

Study and Simplicity

January 25th, 2024

Celebration of Discipline Week 3

The Discipline of Study

He that studies only men, will get the body of knowledge without the soul;
and he that studies only books, the soul without the body.

He that to what he sees adds observation, and to what he reads reflection
is in the right road to knowledge,
provided that in scrutinizing the hearts of others he neglects not his own

- Caleb Colton

Definition of Study

- **Study** is an experience in which through careful attention to reality the mind is enabled to move in a certain direction.
 - The mind will always take on an order conforming to the order upon which it concentrates.
- Perhaps we observe a tree or read a book. We see it, feel it, understand it, draw conclusions from it. And as we do, our thought processes take on an order conforming to the order in the tree or book. When this is done with concentration, perception, and repetition, **ingrained habits of thought** are formed.
 - The Old Testament instructs the Israelites to write the Laws on gates and doorposts and bind them to their wrists for the purpose of directing the mind repeatedly and regularly toward a mode of thought

Study is God's Central Way of Changing Us

- The purpose of the Spiritual Disciplines is the **total transformation** of the person.
 - Replacing old destructive habits of thought with new life-giving habits
- “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Philippians 4:8)
- Many Christians remain in bondage to fears and anxieties simply because they do not avail themselves of the Discipline of study.
 - One may be faithful in church attendance, earnest in fulfilling their religious duties, sing with gusto, pray in the Spirit, receive divine visions and revelations – and yet remain unchanged.
 - Why? Because they have never taken up study.

The Principle of Truth: Truth is Freedom

- “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:32)
- Good feelings, ecstatic experiences, getting “high on Jesus” will not free us. Without a knowledge of truth, we will not be free.

Truth \Leftrightarrow Freedom

Lies \Leftrightarrow Bondage

- Many are **hampered and confused** in mathematics, engineering, chemistry, marriages, relationships, and especially in the spiritual walk by a simple ignorance of truth.
 - Worse yet, many have been brought into the **cruelest bondage** by false teaching.
 - “You traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves” (Matt. 23:15).

What We Study Determines Which Habits Form

- The ingrained habits of thought that are formed **will conform** to the order of the thing being studied. What we study determines the kind of habits that are formed.
 - This is why Paul urges us to focus on things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and gracious.

- Meditation VS Study

Meditation	Study
Devotional	Analytical
Relishes a word	Explicates a word
Functions within a framework	Creates the framework

- Principle of Neuroplasticity: What we repeatedly practice becomes consolidated into who we are

The Principal Task of Study

- Two fields of study: **Verbal** and **Nonverbal**
 - Verbal: books and lectures
 - Nonverbal: the world of nature and the careful observation of events and actions
- The principal task of study is a **perception into the reality** of a given situation, encounter, etc.
 - We can go through a major crisis, for example, without any perception of the real nature of the tragic situation.
 - But if we carefully observe and reflect upon what occurred, we can learn a great deal.

Mechanics of Study

1. Repetition

- Regularly channeling the mind in a specific direction. Repetition ingrains habits of thought, which transform behavior.
- It is not even important that the person believe what he or she is repeating, **only that it be repeated**. The inner mind is thus trained and will eventually respond by modifying behavior to conform to the affirmation.

2. Concentration

- Centering the mind; focuses the attention on what is being studied.
- Distraction is the order of the day. Most people find it virtually impossible to go through an entire day focusing on a single thing.

Mechanics of Study

3. Comprehension

- Understanding **what** we are studying. The “eureka” experience of understanding catapults us onto a new level of growth and freedom. Synapses fire, and new connections are made. This leads to insight and discernment. It provides the basis for a true perception of reality.
- It is not just the truth, but the **knowledge** of the truth that sets us free.

4. Reflection

- Understanding the **significance** of what we are studying.
- Reflection brings us to see things from God’s perspective. In reflection we come to understand not only our subject matter, but ourselves. Jesus speaks often of ears that do not hear and eyes that do not see. When we ponder the meaning of what we study, we come to hear and see in a new way.

The Soul Demands Your Folly; Not Your Wisdom

- “Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seem to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.” (1 Corinthians 3:18)
- Many of us suffer from the **absence of the fool** in our lives.
 - Frenetic and upright, we take ourselves too seriously, trying so hard to conform to a world which promotes workaholism, efficiency, and productivity that we might as well be cogs in a machine.
 - Forgetting that **playfulness is a basic human need**, we wonder why we so easily become bored and exhausted, losing all capacity for spontaneity, authenticity, and passion.
- The antidote to this would be to give the ***fool*** archetype some space in our lives.
 - No matter how many times he stumbles, the fool keeps going along the path of truth. He is not afraid of change and exploring unknown territory. The fool lives in the moment, seeing reality as it is.

