage in meditation; yet realise that what we do with the rest our time will impact on the value of our fixed times of meditation. **(2) A place for meditation** - we should find a place that is quiet and free from interruption - a regular place is preferable. **(3) A posture for meditation** - in one sense posture plays no part, but in another it is important. The body, mind and spirit are inseparable. It is best to find a position in which you are most comfortable and least distracted. It is probably best to sit in a straight chair, with the back straight, and with both feet flat on the floor. It is often best to close the eyes to avoid distractions. The aim is all of this is to center the attention of the body, emotions, the mind and the spirit on the glory of God.

**Forms of Meditation**

**(1) Meditatio Scripturarium** -this is meditation on Scripture. Here we internalise and personalise the passage we are look at. We should take a small portion of scripture and live with it for some time; seeking to live the experience through the use of our senses where appropriate. **(2) Re-collection** - this is also called centering down. Where we become still and enter into recreating silence. One technique is called *palms down, palms up*. Here we place our palms down as a symbolic indication of our desire to turn over any concerns that we may have to God. We pray a prayer that will release that area to God. After a few moments of surrender we turn our palms up as a symbol of our desire to receive from the Lord. We pray for whatever it is that we need from the Lord and wait in surrendered silence. **(3) Meditation on creation** - this form of mediation shows that we believe that God reveals himself through His creation. We give our attention to the created order and allow it to direct our attention to God. **(4) Meditation on events** - Here we reflect on events and seek to interpret their significance to us. It is best accomplished with the Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other.

Donald Whitney, in Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life, deals with meditation under the heading: Bible Intake. Here he explores memorizing, meditating and applying God’s Word. He shows how scripture emphasises the importance of meditation, especially in Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3 and Psalm 119. His guidelines for meditation include: (1) Selecting a passage; (2) Repeating it in different ways; (3) Rewriting it in your own words; (4) Looking for applications to your life; (5) Praying through the text; (6) Taking your time with the passage.

**MEDITATION WORKSHEET**

***Entering In:***

Jesus reminds us that heaven and earth will pass away, but His words will never pass away (Matt. 24:35). God’s Word is absolutely trustworthy; it is eternal and endures forever (Isa. 40:8). Paul exhorts us to let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly as we teach and admonish one another with all wis­dom, and sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with grat­itude in our hearts to God (Col. 3:16). Let us more and more, each and every day, be a people of the Word, growing into the image of Christ as we draw near to God through study and meditation.

***Right Now:***

Read 2 Timothy 3:16. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you and empower you through the Word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). Ask God to help you become a person of the Word!

***In the Coming Days and Weeks:***

\* Decide to read the Bible on a daily basis. Start by reading a chapter a day, pausing to meditate on a verse or two that the Spirit brings to your attention. Review the steps of meditation. Ask questions of the text and enter into dialogue with the Spirit as you ruminate on the Word. If you are more ambitious, you may want to pick up a copy of *The One Year Bible* published by Tyndale and read the three or four chapters assigned daily so that you can read through the whole Bible in one year.

\* Combine your Bible reading and meditation time with your prayer time. Remember what George Muller learned - meditation and prayer are crucial means of knowing God and the Holy Spirit’s power.

\* Make a commitment to memorize at least one verse or text of Scripture a month. If you haven’t already done so, try the Topical Memory System put out by the Navigators. It should be available at your local Christian bookstore.

\* The study of God’s Word requires discipline - which includes careful thought, reflection, and reading of Bible study aids or tools like commentaries, Bible handbooks, and dictionaries. Set aside one or two hours weekly for study and interpretation, asking always for the Spirit to guide and speak to you clearly. Join a Bible study small group or cell group to study and share God’s Word with others.

\* Attend adult Bible class or Sunday school and Sunday services at your church so that you are regularly hearing God’s Word. You may want to take a Bible or theology course at a nearby seminary or Bible college to help you into deeper study of God’s Word.

**SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE #1: MEDITATION (RETREAT)**

**A Day Retreat on Meditation**

**9-9:30 Orientation Time**

*Centering Prayer* - sit quietly, relax, center down, use the prayer word (ie. Father), stay in the silence for ten minutes.

*Reading and Reflecting on Scripture:* Mark 6:30-32

“The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’ So they went away.”

*Journal your Thoughts:*

1. Why did I come here today?

2. What am I hoping to achieve or experience?

3. What is God saying to you right now?

9:30-10:30 **Meditate on God’s Word** (Psalm 57)

1. Read the passage slowly and repeatedly from different translations.

2. Write down any general thoughts that come to mind.

3. Select and write out a key phrase/verse for meditation.

4. Repeat it in different ways.

5. Write it in your own words.

6. Look for application to your life.

A. Pray through the text (let God speak to you through it)

B. Ask questions about the text:

\* Is there something to thank or praise God for?

\* Is there something I need a new attitude about?

\* Is there something I need to make a decision about?

C. What one response do I need to make to this passage?

7. Write your own Psalm to God based on this Psalm.

10:30-11:00 **Tea**

11:00-11:20 **Meditation on God’s Creation**

*“The heavens tell of the glory of God. The skies display his marvelous craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known. They speak without a sound or a word; their voice is silent in the skies”*

(Psalm 191-3).

11:20-11:40 **Meditate on God’s Character**

*O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my every thought when far away. You chart the path ahead of me and tell me where to stop and rest. Every moment you know where I am. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord. You both precede and follow me. I can never escape from your spirit! I can never get away from your presence!* (Psalm 139).

Reflect on the *accessibility* of God - always with me; watching over me, listening to me; ready to intervene in my life.

1. How have you experienced God as accessible?

2. When do you struggle to experience God’s as accessible?

3. What can you do to experience God’s accessibility more?

11:40-12:00 **Meditate on God’s Providence**

*“I recall all you have done, O Lord; I remember your wonderful deeds of long ago. They are constantly in my thoughts. I cannot stop thinking about them.”* (Psalm 77:12)

1. Write down all the things that God has given you.

2. List the ways God has specifically intervened to provide for your needs.

3. What does this characteristic of God mean for your future?

*Philippians 4:12,19:* “I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want...and my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”

12:00-12:15 **Share Experiences**

**SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE #2: PRAYER**

**1. Prayer is Expected:** (a) Jesus expects his followers to pray (Matthew 6:5,6,7,8; Luke 18:1); (b) God’s word expects us to pray (Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17); and (c) Jesus set an example for us ‑ Luke 5:16. *“But we must see the expectation to pray not only as a divine summons, but*

*also as a royal invitation...we view the command to pray as an opportunity*

*to receive the mercy and grace of God.”* (Hebrews 4:16).

**2. Prayer is Learned** (Luke 11:1): (a) By praying (John 16:13); (b) By meditating on Scripture (Psalm 19:7,14); (c) By praying with others (Luke 11:1); and (d) By Reading about prayer (Proverbs 27:17).

**3. Prayer is Answered** (Psalm 65:2; Matthew 7:7‑8)

Richard Foster concentrates on Intercession in *Celebration of Discipline*. He deals with other types of prayer in his book: *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home*. Here he explores prayer in three categories: **(1) Moving Inward: Seeking the Transformation we Need** - Simple Prayer; Prayer of the Forsaken; Prayer of Examen; Prayer of Tears; Prayer of Relinquishment; Formation Prayer and Covenant Prayer. **(2) Moving Upward: Seeking the Intimacy we Need** - Prayer of Adoration; Prayer of Rest; Sacramental Prayer; Unceasing Prayer; Prayer of the Heart; Meditative Prayer; and Contemplative Prayer. **(3) Moving Outward: Seeking the Ministry we Need** - Praying the Ordinary; Petitionary Prayer; Intercessory Prayer; Healing Prayer; Prayer of Suffering; Authoritative Prayer and Radical Prayer.

In *Celebration of Discipline*, Foster mentions misconceptions about prayer:

1. Prayer is mainly about asking things from God.

2. Viewing prayer as always a struggle.

3. We live in a closed, fixed universe.

4. Faith will crumble if our prayers are not answered first time.

5. Praying more than once about something is a lack of faith.

***Response:***

In what ways do I need to improve my prayer life?

**PRAYER WORKSHEET**

***Entering In:***

The great people of the earth today are the people who pray,” says S. D. Gordon. “I do not mean those who talk about prayer; nor those who say they believe in prayer; but I mean those people who take time and pray.” Through prayer and intercession we build friendship with God, we put ourselves in a place to be transformed by the Holy Spirit, and we enter into partnership with Jesus in saving the lost, bring­ing healing to the sick, and delivering the captives. Do you want to be great in the Kingdom of God? Take time to pray!

