

Door to Liberation and Meditation

January 4th, 2024

Celebration of Discipline Week 1

Overview

- Our world is hungry for genuinely changed people. Let us be among those who believe that the inner transformation of our lives is a goal worthy of our best effort.
- This book covers 3 domains of discipline: the inward discipline, the outward discipline, and the corporate discipline
- Throughout 7 weeks, we shall *explore, exercise, experiment with, and embody* the various disciplines and *observe* how our lives are *transformed from the inside*

Weekly Assignments: Reading and Writing

- Each week, you are required to *read* the chapters assigned for that week and *write* a short paragraph discussing what you have read.
- In your paragraph, be sure to *include* the following:
 - ① Your understanding of the material (Summarize what you learned in your own words)
 - ② Questions, counterclaims, or topics for discussion (At least one)
 - ③ Changes in your life (Observe the changes that result from exercising discipline that week)
- Why? Because *life is difficult*. You deal with life's tragedies, complexities, and problems by
 - ① thinking, ② communicating, and ③ acting effectively.

Tentative Schedule (7 weeks)

Week	Chapters
1 (32 pages)	1. The Spiritual Disciplines: Door to Liberation 2. Meditation
2 (29 pages)	3. Prayer 4. Fasting
3 (34 pages)	5. Study 6. Simplicity
4 (30 pages)	7. Solitude 8. Submission
5 (32 pages)	9. Service 10. Confession
6 (32 pages)	11. Worship 12. Guidance
7 (12 pages)	13. Celebration <i>Summary</i>

Door to Liberation

A Call into the Depths

- **Superficiality is the curse of our age.** The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.
- **The classical Disciplines** of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into the depths. They invite us to explore the inner caverns of the spiritual realm.
- God intends the Disciplines of the spiritual life to be for ordinary human beings: people who have jobs, who care for children, who wash dishes and mow lawns. In fact, the Disciplines are best exercised in the midst of our relationships with our husband or wife, our brothers and sisters, our friends and neighbors.

Two difficulties: the why and the how

Every now and then you have caught glimpses, hints of something more than you have known. Inwardly you long to launch out into the deep. You are immediately faced with two difficulties:

1. Pervasive philosophy of **materialism** and mentality of **reductionism** (popular science)
 - We need the courage to move beyond the prejudice of our age and affirm with our best scientists that more than the material world exists. In intellectual honesty, we should be willing to study and explore the spiritual life with all the rigor and determination we would give to any field of research.
2. Abysmal **ignorance of the practical aspects** of discipline
 - However, to know the mechanics does not mean that we are practicing the Disciplines. The Spiritual Disciplines are an inward and spiritual **reality**, and the inner attitude of the heart is far more crucial than the mechanics for coming into the reality of the spiritual life.

The Slavery of Ingrained Habits of Sin

- The natural motions of our lives produce mire and dirt. Sin is part of the internal structure of our lives.
- A method of dealing with ingrained sin is to launch a frontal attack. We rely on our **willpower and determination**.
- Whatever may be the issue for us—anger, fear, bitterness, gluttony, pride, lust, substance abuse—we determine never to do it again; we pray against it, fight against it, set our will against it.



Willpower alone Cannot Transform Your Self

- Many times, we find ourselves once again morally bankrupt or, worse yet, so proud of our external righteousness. Willpower alone is not enough to bring fundamental transformation.
- We cannot change anything unless we accept it. Condemnation does not liberate, it oppresses. (Carl Jung)
- As soon as you resist mentally any undesirable or unwanted circumstance, you thereby endow it with more power—power which it will use against you, and you will have depleted your own resources to that exact extent. (Emmet Fox)
- Satan's threats are always empty. They are all lies. In fact, the only power that Satan has is through human belief in its lies. (Scott Peck) – Willpower can be blinding in the sense that it blocks us from questioning the presumptions underlying its direction.

The Limits of Willpower

- Willpower has no defense against **the careless word, the unguarded moment**.
- The will has the same deficiency as the law—it can deal only with **externals**. It is incapable of bringing about the necessary **transformation of the inner spirit**.
- You see, by dint of will people can make a good showing for a time, but sooner or later there will come that unguarded moment when the “careless word” will slip out to reveal the true condition of the heart.
- If we are full of compassion, it will be revealed; if we are full of bitterness, that also will be revealed.
- What we are comes out. Change needs to occur on the fundamental, spiritual level.