The Fool is Freer and Happier

- **Friendship and marriage** contain a certain amount of folly, because we tend to overlook the defects of our friends and loved ones and consider them “small vices” in comparison to other people.
- **Intellectuals** are foolish in their pursuit of knowledge, spending years going to the library, doing research, thinking that what they are doing is tremendously important, so that a few other intellectuals over of a century will read their book and think very highly of it.
- In essence, there is nothing that can make life happier than the joy that accompanies laughter and play.
 - Folly is not merely universal, but necessary and even desirable to humanity, to be a person is nothing other than to play the fool, and to acknowledge this very fact is the highest form of wisdom.

The Wise Fool

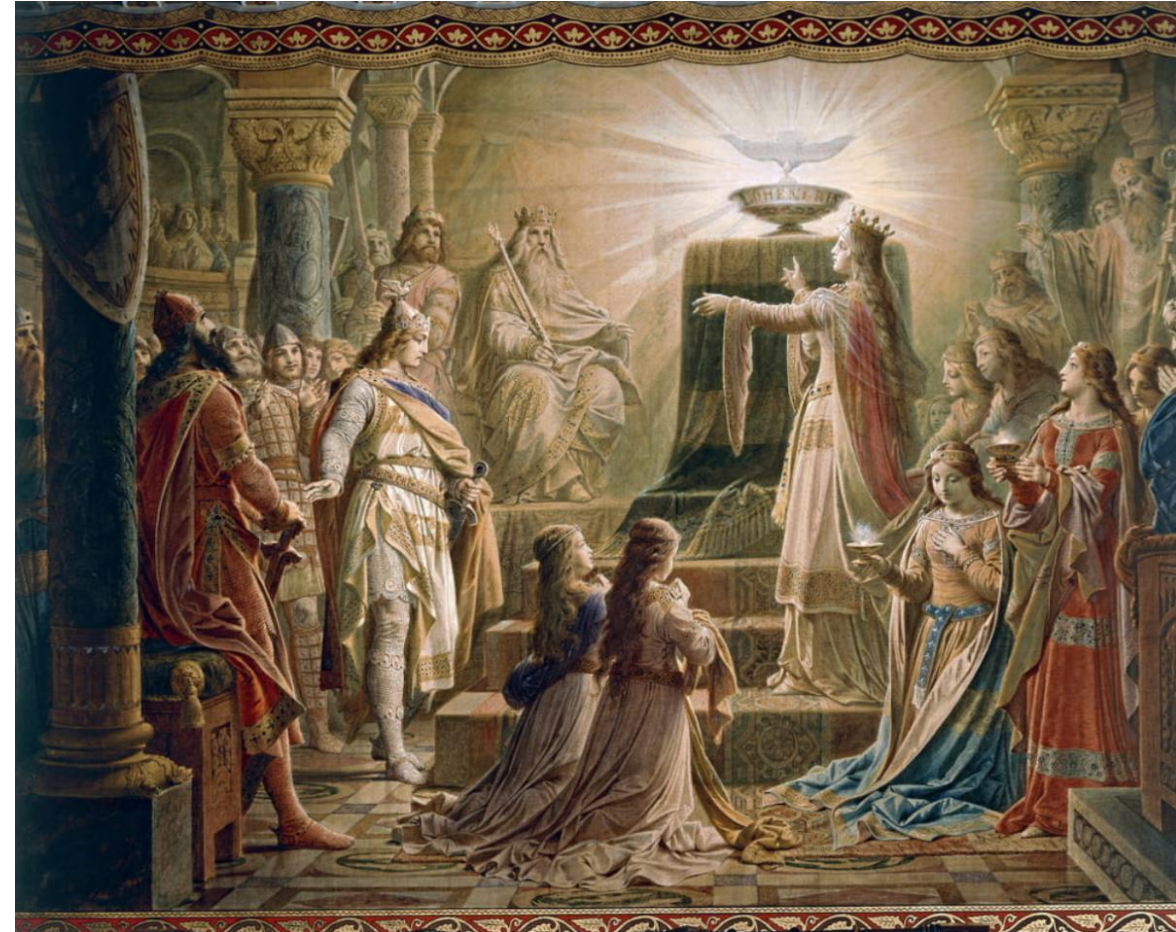
- “The wisest of all, in my opinion, is he who can, if only once a month, call himself a fool — a faculty unheard of nowadays.” (Fyodor Dostoevsky, Bobok)
- The fool is fearless in speaking the truth. In fact, the great secret of the successful fool is that he is no fool at all. He makes harsh truths more palatable by adding humor and wit.
- “A fire broke out backstage in a theatre. The clown came out to warn the public; they thought it was a joke and applauded. He repeated it; the acclaim was even greater. I think that’s just how the world will come to an end: to general applause from wits who believe it’s a joke.” (Søren Kierkegaard, Either/Or)