***Right Now:***

Ask God to grow you into a person of prayer. Acknowledge that you cannot really pray without the direction and energy of the Holy Spirit. Ask the Holy Spirit to be your teacher, strengthening you and guiding you into the where, when, and how of prayer. Take time to listen for his action plan. Remember that most Christians do not have significant lives of prayer, not because they don’t want to, but because they don’t plan to. Ask God to help you, to utterly control you by his Spirit. Believe by faith that he will, and thank him.

***In the Next Few Days:***

1. During this week, think of prayer as entering into Friend­ship with God. Set time aside daily to deepen that friend­ship. Move through the steps of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, petition, and intercession. Make your prayers as specific as possible: “I thank you for\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_; forgive me for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.” Spend time listening at each step, making your prayers a dialogue with God. Ask him to show you the tasks, blessings, and acts of love he has for you and others.

2. Experiment with intercession. You might begin by pray­ing for your enemies and for those who have mistreated you, as Jesus commands (Luke 6:28). This will get you started in a dynamic way that opens conversation with God and keeps you moving beyond superficial concerns into your own and the world’s brokenness.

3. Wait quietly and listen for God’s leading. Let God bring to your mind any situations or persons for whom you should intercede. Lift these up before God, listening again for any special discernment or revelation that will guide the content of your prayers. Go to corporate worship a half hour early next Sunday and walk among the empty pews or chairs, praying for the people who will be sitting there during worship, expecting God to give you prompt­ings and direction for your prayers.

4. Join a prayer group at your church, or gather with a few others to begin a corporate time of prayer. Listen and intercede for pastors, leaders, members, and those God might be drawing to your church’s ministry.

5. Ask the Holy Spirit for an opportunity this week to pray with someone who is sick or facing some problem or struggle. Seize the opportunity when God presents it and enter into spiritual battle with the person through prayer. Ask God to release spiritual gifts of mercy, healing, and discernment in you and to grow you in confidence and experience in authoritative prayer.

6. As you enter into the disciplines of prayer and interces­sion, keep a prayer journal of your interactions with the Holy Spirit. Record how God is at work in you to develop you as a person of prayer.

**SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE #3: FASTING**

**The definition of fasting:**

According to Donald Whitney in *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christ Life* fasting is *a Christian’s voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes.*

**There are many different reasons for fasting:**

1. To strengthen prayer (Ezra 8:23)

2. To seek God’s guidance (Acts 14:23)

3. To express grief (2 Samuel 1:11‑12)

4. To seek deliverance or protection (2 Chron 20:3‑4)

5. To express repentance and return to God (1 Sam 7:6)

6. To humble oneself before God (1 Kings 21:27‑29)

7. To express concern for the work of God (Neh 1:3‑4)

8. To minister to the needs of others (Isa 58:1‑7)

9. To overcome temptations and dedicate yourself to God (Matt 4:1‑11)

10. To express love and worship to God (Luke 2:37)

**There are many different types of fasts:**

1. Normal Fast ‑ abstain from all food but not water (Matt 4:2)

2. Partial Fast ‑ limit the diet but not abstain from all food (Daniel 1:12)

3. Absolute Fast ‑ avoid all food and water (Ezra 10:6)

4. Supernatural Fast ‑ long fast divinely enabled (Deut 9:9; 1 Kings 19:8)

5. Private Fast ‑ a fast that no one knows about (Matt 6:16‑18)

6. Congregational Fast ‑ the church gathers together to fast corporately (Joel 2:15‑16; Acts 13:2)

7. National Fast ‑ the nations gathers to fast (2 Chron 20:3; Neh 9:1; Esther 4:16; Jonah 3:5‑8)

8. Regular Fast ‑ on a special day each month/year (Lev 16:29‑31)

9. Occasional Fast ‑ on special occasions as the need arises (Matt 9:15)

The most common types of fasting today are normal, private, occasional.

**Practising the discipline of fasting:**

I will fast for the following purpose:

I will keep the following type of fast:

I will fast on the following time:

**SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE #4: STUDY**

Dr Siang-Yang Tan in *Disciplines of the Holy Spirit* deals with study of God’s Word under the disciplines of solitude and silence which help us draw near to God. He deals with study and meditation in one chapter. He says: “We listen to God’s voice primarily in the Bible, his inspired Word.” He stresses that although God can speak to us through other means, the Bible is his primary and central means of communication. He goes on to say that the Spirit works though God’s Word to: **(1) Equip Up** (2 Tim 3:16-17); **(2) Cleans us** (John 15:3; Hebrews 4:12); **(3) Feed us** (1 Peter 2:2; Hebrews 5:12-13); **(4) Guide us** (Psalm 119:105); **(5) Deepen Faith** **in us** (Romans 10:17; 1 Peter 1:23)

His guidelines for getting into God’s Word, include: **(1) Hearing** - in sermons, conferences, tapes, radio, etc; **(2) Reading** - each day; **(3) Studying**; **(4) Memorising** and **(5) Meditating**. To study God’s Word he says we should use the following process (always asking God to guide us and speak to us though the study of His Word): (a) What does the text say? Try to get the facts, to know the truth. (b) What does the text mean in it’s original context? What did the author intend the hearers to know? (c) What does the text mean for me, for my church and community, and what must I believe and act on to be obedient to Christ?

Donald Whitney, in *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, deals with the discipline of study under the heading: **Bible Intake**. He has two chapters on bible intake and he deals with the following means of bible intake: hearing God’s word, reading God’s word, studying God’s word, memorising God’s word, meditating on God’s word, and applying God’s word.

He says that the basic difference between Bible reading and Bible study is a pencil and paper. When we study God’s word, we write down observations about the text as we read and record questions that come to mind. If the Bible has cross-references we look up the verses that raised questions and then record our insight. We can find a key word in our reading and look it up in a concordance, review the other times that word is used and record our findings. Another way to study is to outline a chapter, paragraph by paragraph until the whole book is outlines. As we progress we should move on to in-depth word studies, character studies, topical studies and book studies. We will get deeper into the Word as we understand how the grammar, history, culture and geography surrounding a text affect it’s interpretation.

Richard Foster, in *Celebration of Discipline*, suggests that study involves four steps: **(1) Repetition**; **(2) Concentration**; **(3) Comprehension** and **(4) Reflection**.

Study demands humility - until we are willing to be subject to the subject matter we will not learn anything.

**STUDY WORKSHEET**

***Entering In:***

Jesus reminds us that heaven and earth will pass away, but His words will never pass away (Matt. 24:35). God’s Word is absolutely trustworthy; it is eternal and endures forever (Isa. 40:8). Paul exhorts us to let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly as we teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in our hearts to God (Col. 3:16). Let us more and more, each and every day, be a people of the Word, growing into the image of Christ as we draw near to God through study and meditation.

***Right now:***

Read 2 Timothy 3:16. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you and empower you through the Word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). Ask God to help you become a person of the Word!

***In the Coming Days and Weeks:***

\* Decide to read the Bible on a daily basis. Start by reading a chapter a day, pausing to meditate on a verse or two that the Spirit brings to your attention. Review the steps of meditation. Ask questions of the text and enter into dialogue with the Spirit as you ruminate on the Word. If you are more ambitious, you may want to pick up a copy of The One Year Bible published by Tyndale and read the three or four chapters assigned daily so that you can read through the whole Bible in one year.

\* Combine your Bible reading and meditation time with your prayer time. Remember what George Muller learned ‑ meditation and prayer are crucial means of knowing God and the Holy Spirit’s power.

\* Make a commitment to memorize at least one verse or text of Scripture a month. If you haven’t already done so, try the *Topical Memory System* put out by the Navigators. It should be available at your local Christian bookstore.

\* The study of God’s Word requires discipline ‑ which includes careful thought, reflection, and reading of Bible study aids or tools like commentaries, Bible handbooks, and dictionaries. Set aside one or two hours weekly for study and interpretation, asking always for the Spirit to guide and speak to you clearly. Join a Bible study small group or cell group to study and share God’s Word with others.

\* Attend adult Bible class or Sunday school and Sunday services at your church so that you are regularly hearing God’s Word. You may want to take a Bible or theology course at a nearby seminary or Bible college to help you into deeper study of God’s Word.

**SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE #5: SIMPLICITY**

**Defining Simplicity:**

“Simplicity is practising a lifestyle free of excess, greed and covetousness so that we can draw closer to God and reach out to others in compassionate service” (Dr. Siang-Yang Tan).