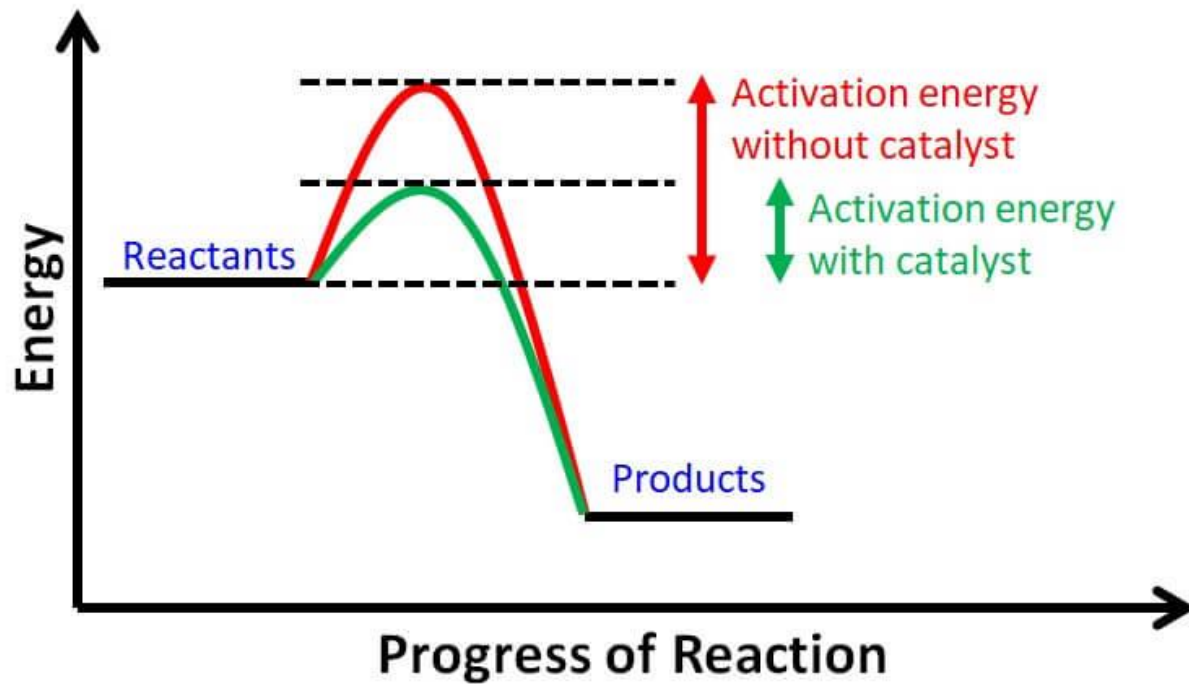
Inner Transformation through Discipline

- The needed change within us is **God's work**, not ours. We cannot attain or earn this **righteousness** of the kingdom of God; it is a grace that is given.
- **Righteousness** is unattained and unattainable through human effort. (Paul, Romans 5:17)
- But seek first his kingdom and his **righteousness**, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Jesus, Matthew 6:33)
- Our work is to **let** God change us in his righteous ways. Change is a process that is uncomfortable and painful. Most of us tend to avoid and ignore the call to transformation, proceeding far afield from all that is good and sensible for an easy way out.

Placing Ourselves under Conditions for Change

- God has given us the Disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace. The Disciplines allow us to **place ourselves before God** so that he can **transform** us.
- The apostle Paul says, “he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life” (Gal. 6:8).
- Disciplines are God’s way of getting us into the ground; they put us where he can work within us and transform us.
- Discipline can be defined as actions aligned with the beliefs, principles, and attitudes that encourage Spiritual evolution. Discipline is the toolbox with which we confront reality and solve the problems of life.

Analogy: Chemical Reactions with Catalyst



It is known that crying can increase neuroplasticity. Perhaps so can the various practices of discipline. Then discipline can be understood as a biochemical catalyst for adaptive transformation in the brain.

The Path of Disciplined Grace



The grace of God is unearned and unearnable, but if we ever **expect** to grow in grace, we must consistently walk on the path of discipline which involves both individual and group life.

What Internal Transformation Looks Like

- We struggle to exhibit a **loving and compassionate** spirit, yet it is as if we are bringing something in from the outside. Then bubbling up from the inner depths is the one thing we did not want, a **biting and bitter** spirit.
- However, we will discover internal changes.
- The spirit of compassion we once found so hard to exhibit is now easy. In fact, to be full of bitterness would be the hard thing.
- Divine Love has slipped into our inner spirit and taken over our habit patterns. In the **unguarded moments** there is a spontaneous flow from the inner sanctuary of our lives of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22, 23).