The Myth of Parsifal: From Boy to Man

- Parsifal lives alone with his mother. After seeing knights pass by him, he is marveled and decides to leave his mother in order to become a knight himself, and goes through many trials that initiate him into manhood
- The Fisher King, king of the Grail castle, is severely wounded, but he is incapable of dying.
- Every adolescent receives his Fisher King wound: the graduation from naïve consciousness into self-consciousness; growing up to realize that the world is not just joy and happiness.

The Myth of Parsifal: From Boy to Man

- Every night there is a solemn ceremony in the Grail Castle. One of the maidens holds the Holy Grail, filled with wine, and each person that drinks from it is granted their deepest wish.
- The Fisher King, however, does not participate and is suffering alone.
- No further outward effort is possible, if our inward capacity is wounded.



The Myth of Parsifal: From Boy to Man

- It is perhaps the deepest form of suffering, to be right in front of beauty, happiness, and holiness, but unable to partake in any of it.
- One day, Parsifal finds a man in a boat fishing on a lake; it was the Fisher King. He asked if there was any place to stay the night, to which the Fisher King gave him the directions to the Grail Castle.
- Parsifal attends the ceremony, but the Fisher King is groaning in agony alone. The following day, he leaves the castle. As he turns around, the castle was nowhere to be seen.
- It took Parsifal 20 long and painful years to find the Grail Castle again.

The Cure to the Fisher King Wound

- The inner castle is always there, but appears invisible to our eyes, unless we see the world with new eyes.
- Many of the continued stories say that after Parsifal revisited the Grail Castle, he asked the Fisher King, “whom does the Grail serve?”. Immediately, he was healed, and peace and happiness reigned over the land.
- The Grail is the center of meaning in human life, and the meaning of life is to serve the Grail.
- “A man must consent to look to a **foolish, innocent, adolescent part** of himself for his cure. The inner fool is the only one who can touch his Fisher King wound.” (Robert A. Johnson)

The Fool is the Precursor to Transformation

- The fool is both the beginning and the end of the **journey**.
 - He is heroic because he jumps off the place of comfort into the place of the unknown.
 - The Fool's Journey becomes the Hero's Journey, in which the hero has a call to adventure and must leave the safety and comfort of the Ordinary World and enter into the unknown and difficult territory of the Special World. Here he must defeat his dragon, and gather the gold, the "treasure hard to attain".
- The **journey** is a psychological and spiritual death and rebirth, in which an old aspect of oneself dies, giving birth to a **new and more capable self**.
 - Finally, the hero must return to his people in the Ordinary World and share the gift acquired in the Special World with others, something with the power to heal, whether it is wisdom, love, or simply the experience of surviving the Special World.

The Soul Demands Your Folly; Not Your Wisdom

- To embark on a journey of **self-discovery** is traditionally considered foolish.
 - We are supposed to follow a linear path: education, work, marriage, and so on. When a person deviates from this path, he is seen as a fool whose adventures will amount to nothing but poverty and misery.
 - The fool thinks of all the **wonderful adventures** that lie ahead and is less worried about making mistakes. He thinks on his feet, is energetic, and urges us to live life to the fullest, while the person who thinks too much is over-cautious and remains stagnant.
- **Rumination and overthinking** creates anxiety, and one suffers more in imagination than in reality. **Failure**, however, can open new doors that one never imagined or expected to be open.
 - What we think of abstractly as **absolute failure** may in fact lead to **unimaginable success**. What you need most is to be found where you least wish to look.

Study of Books

- The first reading involves **understanding** the book: what is the author saying? The second reading involves **interpreting** the book: what does the author mean? The third reading involves **evaluating** the book: is the author right or wrong?
 - Most of us tend to do the third reading right away and often never do the first and second readings at all. We give a critical analysis of a book before we understand what it says.
- To read successfully we need the extrinsic aids of **experience, other books, and live discussion**. Experience that has been understood and reflected upon informs and enlightens our study. Books often have meaning only when they are read in relation to other writings. Live discussion refers to the ordinary interaction that occurs among human beings as they pursue a particular course of study. Insights and creative ideas **emerge** when people gather for discussion, debate.