**Three Inner Attitudes of Simplicity (Richard Foster):**

**1. To receive what we have as a gift from God**

*How much of my life do I receive as a gift of God? What parts do I hold onto with the assumption that I have a right to do what I want with them because I worked hard for them and earned or acquired them by my efforts!*

**2. To know it is God’s business, and not ours, to care for what we have**

*Do I trust everything in my life to God’s care and protection! How much time and energy do I spend worrying about what might happen to people, things, or circumstances in my life! What patterns of thought or behaviour in my life arise out of an anxious attempt to control the unknown or eliminate uncertainties?*

**3. To have our goods available to others**

*Am I free to make my possessions and resources available to others! Or do I cling to them in fear that sharing means losing! What am I willing to share, and what am I not willing to share! Where do I exhibit a selfishness that God wants me to let go?*

*“If our goods are not available to the community they are stolen goods”* (Martin Luther)

**The Outward Expression of Simplicity (Richard Foster):**

1. Buy things for their usefulness rather than their status

2. Reject anything that is producing an addiction in you

3. Develop a habit of giving things away

4. Refuse to be propagandized by the custodians of modern gadgetry

5. Learn to enjoy things without owning them

6. Develop a deeper appreciation for the creation

7. Look with a healthy skepticism at all “buy now, pay later” schemes

8. Obey Jesus’ instructions about plain, honest speech

9. Reject anything that will breed the oppression of others

10. Shun whatever would distract you for your main goal - to seek first the kingdom

**Everyday Simplicity (Dr. Siang-Yang Tan):**

1. Buy things to meet your basic needs.

2. Turn away from things that have a hold on you.

3. Focus on enjoying the things available that you do not own.

4. Let your thoughts, speech and actions be simple and straightforward.

5. Look for the Holy Spirit to be at work when you experience interruptions.

6. Turn away from anything that seeks to replace God as your first love.

*“The great challenge before us is to put kingdom values into practise in our daily lives - to be simple and upright, and to move against the swift stream s of our culture toward a life of single-mindedness, simplicity and unity with God”* (Dr. Siang-Yang Tan).

Donald Whitney deals with simplicity from the angle of stewardship. He speaks of the disciplined use of **(1) Time** (encouraging Christians to use time wisely because the days are evil, we are preparing for eternity, time is short and passing, remaining time is uncertain, time lost cannot be regained, we are accountable to God for our time, and time is easily lost); **(2) Money** (because God owns everything we own, giving is an act of worship, giving reflects faith in God’s provision, giving should be sacrificial and generous, giving reflects trustworthiness, giving should be in love and not legalism, giving should be willingly, thankful and cheerful, giving should be in response to real needs, giving should be planned and systematic and giving results in bountiful blessing.

**SIMPLICITY WORKSHEET**

***Entering In:***

Jesus challenges us to seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness. He promises that as a result, all the things we need in life-food, drink, clothing, shelter-will be given to us as well (Matt. 6:33). Let us respond by yielding our lives and possessions more fully to the Spirit’s control, receiving from him the grace to live in greater simplicity day by day.

***Right now:***

Read Matthew 6:19-34 and meditate on Matthew 6:33: “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Pray: *Holy Spirit of God, help me to seek your kingdom first. Take con­trol of my desires, passions, and material possessions. Help me to be a good steward of what you’ve given me and a generous giver from the bounty you pour down upon me. May I, in your power, live in greater simplicity, so that others may be touched and transformed by the love of Christ. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

***In the Coming Days and Weeks:***

\* Take some time today to reflect on your life. In what ways are you rich? What is the extent of your wealth and possessions? Do you have enough, too much? Honestly ask, “What controls me. What do I ‘serve’ the most? What can I give up or give away?” Ask the Holy Spirit for power to be delivered from any bondage to your possessions and expect him to show you the way into new freedom. Then, be obedient to what he tells you.

\* Take a week to explore the area of giving. Where are you now in your practice of giving? What are your next steps into the joy of giving? If you do not already tithe, explore tithing for a month and see what happens to your heart and spirit. Look for ways to curb any unnecessary spend­ing. Ask God how much of your money you should keep.

\* Review the basic guidelines of everyday simplicity - buy only to meet basic needs, give away what has a hold on you, focus on enjoying what you cannot own, let thoughts and speech be simple and honest, look for God in the “interruptions,” and so on. Each week during this month, put one of these ideas into practice.

\* Spend an afternoon or weekend in a ministry center that serves wounded, sick, hungry, or homeless people. Look carefully into the faces of those you meet. Listen to their voices. Consider that these people are made in God’s image, just as you are. Ask God to give you his point of view about and his heart of compassion for these people.

\* Unclutter your life - de-accumulate. Put on a yard sale. Give away the money you gain and give away what you can’t sell. Clean out your closet and give away any clothes you haven’t worn for a year.

\* Simplify your life. Give up TV for a while. Stop working so much at the office. Give up your plans to build “bigger barns” (see Luke 12:13-21 ). Take some long walks and talk to God about the real meaning of your life. If you release things in your life to God one by one, the day will come when he will be all you will have left. And more important, he will have you!

**TRY THE SIMPLE LIFE**

By J. Grant Swank, Jr., Pastor, Church of the Nazarene, Windham ME

Several years ago our family decided to adopt a more simple lifestyle. We had been under the crush of hurried, complicated family schedules and concluded that they were working against our spiritual growth. Purposefully we set in motion the following:

**1. Cut credit cards down to one, and that only for emergency use.** We had been used to flinging those cards around too freely‑‑to our detriment. Having only one on hand for rare use would discipline us within realistic boundaries of financial fact.

**2. Mark on the family calendar home activities along with outside obligations.** Before, we penciled in only those meetings at school, commitments at church, and organizational duties that called us away from the house for too many hours. Now we wrote into our calendar evenings together at a neighbourhood restaurant, that morning set aside for just my wife and me to have breakfast, and that Sunday afternoon with one another in the park. The family gatherings were put on the same par as the out‑of‑the‑home tugs at our time.

**3. Cut down outside infringements on our time.** Instead of living as we had been doing for some years‑‑running here and there, separating ourselves from one another sometimes for weeks on end‑‑we covenanted to pull in the strings of family life so as to get to know one another on deeper levels. In order to make this a reality, all of us had to learn to say no to many invitations. In doing so, we learned that none of us is indispensable and that many committees can actually survive without us.

**4. Turn off the television.** Instead of hearing that box chattering on for hours, we turned it off to discover the quiet. At first it was a bit awkward; but it did not take too long to come to value the new dimension of silence. Our two children have their few hours to watch programs directed to their interests, even then with careful monitoring from parents as to content. And the rest of us who are older have discovered books we had not read, games we had not played, conversation we had not had time for, and relaxing moments doing nothing particularly productive that we simply had not permitted before.

**5. Take car rides more frequently.** Even with gas prices as they are, we allow in the budget gas money for family excursions. This may mean doing without something else, but we are willing to live with this priority. And car rides naturally invite picnics. We have the details down to a science, with each person having his or her errands to run quick as a flash in readying for a meal outdoors. It doesn’t always take much; sometimes a few sandwiches and a beverage will do.

**6. Slow down our movements.** For years I have scaled staircases a couple steps at a time, but there’s no need to set the wood ablaze. The same goes for driving the car. Instead of rationalizing why I could get by with going over the speed limit, I now content myself with keeping within the law (not bad for a preacher!).

**7. Concentrate on the simpler things of life:** walking through the snow with the family, going out for a “night on the town” by purchasing an ice‑cream cone apiece, colouring a picture with my 4‑year‑old, writing a homemade poem on the back of a napkin at the coffee shop, discovering a new field of horses, and meandering for an evening through one of the “junk shops” at the other end of the village.

**8. Give God a chance to freshen up our days.** Before we had worked on remote control most of the time. We had learned doctrines and the orthodox phrases; they were given forth with sincerity, but more times than not from empty wells. Now God has become more real, more personal. He has had the opportunity to be more creative in our walk with Him. As we look about us at other Christians, we realize they too hunger for that fresh approach to God: however, they are caught up in the same rat race we had been pressed into. Most of the time they do not realize why they are exhausted in service for the Lord.

Thanks be to Him, He has opened up the simple life for our family. In it we have come to experience that rejuvenation so rarely found in this speed‑crazed world. Other than my experience of personal redemption through Jesus, I must confess that this experience of the simple life has been the most exhilarating discovery I have ever come upon.

**SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE #6: SOLITUDE**

**Defining Solitude:**

Dr. Siang-Yang Tan says: “Solitude is being alone in purposeful withdrawal from human interaction. It is a deliberate choice to be alone in order to draw closer to God by the power of the Holy Spirit, thereby freeing ourselves from bondage to people and things. Silence, the absence of speech, is a crucial component of solitude. While not all silence is solitude, silence is always a part of solitude.” Henri Nouwen wrote: “Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life”.

Richard Forster says that solitude is more a state of mind and heart than it is a place. There is a solitude off the heart that can be maintained at all times. Crowds, or lack of them, have little to do with this inward attentiveness. It is quite possible to be a desert hermit and never experience solitude. But if we possess solitude we do not fear being alone, for we know that we are not alone. Neither do we fear being with other, for they do not control us. In the midst of noise and confusion we are settled into a deep inner silence. Foster says that silence goes beyond simply refraining from speech - silence must involve listening to God.

**Jesus and Solitude:**

Jesus practised solitude - he regularly sought out solitary places: Matthew 4:1-11; 14:13,23; 17:1-9; 26:36-46; Mark 1:35; 6:31; Luke 4:42; 5:16; 6:12.

**Benefits of Solitude:**

In solitude we are prepared to hear God’s voice; we grow in intimacy with God as we express worship through silence; we develop and discover God’s character and purpose; we express faith in God by waiting in silence before him; we develop sensitivity and compassion for others and are able to respond to their hurts; we are physically and spiritually restored; we regain spiritual perspective; we find the will of God; and we learn to control the tongue. Under the discipline of silence and solitude we learn when to speak and when to refrain from speaking. The disciplined person is the one who can do what needs to be done when it needs to be done. If we are silent when we should speak, we are not living in the disciple of silence. If we speak when we should be silent, we again miss the mark.

**Steps into Solitude:**

\* Take advantage of the “little solitudes” that fill the day - moments when we wake up, breakfast, in traffic, grace at meals, at night, etc.

\* Develop a quiet place for silence and solitude.

\* Observe yourselves to see how often your speech is a frantic attempt to explain or justify your actions.

\* Disciplines yourselves so your words are few and full.

\* Try to live an entire day with no words at all.

\* A few times a year, withdraw for a few hours to reorientate your life goals.

\* Take a retreat once a year with nothing in mind but solitude.

**SOLITUDE WORKSHEET**

Solitude and silence are an outward declaration of your inward hunger and desire to know God more fully and love him more deeply. These disciplines are critical for spir­itual growth. They prepare you to really listen to God and receive his divine guidance. ln solitude and silence you are drawing near to the God who “longs to be gracious to you.” (Isaiah 30:18). What an invitation! God waits for us to wait For him! Will you? Choose to connect with the love and power of God in solitude and silence, beginning today.

***Entering In:***

Every journey begins with a single step. Get on your knees and ask God to help you to fight busyness, to draw you near to himself, to show you his love. Pray: *Lord, I can’t do this myself. I need your help! I want to be near to you, to hear your voice, to grow in intimacy with you, to receive reve­lation of your character and purpose, to be strengthened to resist temp­tation, to be prepared for spiritual battle. Lord, show me what this means for me today and in the corning weeks. Reveal to me your plans for me to draw near to you in solitude and silence. I love you, Lord. Grow in me a hunger and desire for you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

***In the Coming Days and Weeks:***

\* Schedule time to be alone with God daily. If this is not a regular part of your life, you might want to begin with ten to fifteen minutes a day and try to increase the time to an hour a day. This daily time with God is probably the single most transforming experience you can under­take. It is the lifeblood of solitude and silence. To those who seek him regularly, the Holy Spirit gives himself in great abundance, bringing to them the most rapid, con­sistent, healthy growth in Christlikeness. You should include prayer and meditation on the Scriptures.

\* Practice being silent perhaps up to a half or whole day. Make sure you explain what you are doing to your room-mates, spouse, or family! It takes time to enter into silence. Your first hour or so of silence may be characterized by many random thoughts. Living in an information-based society compels us to be constantly processing, and our minds are rarely quiet and still. It may take some time for your mind to slow down so you can be truly quiet and attentive to the Spirit within.

\* Choose to listen to others around you before you speak. This involves consciously and continuously checking in with God before you respond, and deliberately evaluating your intended speech to see if what you are about to say is really worth saying at all. By practising silence this way in the midst of everyday life, you will come to realize that many of your words are only chaff. Silence gives the Holy Spirit an opportunity to sow his thoughts in your mind and heart!

\* Take a half- to full-day private retreat spending time in solitude with God in a special or favourite place - at a local park, in nearby woods or hills, along the beach, or in a quiet, uninterrupted place in your own home. Don’t over-structure the time. A long, leisurely walk in conversation with God, or reading and meditating on a few passages of Scripture, will be more centering and restorative than racing through several chapters of Scripture or hurrying through devotional literature.

\* Take longer retreats of 24 to 48 hours, or even up to a week, several times a year in order to draw near to God. You may want to go to a special retreat center for this pur­pose. The more you enter the rhythm of waiting on God, of giving him some of your best time, the more free you will be from pride and performance, the more willing to surrender false images of yourself.

**SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE #7: SUBMISSION**

Richard Foster approaches this discipline through the back door by first describing what it does for us, and then defining it. He stresses that every discipline has a corresponding freedom. The discipline of submission bring the freedom to lay down the burden of always getting out own way. In submission we are free to value other people. As we give up our rights we experience liberation.

Jesus calls us to self-denial (Mark 8:34): a message that is not popular with an era in which self-fulfilment and self-actualisations are emphasised. He says that Jesus is calling us to self-denial and not self-hatred. Rather than losing our identity in self-denial we actually find it. Self-contempt claims that we have no worth, whereas self-denial declares that we are of infinite worth and shows us how to realise it. Self-denial involves holding others’ interests above our own.

Jesus taught subordination: Philippians 2:8; Matthew 23:8-10; Mark 8:34; 9:35; John 13:15. The cross-life is a life of voluntary submission; of freely accepted servanthood.

The epistles teach subordination: Philippians 2:4-7; 1 Peter 2:21-23; Ephesians 5:21; Colossians 3:18-22; Philemon 16.

Paul encourages believes to be filled with the fullness or love of God (Ephesians 3:16-19). The to make this a reality in our lives is through yielding and submission. Dr. Siang-Yang Tan says: “To surrender means giving oneself over to the possession or power of another; to give up, relinquish, submit, or yield...We must lose our ‘natural’ selves to find our true selves” (John 12:24-25). “Surrendering means the husk of our individual independence from God is broken and our personality is liberated to be yielded in dependence on him, to be one with his will and purpose.

There are limits to submission: the point at which submission becomes destructive. For example in dealing with the state, see 1 Peter 2:13,14 and Acts 4:19,20; 5:29. Also compare Romans 13:1 with Acts 16:37. There are no easy answers in setting the limits of submission - that takes discernment and dependence on the Holy Spirit for guidance. Subordination calls us to live in submission to human authority until it becomes destructive.

There are seven acts of submission: (1) to the triune God; (2) to the Scripture; (3) to our family; (4) to our neighbours; (5) to the believing community; (6) to the broken and despised; (7) to the world.

There are a number of reasons why God requires yielding and submission before he fills, changes and blesses us: *(1) Surrender to God is good for us* - it is what we are made for (Galatians 2:20; Philippians 4:12-13; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10); *(2) Yielding to God brings freedom from introspection and the sins of the self-life* - self-praise, self-sufficiency, self-loathing, self-absorption, self-abuse, self-indulgence, etc, and it means freedom from the burden of having to control everything and having everything our own way; and *(3) Submission to God cultivates the mind of Christ in us* - as we connect with God through yielding and submitting we are more open to him, more sensitive to his presence, more discerning of his will and more humble in the pattern of Jesus.

We must avoid the following positions: *(1) the doormat* - the person who allows others to treat him as a thing and not a person; *(2) the pleaser* - the person who wants toavoid conflict above all else; *(3) the dependant* - the person who fears making decisions; *(4) the manipulator* - the person who follows all the outward rules of submission, but employs every subtle trick to get his own way. These distortions are religiously approved means to dehumanise and destroy people. Jesus calls us to submission that is based on love and compassion; a way of submitting to others to serve them.

How do we achieve submission? In essence submission is a work of God. The Spirit within us is there to transform us. We must allow the fruit of the spirit to be evidenced in our lives. But this does not mean that there is nothing for us to do. We must co-operate with God through the spiritual disciplines of daily prayer, study of Scripture, spiritual warfare, confession and acts of submission. These must all be done in the strength of the Spirit and not in the energy of the flesh (Romans 8:13; Ephesians 6:10; Romans 14:17).