No more hiding and acting; Just being

- There is no longer the tiring need to hide our inner selves from others.
- We do not have to work hard at *acting* good and kind; we *are* good and kind. To refrain from being good and kind would be the hard work because goodness and kindness are *part of our nature*.
- Just as the natural motions of our lives once produced mire and dirt, now they produce “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17)

When Disciplines Degenerate into Law

- They are used to **manipulate and control** people.
- We take explicit commands and use them to **imprison** others. Such a deterioration of the Spiritual Disciplines results in **pride and fear**. Pride takes over because we come to believe that we are the right kind of people. Fear takes over because we dread losing control.
- Without laws the Disciplines are primarily an **internal work**, and it is impossible to control an internal work.
- When we genuinely believe that inner transformation is God's work and not ours, we can put to rest our passion to set others straight.

Meditation

Hurry is not of the Devil; it is the Devil

- If we hope to move beyond the superficialities of our culture, including our religious culture, we must be willing to go down into the **recreating silences**, into the inner world of **contemplation**.
- Throughout the bible, we see that God speaks to people who are close to the heart of God; God spoke to them not because they had special abilities, but because they were **willing to listen**.
- In the midst of an exceedingly busy ministry Jesus made a habit of withdrawing to “a lonely place apart” (Matt. 14:13).
- He sought out his heavenly Father; he listened to him, he communed with him. And he beckons us to do the same.

Meditation is Hearing and Obeying

- Christian meditation, very simply, is the ability to **hear God's voice and obey his word.**
- The truth of the matter is that **God desires our fellowship.**
- In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve talked with God and God talked with them—they were in communion. Then came the Fall, and in an important sense there was a rupture of the sense of perpetual communion, for Adam and Eve hid from God.
- But God continued to reach out to his rebellious children, and in stories of such persons as Cain, Abel, Noah, and Abraham we see God speaking and acting, teaching and guiding.

Being a Child of God (and not grandchild)

- What we see over and over again is God's people learning to live on the basis of hearing God's voice and obeying his word.
- To pray is to descend with the mind into the heart, and there to stand before the face of the Lord, ever-present, all seeing, within you.
- As a people, however, the Israelites were not prepared for such intimacy. Once they learned a little about God, they realized that being in his presence was risky business and told Moses so: "You speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die." (Exod. 20:19).

The Purpose of Meditation

- The reality is closer to an experience of **intense intimacy and awful reverence** than a giddy, buddy-buddy relationship
- What happens in meditation is that we create the **emotional and spiritual space** which allows Christ to **construct** an inner sanctuary in the heart. The aim is to bring this living reality into all of life. It is a portable sanctuary that is brought into all we are and do.
- We who have turned our lives over to Christ need to know how very much he longs to eat with us, to commune with us.

Inner Personality Transformation

- Inward fellowship of this kind transforms the inner personality.
- We cannot burn the eternal flame of the inner sanctuary and remain the same, for the **Divine Fire will consume everything that is impure.**
- Everything that is foreign to his way we will have to let go. No, not “have to” but “want to,” for our desires and aspirations will be more and more conformed to his way.

Detachment from chaos, Attachment to God

- The detachment involved in meditation is intentional: The **detachment from the confusion** all around us is in order to have a **richer attachment to God**.
- Christian meditation leads us to the **inner wholeness** necessary to give ourselves to God freely.
- This detachment does not result in an unhealthy otherworldliness – to the contrary, true godliness does not turn men out of the world but enables them to live better in it and excites their endeavors to mend it. It is **extremely practical** in dealing with ordinary human problems.

Meditation is Extremely Practical

- Often **meditation will yield insights** that are deeply practical, almost mundane. **Instruction** will come on how to relate to your wife or husband, or how to deal with this sensitive problem or that business situation.
- Meditation sends us into our ordinary world with **greater perspective and balance**.
- I have experienced the guidance of God in studying mathematics, solving math problems, debugging a complex computer program, and more everyday problems. Each time God responds, it is surprising, eye-opening, and graceful.

Not by Blind Faith; through Rigorous Inquiry

- The inner reality of the spiritual world is **available to all who are willing to search** for it.
- Let me suggest we take an **experiential attitude** toward spiritual realities. Like any other scientific endeavor, we form a hypothesis and experiment with it to see if it is true or not.
- If our first experiment fails, we do not despair or label the whole business fraudulent. We reexamine our procedure, perhaps adjust our hypothesis, and try again.
- We should at least have the honesty to persevere in this work to the same degree we would in any field of science. The fact that so many are unwilling to do so betrays not their intelligence but their prejudice.