Study of Scripture ≠ Daily Devotional Reading

- In the study of Scripture, a high priority is placed upon **interpretation**: what it means. In the devotional reading of Scripture, a high priority is placed upon **application**: what it means for me.
 - All too often people rush to the application stage and bypass the interpretation stage: they want to know what it means for them before they know what it means!
- When we study a book of the Bible we are seeking to be controlled by the intent of the author.
- We are determined to hear what he is saying, not what we want him to say. We want life-transforming truth, not just good feelings. We are willing to pay the price of barren day after barren day until the meaning is clear.

Study of Nature

- We begin the **study of nature** by paying attention. We see flowers or birds. We observe them carefully and prayerfully. The first step in the study of nature is **reverent observation**. A leaf can speak of order and variety, complexity and symmetry.
- “Love all God’s creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God’s light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day.” (Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*)

Study of Human Relationships

- Watch, for example, how much of our speech is aimed at justifying our actions.
- We find it almost impossible **to act** and allow the act to **speak for itself**. No, we must explain it, justify it, demonstrate the rightness of it. Why do we feel this compulsion to set the record straight? Because of pride and fear, because our reputations are at stake!
- We should become **attentive** to the **ordinary relationships** we encounter throughout the day: at home, work, school.
 - We notice the things that control people
 - Remember, we are not trying to condemn or judge anyone; we are only trying to learn. If we do find a judging spirit emerging within ourselves, we observe that and learn.

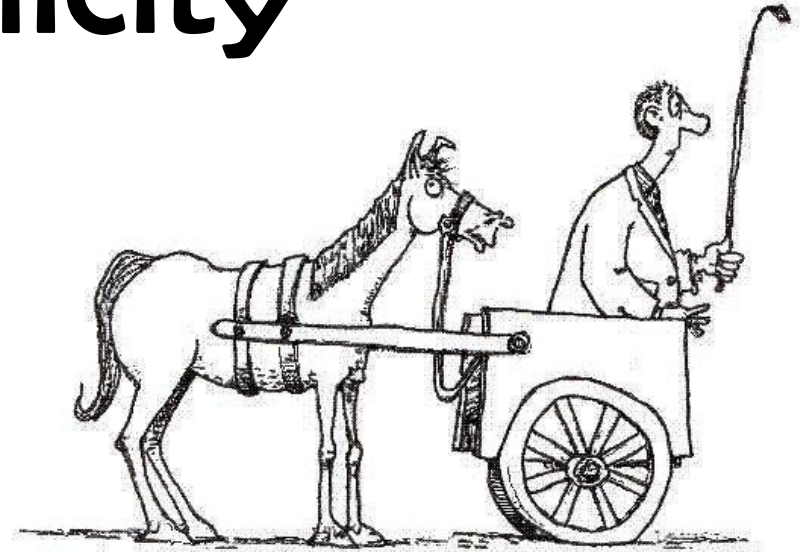
Study of Ourselves

- We should learn the **things that control us**.
- We observe our feelings and mood swings.
- What controls our moods?
- Why do we like certain people and dislike others?
- What do these things teach us about ourselves?
- We study these matters with a spirit of humility, needing a large dose of grace.

Study of Culture and Society

- Also, we should ponder the events of our time, noting first, with a spirit of discernment, what things our culture lifts up as “great events.” Let’s look at the values of the culture—not what people say they are, but **what they actually are**.
- Let’s learn to **ask questions**.
 - What are the assets and liabilities of a technological society?
 - What has the fast-food industry done to the tradition of a family gathering for dinner?
 - Why do we find it difficult in our culture to have time to develop relationships?
 - Is Western individualism beneficial or destructive?
 - What in our culture is in harmony with the gospel and what is at odds with it?

The Discipline of Simplicity



Simplicity: The Horse before the Cart

- Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.
- *But **seek first** his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.*
(Matthew 6:25–33)
- Simplicity is predicated on the belief that seeking the **kingdom of God** and the **righteousness of his kingdom first** will bring everything necessary in its proper order.
 - Everything hinges upon maintaining the “first” thing as first.

Simplicity VS Duplicity

Simplicity	Duplicity
Inward Focus and Unity “The Divine Center” Freedom Joy and Balance Truthful and Honest Speech	Bondage Anxiety and Fear Lust for Status and Position Greed, Manipulation, Deception

- Purity of heart is **to will one thing**.
- Living in the **modern world** exposes us to a maze of competing attachments. One moment we make decisions based on sound reason and the next moment out of fear of what others will think of us. We lack unity or focus on which our lives are oriented.