Jesus is our model of submissions. He submitted his will to his Father, leaving control completely in his Father’s hands (John 5:19). Paul describes Jesus life that was characterised by submission (Philippians 2:6-9). Jesus stressed that no less was required of his disciples (Mark 8:34-35; Matthew 23:11-12; John 13:12-15). J.I. Packer wrote that we grow *up* into Christ by growing *down* into lowliness. We grow greater by growing smaller.

**SUBMISSION WORKSHEET**

***Entering In:***

As we prepare to enter in, we can sing and pray with confident assurance the old hymn “I Surrender All.”

All to Jesus I surrender,

Make me Saviour, wholly Thine.

Let me feel the Holy Spirit,

Truly know that Thou art mine.

All to Jesus I surrender,

Lord, I give myself to Thee;

Fill me with Thy love and power,

Let Thy blessing fall on me.

***Right now:***

Lord, I want to know the love that surpasses knowledge and to be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. I yield to you now, as much as I am able, and ask you, Holy Spirit, to lead me deeper into surrender. I want to be identified by my love for you and for others. Lead me in the days and weeks to come into this great, risky, vulnerable adventure of loving as you have loved. Thank you for your promise to be with me to the end. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

***In the Coming Days and Weeks:***

\* Pray meditatively through chapter 2 of Paul’s letter to the Philippians. What does Jesus’ model of voluntary servanthood say to your life and circumstances? Wait patiently, listen expectantly, and obey swiftly.

\* Paul says that love is not resentful and does not keep accounts (1 Cor. 13:5). If you have a serious problem with someone, write down on a piece of paper all of your “hurts” ‑ both ways in which you have been hurt and ways in which you may have been hurtful. Then bring the list to God in prayer. Surrender the first half to him and ask forgiveness for the other half. Then burn the piece of paper as a helpful sign that God truly forgives, and that he will strengthen you to do the same.

\* Begin each day for a week or two by asking God to lead you moment by moment into surrender to his will. Ask, “Lord, where do I plant myself today? In what acts of love? What routines of service? What words of witness and encouragement?”

\* This week, follow the lead of St. Therese of Lisieux and look for the “little ways” to love and serve others. Do you have any enemies? Pray especially for them and find hidden ways to serve them. These acts will unite you with the humble heart of Jesus, who died at the hands of his “enemies” to bring all of us into new life.

\* The pathway of humility is not easy. Review the areas of yielding above, then select an area to give special attention for the next few weeks. Make specific decisions and plans for practising submission. Make a record of your attempts and share this with someone to whom you are accountable. What you do for a time in a focussed and deliberate way, in dependence on the Holy Spirit, will eventually become natural and habitual.

**SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE #8: SERVICE**

Service was the most distinctive quality of Jesus’ lifestyle and ministry (Matthew 20:26-28; Philippians 2:7-8). Service flows naturally out of a love relationship with God (Isaiah 6:1-8). It could be defined as a natural response of “holy obedience” that flows from our passion for God. According to Dr. Siang-Yang Tan it is “a concrete expression of our love for Jesus and our desire to be more like Him.”

Richard Foster says that service enables us to say ‘no!’ to the world’s games of promotion and authority. It abolishes our need for a pecking order. While we don’t do away with all sense of leadership and authority, we need to remember that Jesus redefined leadership and rearranged the lines of accountability. Then authority Jesus spoke about was not an authority to manipulate and control. It was authority of function, not of status. In Matthew 20:25-28 we read of how he stressed that it is an authority found in a towel and not a title or a position.

Foster contrasts self-righteous service and true service. Self-righteous service (1) comes through human effort; (2) is concerned about making impressive gains; (3) requires external rewards; (4) is highly concerned about results; (5) picks and chooses who to serve; (6) is affected by moods and whims; (7) is temporary; (8) is insensitive and demands to help even when to do so would be destructive; and (9) it fractures community. True service, on the other hand, (1) relies on divine energy; (2) indiscriminately welcoming all opportunities to serve, no matter how small; (3) rests content in hiddenness; (4) delights only in the service it self not the rewards; (5) is indiscriminate in ministry; (6) ministers faithfully because there is a need; (7) it is a life-style; (8) it often serves by waiting in silence for the appropriate moment; and (9) it builds community by caring for the needs of others.

When people choose to be servants they give up the right to be in charge. They become available and vulnerable. The image of a slave is used in the Bible for service. This often raises the issue of people becoming doormats and being taken advantage of. Service involves willingly allowing people to step on you. It is all about willingly enduring suffering, insults, hardships and humiliations for the love of Christ. This is certainly no easy task!!!

Every Christian is gifted to serve. God has given us spiritual gifts through His Holy Spirit to prepare us for works of service (1 Peter 4:10; Ephesians 4:7,11-13). We need to study the Scriptures that list the spiritual gifts; begin to experiment with the gifts that we feel drawn to; examine our motivation and feelings; evaluate our effectiveness as we use our gifts and expect confirmation of our gifts from the body of Christ.

Donald Whitney stresses that as we serve we should ensure that we ae motivated by: Obedience (Deuteronomy 13:4); Gratitude (1 Samuel 12:24); Gladness (Psalm 100:2); Forgiveness (Isaiah 6:6-8); Humility (John 13:12-16); and Love (Galatians 5:13).

Service is more a way of living than a list of things to do. But it must come to expressions as it takes shape in the world in which we live. Foster suggests the following areas: *(1) the service of hiddenness* - these are tasks that remain largely hidden; *(2) the service of small things*, where like Dorcas we make things for people (Acts 9:39); *(3) the service of guarding the reputation of others* (Titus 3:2); *(4) the service of being served* where we allow others to serve us; *(5) the service of common courtesy*; *(6) the service of hospitality* (1 Peter 4:9); *(7) the service of listening*; *(8) the service of bearing others’ burdens* (Galatians 6:2); and *(9) the service of sharing the word of Life with another*.

**SERVICE WORKSHEET**

***Entering In:***

Through the discipline of service, we become servants after the style of Jesus. He invites us all into this great, risky, vulnerable adventure of serving others in the same way that he has served us. He promises to be with us in our service to the very end. We enter into service by the power of the Holy Spirit, as his love is shed abroad in our hearts.

***Right Now:***

Pray: *Lord, save me from the misery of self centeredness and fit me for the outgoingness of service in your kingdom. I surrender to you today. I want to be available to be shaped and empowered and used by you for your kingdom purposes. I want to be a river of living water, a worker of signs and wonders, to reflect the brightness of Christ. Fill my heart with such love that it sings with strange and wild joy. Fill me with yourself that my life may f low in natural service to others. In your name, Servant-God, I pray. Amen.*

***In the Coming Days and Weeks Ahead***

\* Each day this week, as you pray, ask God to bring you someone whom you can serve or give words of witness or encouragement. Determine to take action on the direction the Holy Spirit gives. Get excited! You are entering into a great adventure with the Holy Spirit.

\* In the next week, take some time to reflect on the acts of service you have engaged in during the past few weeks. Ask yourself these questions: “Am I serving a genuine need or serving my own need to serve? In my service, am I seeking to gain control, merit, or appreciation for myself with this person or with God?” Ask God to help you to be aware of your motives and actions at the same time he is empowering you to be free as you grow in your service.

\* Service flows naturally out of a love relationship with God. Spend time daily this week in worship to God. Let the Spirit draw you from worship into holy service and give you fresh motivation for ministry and mission. Remember the words of Tozer: “Fellowship with God leads naturally to obedience and good works.”

\* Develop a plan to earnestly desire and seek spiritual gifts to exercise in service. Review the five simple steps outlined above and begin to explore and experiment with spiritual gifts. Take time for the Holy Spirit to match spiritual gifts with your temperament, abilities, personality, and experience so that you can say, “This is what I really enjoy doing; this is how I want to serve!”

\* “Nurture a love to do good things in secret,” says Jeremy Taylor. This week let your acts of kindness go unnoticed. Pray for your coworkers. Find some hidden way to serve them. Let your faithful response to the Spirit’s leading unleash a contagious tidal wave of love and service.

**SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE #9: CONFESSION**

The death of Christ on the cross deals with more than “just” salvation. While it causes an objective change to take place in our relationship with God, it also causes a subjective change in us. In the Bible salvation is both an event and a process. In the process of living as a Child of God and becoming like Christ, the place of confession is essential. Confession is both a grace and a discipline. It is a grace because it comes freely from God, but there is also an action that we must take - so it is a discipline.