The Inertia of Laziness: Secondhand Delivery

- Human beings seem to have a perpetual tendency to have somebody else talk to God for them. We are content to have the message secondhand.
- One of Israel's fatal mistakes was their insistence upon having a human king rather than resting in the theocratic rule of God over them
- The history of religion is the story of an almost desperate scramble to have a king, a **mediator**, a priest, a pastor, a go-between. In this way we do not need to go to God ourselves.
- *Such an approach saves us from the need to change, for to be in the presence of God is to change. The natural resistance to change is the inertia of laziness; the original sin.*

It takes Courage to Meditate

- That is why meditation is so threatening to us. It boldly calls us to enter into the living presence of God for ourselves. It tells us that God is speaking in the continuous present and wants to address us.
- All who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord are the universal priesthood of God and as such can enter the Holy of Holies and converse with the living God
- To bring people to believe that they can hear God's voice seems so difficult. It is a grace to have the desire to listen to God.

God can use our Imagination for his Purposes

- We believe he can sanctify the imagination and use it for his good purposes.
- Of course, the imagination can be distorted by Satan, but then so can all our faculties. God created us with an imagination, and as Lord of his creation he can and does redeem it and use it for the work of the kingdom of God.
- We are seeking to think God's thoughts after him, to delight in his presence, to desire his truth and his way. And **the more we live in this way, the more God utilizes our imagination for his good purposes.**
- In fact, the common experience of those who walk with God is one of being given images of what can be.

Principle of Incarnation

- God so accommodates, so enfleshes himself into our world that he uses the images we know and understand to teach us about the unseen world of which we know so little and which we find so difficult to understand.

Considerations for Meditation

- A mind that is harassed and fragmented by external affairs is hardly prepared for meditation.
- If we are constantly being swept off our feet with frantic activity, we will be unable to be attentive at the moment of inward silence.
- **Holy leisure**; a sense of balance in the life, an ability to be at peace through the activities of the day, an ability to rest and take time to enjoy beauty, an ability to pace ourselves

Considerations for Meditation

- **Solitude**; a place that is quiet and free from interruption. If it is possible to find some place that looks out onto a lovely landscape, so much the better. It is best to have one designated place rather than hunting for a different spot each day.
- **Posture**; The body, the mind, and the spirit are inseparable. Tension in the spirit is telegraphed in body language. If inwardly we are fraught with distractions and anxiety, a consciously chosen posture of peace and relaxation will have a tendency to calm our inner turmoil.
- Regardless of how it is done, the aim is to **center the attention** of the body, the emotions, the mind, and the spirit **upon “the glory of God in the face of Christ”** (2 Cor. 4:6).

The Forms of Meditation

- **Meditation upon Scripture:** the meditation of Scripture centers on internalizing and personalizing the passage. Set aside all tendencies toward arrogance and with a humble heart **receive** the word addressed to you.
- It is important to resist the temptation to pass over many passages superficially. **Our rushing reflects our internal state** and our internal state is what needs to be transformed.
- Bonhoeffer recommended spending a whole week on a single text! Therefore, my suggestion is that you take a single event, or a parable, or a few verses, or even a single word and **allow it to take root in you.**

The Forms of Meditation

- **Recollection:** recreating silence to allow the fragmentation of our minds to become centered.
- Whatever it is that weighs on your mind or is a concern to you, just say, “palms down.” Release it. After several moments of surrender, turn your palms up as a symbol of your desire to receive from the Lord.
- Having centered down, spend the remaining moments in complete silence. Do not ask for anything. Allow the Lord to commune with you, to love you.

The Forms of Meditation

- **Meditation upon the Creation:** give your attention to the created order.
- Look at the trees, really look at them. Take a flower and allow its beauty and symmetry to sink deep into your mind and heart. Listen to the birds—they are the messengers of God. Watch the little creatures that creep upon the earth.
- These are humble acts, to be sure, but sometimes God reaches us profoundly in these simple ways if we will quiet ourselves to listen.

The Forms of Meditation

- **Meditation upon Events:** to penetrate the inner meaning of events, not to gain power but to gain prophetic perspective.
- The person who has meditated on the Passion of Christ but has not meditated on the extermination camps of Dachau and Auschwitz has not yet fully entered into the experience of Christianity in our time.
- Newspapers are generally far too shallow and slanted to be of much help. We would do well to hold the events of our time before God and ask for prophetic insight to discern where these things lead. Further, we should ask for guidance for anything we personally should be doing to be salt and light in our decaying and dark world.

The Question

- Do you accept the premise? The world, our country, our society, our community needs **disciplined people**. i.e., people who see beyond the superficialities of externalism, people who are open to the call to inner transformation; who continually confront and accept the suffering involved as well as the joy
- Would it be desirable for you to display love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control because that is who you are by nature?
- What if someone takes advantage of you? What if the “people of the lie” want you silenced or dead? Is it still worth it, considering that everyone is doomed to die anyways?
- There is a price to pay for Spiritual growth. But there is also a price to pay for ignoring God’s call; staying undisciplined, deceptive, confused, impulsive, and ignorant.