Modern Culture Lacks a Divine Center

- We really must understand that the lust for affluence in contemporary society is psychotic. It is psychotic because it has completely lost touch with reality. We crave things we neither need nor enjoy. “We buy things we do not want to impress people we do not like.” Where planned obsolescence leaves off, psychological obsolescence takes over. The mass media have convinced us that to be out of step with fashion is to be out of step with reality.
- It is time we awaken to the fact that **conformity to a sick society is to be sick.**
- Covetousness we call ambition. Hoarding we call prudence. Greed we call industry.
- Modern counterculture is a superficial change in life-style without dealing seriously with the root problems of a consumer society

Inward Reality

- Focus upon the kingdom produces the inward reality, and without the inward reality we will degenerate into legalistic trivia.
 - Nothing else can be central. The desire to get out of the rat race cannot be central, the redistribution of the world's wealth cannot be central, the concern for ecology cannot be central.
 - Seeking first God's kingdom and the righteousness, both personal and social, of that kingdom is the only thing that can be central in the Spiritual Discipline of simplicity.
- In fact, when the kingdom of God is genuinely placed first, ecological concerns, the poor, the equitable distribution of wealth, and many other things will be given their proper attention.

Freedom from Anxiety

- If what we have, we **receive as a gift**,
 - and if what we have is to be **cared for by God**,
 - and if what we have is **available to others**,
 - then we will possess freedom from anxiety.
 - This is the inward reality of simplicity
- If what we have, we believe **we have gotten**,
 - and if what we have, we believe we **must hold onto**,
 - and if what we have is **not available to others**,
 - then we will live in anxiety.

Inner Attitudes of Simplicity: “Do not be anxious”

- **To receive** what we have as a gift from God is the first inner attitude of simplicity. We work but we know that it is not our work that gives us what we have.
- **To know** that it is God’s business, and not ours, to care for what we have is the second inner attitude of simplicity. God is able to protect what we possess. We can trust him.
 - Simplicity means the freedom to trust God for all things.
- **To have our goods available to others** marks the third inner attitude of simplicity. If our goods are not available to the community when it is clearly right and good, then they are stolen goods.
 - The reason we find such an idea so difficult is our fear of the future. We cling to possessions because we are anxious about tomorrow. But if we truly believe that God is who he says he is, we need not be afraid.
 - Again, ordinary common sense will define the parameters of our sharing and save us from foolishness

Outward Expressions of Simplicity

- **First**, buy things for their usefulness rather than their status.
- **Second**, reject anything that is producing an addiction in you.
 - Learn to distinguish between a real psychological need, like cheerful surroundings, and an addiction.
 - How do you discern an addiction? Very simply, you watch for undisciplined compulsions.
- **Third**, develop a habit of giving things away.
 - If you find that you are becoming attached to some possession, consider giving it to someone who needs it. Practice voluntary poverty.
- **Fourth**, refuse to be propagandized by the custodians of modern gadgetry.
 - Timesaving devices almost never save time.

Outward Expressions of Simplicity

- **Fifth**, learn to enjoy things without owning them.
 - If we own it, we feel we can control it; and if we can control it, we feel it will give us more pleasure. The idea is an illusion.
 - Many things in life can be enjoyed without possessing or controlling them. Share things. Enjoy the beach without feeling you have to buy a piece of it. Enjoy public parks and libraries.
- **Sixth**, develop a deeper appreciation for the creation.
 - Get close to the earth. Walk whenever you can. Listen to the birds. Enjoy the texture of grass and leaves. Smell the flowers.
- **Seventh**, look with a healthy skepticism at all “buy now, pay later” schemes.
 - They are a trap and only deepen your bondage.

Outward Expressions of Simplicity

- **Eighth**, obey Jesus' instructions about plain, honest speech.
 - Make honesty and integrity the distinguishing characteristics of your speech.
 - Reject jargon and abstract speculation whose purpose is to obscure and impress rather than to illuminate and inform
- “If thou art absolutely obedient to God, then there is no ambiguity in thee and thou art mere simplicity before God.... One thing there is which all Satan's cunning and all the snares of temptation cannot take by surprise, and that is **simplicity**.” (Kierkegaard)
- **Ninth**, reject anything that breeds the oppression of others.
 - In a world of limited resources, does our lust for wealth mean the poverty of others?

Outward Expressions of Simplicity

- **Tenth**, shun anything that distracts you from seeking first the kingdom of God.
 - It is so easy to lose focus in the pursuit of legitimate, even good things.
 - Job, position, status, family, friends, security—these and many more can all too quickly become the center of attention.