Dr. Siang-Yang Tan links the disciplines of repentance and confession, suggesting that they are the white flags of surrender that we wave to declare the death of our pride and the submission of our wills to God. He defines repentance as “turning away from what we are thinking or doing, renouncing behaviours harmful to ourselves or others, surrendering those courses of action contrary to God’s will and purpose, and returning to a loving and obedient relationship to him.” If we are serious about wanting to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, we will be eager to remove sin from our lives through confession and repentance.

Four things are often mistaken for confession: *(1) Pretending that it doesn’t matter* - this is lying. We need reconciliation and not avoidance. *(2) Ceasing to hurt* - we may still continue to hurt even after we have been forgiven. *(3) Forgetting* - we cannot forget, but must decide not to use the memories against others. *(4) Pretending that the relationship is unchanged* - it will change, sometimes even for the better.

**Personal Confession**

The following process should be followed in confession:

**1. Examine our Conscience**

This is a time when we come under the gaze of God and in his silent and loving presence we become conscious of things that must be forgiven if we are to continue with Him. We must be willing to deal with specific sins. While a general confession may save us from shame, it will not bring inner healing. This first step is not easy because we are good at rationalising our behaviour, hiding our sinful actions from others and become comfortable with self-deception (James 1:22,26). David’s experience with Bathsheba and later with the prophet Nathan showed these tendencies (2 Samuel 12:7). The importance of self-examination must be emphasised in confession. Each day we need to take time to ask: *Have I been responsive to God’s leading today? Did I speak the truth in love? Did I give in to temptation? Are my desires set on things of the Spirit of the flesh?* We should review the things that come out of our hearts (Mark 7:20-22).

**2. Express Sorrow for Dishonouring God**

This is not primarily an emotion, but an abhorrence at having committed the sin - at having offended the heart of God. This shows that we take the confession seriously. When confronted by Nathan, David was reduced to a state of complete sorrow and repentance (Psalm 51:4). He realised that all sin is sin against God. 1 John 1:8-10 stresses that we are sinful and that we need to be transformed.

**3. Ask for Cleansing and Forgiveness**

David prayed that God would forgive him (Psalm 51:7-12). Through confession, that which has been kept in darkness and which has festered in secret is brought into the light and made visible - thereby losing its power to shame and weaken us. As we are forgiven, the darkness is dispelled and healing flows to the individual and within the Christian community.

**4. Determine to Avoid Sin**

In confession we must spend time asking God to give us a deeper desire for holy living - and a hatred of unholy living. We must take practical steps to avoid sin, like avoiding situations where temptation is strong and asking others to hold us accountable in those areas.

**5. Seek Restitution and Reconciliation**

Part of what it means to determine not to sin again is to make things. We need to restore what’s been lost and mend what has been broken. Jesus encourages us to seek reconciliation (Matthew 5:23-24).

Confession begins in sorrow and ends in joy. There needs to be a definite end to self-examination and condemnation. We need to remember that the forgiveness of sins results in a changed life.

**Corporate Confession**

Confession is both something that is private between us and God (1 Timothy 2:5) and a corporate matter (James 5:16). If we could realise that the people of God are a fellowship of sinners, we would be more willing to confess our needs and sins to one another. Confession is corporate because it offends God and destroys fellowship between people. As followers of Christ we have the authority to receive the confession of sin and to forgive it in Jesus’ name (John 2:20). While the individual can approach God directly and confess sin, there is great value in the truth of the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9). Our brothers and sisters have a vital role to play in hearing confession and expressing forgiveness.

According to Dr. Siang Yang Tan, “corporate confession creates a context in which we can hear a pronouncement of forgiveness, bringing us into an experience of the reality that God forgives us.” When those who hear our confession act toward us as God does - without condemnation or reproach, but with grace, wisdom and counsel - they proclaim the mercy and forgiveness of God.

Richard Foster gives some guidelines for those who will hear the confession of sins. (1) Learn to live under the cross. If we remember that we are all sinners and that the heart is deceptive, nothing people say will disturb us. (2) Keep in confidence anything shared in confession. (3) Pray that Christ will help us live in a way that our life will speak of Christ’s presence and love. (4) Pray for the increase of the gift of discernment. We need to be able to perceive what is actually going on within people if we are to help them experience healed. (5) Discipline ourselves to be silent while people are confessing to us. Many comments are distracting and even destructive to the sacredness of the moment. We should also avoid the opposite temptation to pry out more details than are necessary. (6) Pray silently for people while they are confessing. (7) Announce to them that forgiveness in Christ is real and effective for them. It may be wise to accompany our prayer with the laying on of hands (Hebrews 6:2) where we invite God to penetrate their deep inner mind and heal the sorrows of the past.

**Confession and Renewal or Revival**

There is a close connection between genuine confession and revival (2 Chronicles 7:14). Maybe we see so little renewal in our church or revival in our land because there is little practise of the discipline of confession.

**CONFESSION WORKSHEET**

The things God wants to do in and through us cannot happen unless our hearts are broken and contrite. Until we are filled with a “godly sorrow that leads to repentance,” unless we are done trying to stand up and defend ourselves, our hope is still in ourselves and not in God alone. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and draws us into repentance, causing us to cry out with King David for a clean heart and a right spirit. The Holy Spirit can rebuild the broken walls that have resulted from our rebellion and sin. May his love and power be manifest in our midst in fresh, dynamic, life‑giving ways.

***Right now:***

Ask the Lord to search your heart, as David did: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23‑24). Ask the Holy Spirit to shed light into the deepest area of your heart and bring knowledge and conviction of any sin. Lay before the Lord what the Spirit reveals. Ask him to help you, beginning today, to cultivate a willing spirit of repentance.

***In the Coming Days and Weeks:***

\* Each day this week, talk to God and listen to him regarding any unhealthy areas of pride in your life. Ask the Lord, “Does my pride, concern for what others think, and desire to control stand in the way of closer relation to you?” If you are human, the answer is probably yes. Let the Spirit identify at least one area of pride or control to submit to him. Repent and ask for strength and resolve to act in new ways. Remember that conviction of sin starts with awareness of sin.

\* Each day for a week or two, pray Psalm 51. Review the steps in repentance: awareness, remorse, confession, resolve, restitution. Take time for the Holy Spirit to clarify your situation and give you a godly sorrow for sin.

\* Take time this week to let the Holy Spirit show you whom to love. Is there anyone you have wronged, cheated, dismissed, or hurt (i.e., a colleague at work, a classmate, a parent, or child)? Ask, “How can I make this right? What restitution should I undertake? Will you help me, Holy Spirit, to love and serve this person today?” If someone has wronged you, set your will on forgiving them and trust the Spirit to provide opportunity for that forgiveness to work its way through to reconciliation.

\* Explore a more regular practice of self‑examination. Think about the following questions (with your small group or accountability partner, if possible) asked regularly in the small group Methodist meetings of John Wesley’s day: What known sins have you committed since our last meeting? What temptations have you struggled with? How were you delivered from temptations? What have you thought, said, or done which you have questioned whether or not it was sin? Have you anything you desire to keep secret?

\* Are you burdened by any sin or secret shame you haven’t been able to confess to anyone before? Lay your burden down with a counsellor or spiritual advisor. By allowing the sin or shame to be exposed to the light, it will lose its power to control and create fear. Receive forgiveness and acceptance from God through your confessor and return to the Father’s loving embrace. Read Luke 15:11‑24 to be reminded of God’s overwhelming love in welcoming back the broken and lost. Receive and celebrate God’s loving forgiveness toward you and rejoice that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

**SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE #10: WORSHIP**

**Worship Defined:** In some ways worship defies definition, it can only be experienced. But we need to give it a definition. Our English word for “Worship” comes from the Anglo‑Saxon word “Weorthscipe”, ie. worth ship. It’s a recognition of, and a response to the worth of God. The words used in the Bible for worship reveal the meaning of worship: **(1) Hebrew words:** *(a) Shachah* ‑ to bow down, Prostrate; *(b) Abodah* ‑ to serve a superior. **(2) Greek words:** *(a) Proskuneo* ‑ to come forward to kiss the hand, as an act of adoration. *(b) Leitourgia* ‑ to serve. A study of these words show that worship is both an attitude of the heart and actions of service. Ralph Martin shows this dual emphasis: “*Worship is the dramatic celebration of God in his supreme worth in such a manner that His worthiness becomes the norm and inspiration of human living.* (Ralph Martin). Someone else has said: *“Worship is becoming aware of God’s presence and responding to His presence with verbal or active expressions of love and devotion.”* In Isaiah 6:1‑8, Isaiah is transported into the presence of God. Here we see that worship is: *(1) Revelation* (v1‑4) ‑ God reveals Himself and Isaiah became aware of God’s presence. *(2) Response* (v5‑8) ‑ Isaiah responds to the presence of God.

**Personal Worship:** Why does the reality of God Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth, living in us, not set us on fire as it should? It is because we are unaware of God’s presence. This could be because: **(1) God is invisible** ‑ We don’t usually perceive God with our 5 senses. **(2) God is crowded out** ‑ Hectic and busy lives make us neglect Him. **(3) We do not discipline ourselves to think of God.** The solution to this lack of awareness of the presence of God lies in tuning into the presence of God. If we can learn to be aware of God’s presence, learn to relate to the God who is always with us then worship will become a life‑style. David, the Psalmist learnt to practise the presence of God. We read these words of David in Psalms 16:8, “I have set the LORD always before me.” It says literally, “I keep the Lord continuously in prominence”. He had a spontaneous relationship with God because he was continually aware of the presence of God. We need to practise the presence of God. How? (a) Remind yourself of the reality of God’s presence. (b) Decide to talk to God continuously. (c) When you forget God is with you ‑ confess and continue with Him. (d) Do everything ‑ even common tasks ‑ for the Lord (Colossians 3:17,23). (e) Take control of your senses let them direct your mind to God. (f) Make it your aim to experience God at all times.

**Corporate Worship:** a Danish philosopher, compared worship to a dramatic production. In worship, it often seems as though the worship leader is the actor and God is the prompter, whispering in his ear, telling him what to do next. The congregation listens and applauds at the end if they like the way worship is led or they throw things by grumbling or complaining if they don’t. He said that’s all back to front - God is the audience, the congregation are the actors and the person leading worship is the prompter, who keeps the production going. Colossians 3:16 shows there are three dimensions to corporate worship: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God” - (1) we communicate with God (up); (2) we communicate with each other (sideways); and (3) God communicates with us (down).

Richard Foster has some helpful guidelines on developing the spiritual discipline of worship: (1) Learn to practise the presence of God daily. (2) Have many different experiences of worship. (3) Find ways to prepare for the gathered experience of worship. (4) Have a willingness to be gathered in the power of the Lord - submit to one another. (5) Cultivate holy dependency. (6) Absorb distractions with gratitude. (7) Learn to offer a sacrifice of worship.

The fruit of worship is holy obedience! Isaiah said: “Here am I, send me!”

**WORSHIP WORKSHEET**

We have been created to worship the most high God, redeemed for an eternity of lovemaking with our wooing bridegroom, filled with the Spirit to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to the Lord with thanksgiving in our hearts. Let us more and more, each and every day, be worshippers of the most high God, brides to our lover Jesus, growing into the likeness of Christ as we are surrendered through worship to his will and purpose. “Lead me, Holy Spirit, into loving relationship and willing surrender. Help me to love God and enjoy him forever, with all of my heart, mind, soul, and strength.”

***Right now:***

Using the words of Frances Havergal’s well‑known hymn, surrender yourself to God in confession, adoration, and praise.

Take my life and let it be Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.

Take my moments and my days; Let them flow in endless praise.

Take my voice and let me sing Always, only, for my King.

Take my lips, and let them be Filled with messages from Thee.

Take my will and make it thine; It shall be no longer mine.

Take my heart, it is thine own; It shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store.

Take myself, and I will be, ever, only, all for Thee.

***In the Coming Days and Weeks:***

\* Make it a regular habit during the next few weeks to offer the Lord a “sacrifice of praise.” As you pray, read the Bible, do the dishes, take a coffee break, or go for a walk, let your heart flow out toward God in praise. Let one or more of the psalms guide you as a starting point, or write your own psalm of God’s grace to you and sing it to him. Fix your mind on Jesus, his glory and majesty, his beauty and strength. Let the Holy Spirit release in your spirit a language of praise. Remember that God invites us into his very self to taste and know his inner sweetness. Praise him for this and ask him to help you taste and know him more.

\* Take some time this week to “hallow” God’s name. His is the name above all names. He is God above all gods, the Lover of our souls, the Bridegroom, the Faithful One, Jesus, the Rock of Ages, King of the nations. Let the Spirit bring to your mind the names of God and the aspects of his character that these names reveal. Bless and praise him just for who he is.

\* Take time to receive from the Spirit in worship. Lie still in a relaxing and comfortable place (bathtub, sofa, lawn chair, hillside) and listen to a favourite worship tape. Let the music and words wash over you, sinking into your head and heart.

\* Imagine God singing one or more of these songs to you. Let your heart flow out toward God in surrender and thanksgiving. Imagine yourself in the throne room of God (Isa. 6; Rev. 4‑5) worshipping with the seraphim, elders, and angels. Feel the pillars of the temple shake from the loud praise. See the Lamb upon his throne and enter into vocal rejoicing and praise ‑ “And he shall reign Forever and ever... forever, and ever...alleluia, alleluia.” Take your pride, accomplishments, and whatever concerns you have and cast them at his feet in surrender to him. He is worthy! Tell him so.

\* As you attend corporate worship in the next few weeks, practice the Presence of God on the way as a means of preparing your heart for worship. Some ideas: pray silently for those you see, thank God for the day and all its possibilities ask him to bring to your mind things you should know about yourself or others. In this way, you are preparing your heart and mind to worship in spirit and in truth. Remember Paul’s encouragement to be continually filled with the Spirit (which naturally overflows into worship) so that you are ready to enter into corporate worship with others, sharing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, making music in your heart to the Lord (Ephesians 5:19‑20).

**SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE #11: GUIDANCE**

Donald Whitney does not have a chapter on guidance, but he does address the issue of knowing the will of God when he refers to three means to discover God's will, i.e. fasting; memorising God's Word and silence and solitude. (1) Fasting and guidance are linked in Judges 20:26; Acts 14:23. While fasting does not ensure that we receive clear guidance from God, it does make us more receptive to the One who loves to guide us. (2) Scripture Memory and guidance are linked in Psalm 119:24. (3) Silence and solitude and guidance are linked in Luke 6:12-13 where Jesus spent the night in prayer alone before he chose the disciples. God often makes his will known to us in private.

Richard Foster identifies guidance as a corporate discipline. He says that while there is a lot of emphasis on how God guides us individually we hear little about how God guides us through the body of Christ. He sets out to stress the communal side of guidance, but referring to the way in which God guided the children of Israel as a people; and then through the church: Matthew 18:19,20; Acts 13:1-3.

Foster talks about the role of spiritual directors in church history. This was a person whose role it was to open people up to the way of God in their lives. He functions as an advisor to a friend. They are people who are seeking to follow God themselves and openly share from their journey - both triumphs and struggles.

There are limits to corporate guidance. Sometimes leaders will manipulate and control people. On the other extreme it is possible for stiffed-necked people to hinder God-inspired leaders. Guidance also goes wrong when it is divorced from biblical norms. We should always check to see whether we are being led in a part that is contrary to Scripture. Guidance is also limited in that we are finite, fallible human beings who make mistakes (even Paul and Barnabas could not agree on one occasion - Acts 15:39). Our goal is to develop into an all-inclusive community of loving persons.

The goal of guidance is not specific instructions about what we must do; but conformity to the image of Christ. Specific guidance about particular matters is a by-product of the process of becoming more like Jesus Christ. The will of God is discovered as we become acquainted with God, learn His ways and become His friend. As this happens, God produces in us the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), and in time we start to know instinctively how we should live - what actions please or displease him and what decisions he would approve of.

The outward tests of guidance include: Scripture, the Christian community, divine providence working through circumstances, and our own personal integrity. There are also exceptional means of guidance such as fleeces, dreams, visions, sings and angels. But we must remember that God will not lead us in a way that is contrary to his know will - as revealed in the Bible

Dr. Sian-Yang Tan links listening and guidance and presents the following means of guidance: The Bible; Prayer - conversation with God; Godly counsel; Providential circumstances (Acts 8:1-5); Sanctified common sense (1 Corinthians 10:31); Inner witness and peace (Colossians 3:15); Prophecy and words of knowledge or wisdom (1 Corinthians 12:8,10); Visions and dreams (Daniel 2:19; Acts 9:10-16; Acts 10:9-23; 18:9-10); Nature (Romans 1:20; Psalm 19:1-4); Heavenly visitations (Acts 8:26,29; 9:3-6; Daniel 9:20-23; Acts 11:21). Usually the Holy Spirit bring together several means of guidance in a process that leaves us convinced that we are following the right path in obedience.

**GUIDANCE WORKSHEET**

Listening and guidance grow naturally out of intimacy with God. As we draw near, we begin to hear his voice and receive encouragement, correction, and direction for our lives. Ask yourself: "Am I looking to Cod, to my Good Shepherd, and following his voice? Am I eager to see what he is doing? Am I expectantly waiting for his guidance? Is my mouth, my heart, my life open wide to God?"

***Right now:***

Take a few moments to listen to God. Prepare your heart by turning any problems over to him. Remind yourself that receiving guidance from Cod is more his work than yours. Even though you don't have any great ability to hear from God, God knows you infinitely well and knows how to reveal his purposes and plans to you. Your part is to wait upon him and listen. Simply ask the Lord how he is praying for you, how he is at work in your life (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:34). Let thoughts come, and turn them into questions and conversation with Cod. Take note of any ideas, Scripture passages, or gentle promptings that come to your mind or spirit. Close by asking him to grow you in the practice of listening and hearing from him. As you leave this time of listening, expect to experience his guidance in the days ahead.

***In the coming days and weeks:***

\* Set aside a few minutes each day this week to listen to God through his Word. Ask him to lead you to Scripture through which he wants to speak to your current circumstances. If you have a regular pattern of reading Scripture, ask him to impress upon your mind and spirit the meaning of a text and its application to your life. Pray with the psalmist: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23, 24). Praying and listening through the Word will lead to praying about God's desires for your life.

\* Set aside an hour or more one day, take pen and paper, and review the means of guidance. Write down examples of ways God has spoken to you and guided you in the past. As the Spirit guides you in this process, be strengthened in your confidence that God has spoken to you and that he will continue to do so.

\* Experiment with practising the presence of God. Try to be consciously aware of God's presence for at least one second of every minute for one hour a day. Jesus had an inward focus on observing God and doing only what the Father showed him (John 5:19). Commit yourself to doing the same. Be attentive to how Cod is working and speaking in all that is happening around you. Continually turn to Cod and ask what he wants you to be seeing, understanding or doing. Keep a journal of what you are learning.

\* As you intercede for others, do not assume you already know what to pray for. Take time to lift each person up to the throne of grace and ask God to show you how he is at work in their lives. Listen for the promptings of the Spirit for ways you can help, encourage, and meet needs.

\* Gather with other Christians to wait upon the Lord, seeking God's mind about a matter of concern for your church or community. All promptings from the Spirit must be tested and confirmed by the Word, by circumstances, by inner conviction, and by the community of believers. Corporate listening is the best way to insure health and balance as you learn to listen and test the ways God speaks to you.

**SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE #12: CELEBRATION**

Richard Foster ends his book by exploring the discipline of celebration. He correctly concludes that there is a lack of joyous festivity in contemporary society. Jesus began his ministry by proclaiming the year of Jubilee - an Old Testament festival that included the cancelling of debts, releasing of slaves, no planting of crops and returning of property to original owners. God was teaching his people to keep their focus on Him.

Nehemiah 8:10 says that the joy of the Lord makes us strong - it bring endurance and energy. The source of joy is obedience (Luke 11:27,28). To be joyful, and celebrate, requires that we live a life of obedience. Foster says that joy is the result of the practise of spiritual disciplines: "God bring about the transformation of our lives through the Disciplines, and we will not know genuine joy until there is a transforming work within us." In fact, as he goes one to say: "Celebration comes when the common ventures of life are redeemed."

Some writers would have us celebrate everything that happens in our lives. They encourage us to praise God for everything that comes our way. This is helpful in that it encourages us to see things though the eyes of faith and know that God works through everything that comes our way. It is unhelpful in that it tends to deny the vileness of evil and turns the most horrible human tragedies into the will of God. Rather, we are commanded in Scripture to live in a spirit of thanksgiving in all circumstances but not celebrate the presence of evil.

The way to celebration is through developing a carefree approach to life (Phil 4:4; Matt 5:26). This involves learning to trust God fully. Without believing that God will provide for all our needs we will not be able to celebrate. In this context we learn that through prayer we can rely on God to meet all our needs. This is part of the way in which we will discover joy - we also need to give our attention to excellent and good things. As we fill our lives with thanksgiving to God for the things that he has given us we will experience joy (Phil 4:8).

Celebration has the following benefits:

\* It saves us from taking ourselves too seriously - we need to alive and interesting!

\* It helps with the periodic sense of sadness that can oppress the heart - it deals with depression.

\* It gives us perspective as we laugh at ourselves and realise some of our causes are not so important.

\* It tends to create more celebration - joy brings joy!

To practise celebration we can do the following:

\* Sing, shout, dance and make a noise

\* Laugh - especially at ourselves

\* Use the gifts of fantasy and imagination and enjoy the creativity of others

\* Turn family events into times of celebration and thanksgiving

\* Celebrate little events and accomplishes

\* Take advantage of the festivals of our culture and really celebrate - and develop new ones

Richard Foster concludes: "Celebration gives us the strength to live in all the other disciplines. When faithfully pursued, the other Disciplines bring us deliverance from those things which have made our lives miserable for years, which in turn, evokes increased celebration, Thus, an unbroken circle of life and power is formed."

**Input on Journaling**

Donald Whitney in his book, “Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life” has a chapter on Journaling. This book is a good read alongside Foster’s books *Celebration of Discipline*. Here are some of the key thoughts he has on Journaling:

As a Christian, your journal is a place to record the works and ways of God in your life. Your journal also can include an account of daily events, a diary of personal relationships, a notebook of insights into Scripture, and a list of prayer requests. A journal is one of the best places for charting your progress in the other Spiritual Disciplines and for holding yourself accountable to your goals.

The Bible itself contains many examples of God‑inspired journals. Many psalms are records of David’s personal spiritual journey with the Lord. We call the journal of Jeremiah’s feelings about the fall of Jerusalem the book of Lamentations.

*The Value of Journaling:* Apart from promoting spiritual growth by means of its own virtues it is a valuable aid to many other aspects of the spiritual life as well:

\* help in self‑understanding and evaluation.

\* help in meditation ‑ because it focuses concentration.

\* help in expressing thoughts and feelings to the Lord.

\* help in remembering the Lord’s works ‑ Deuteronomy 17:18.

\* help in creating and preserving a spiritual heritage.

\* help in clarifying and articulating insights and impressions.

\* help in monitoring goals and priorities.

\* help in maintaining the other spiritual disciplines.

*Ways of Journaling:* (There are no rules!)

\* bookshops sell journals that can be used.

\* use a simple notebook or loose‑leaf pages.

As a starting entry for each day, try listing the one verse or idea from your Bible reading that impressed you most. Meditate on that for a few minutes, then record your insights and impressions. From there consider adding recent events in your life and your feelings and responses to them, brief prayers, joys, successes, failures, quotations, etc. I try to write in my journal daily, but if I don’t, I refuse to feel guilty about it. As with any discipline, journaling requires persistence through the dry times. As with all the disciplines, you must start journaling before you can experience its value.

I have just designed a new daily devotional journal for myself, that has the following sections in it.

*1. Centering Prayer -* I spend about ten minutes in centering prayer, this is a way of being in God’s presence that I learnt from an elderly Catholic Nun in Natal. You sit in an upright position, both feet on the ground and you enter into the silence. You express your intention to God that you are simply going to be in his presence. You use a word or phrase to help you stay aware of God’s presence. The word maybe something like: Abba, or Father, or Jesus. etc. You don’t meditate on the phrase, you only say it gently when you find your mind wandering from it’s focus ‑ which is being with God.

*2. Reading of Passage* - I have divided the book of Romans into about 40 shorter readings, according to the breaks in the NIV Bible. And will read the section though a few times.

*3. Meditation on Passage* - Here I spend ten minutes reflecting on the passage. I look for any key thoughts that emerge, a key phrase to focus on ‑ and I stay with the passage or phrase for a while. I write down any impressions that come to mind.

*4. Application to Life -* The next section in my journal has a space in which during the next ten minutes I write down any insights that I receive from the text concerning how I live my life.

*5. Writing out a Prayer* - The next five or ten minutes is spent writing out a prayer to the Lord. I write it out and then read it to the Lord. I find this helps me to go a bit deeper in my praying.

*6. Prayer of Adoration* - For the next five minutes I focus on God as I express my love and devotion to Him. I write down in my journal any things that I specifically focus on or think of in terms of who God is and what he has done for me.

*7. Prayer of Intercession* - I end off with a time of bringing various aspects of the church and my ministry before the Lord. I am praying through a list of youth ministry prayer requests at the moment.