

“The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us.”

Richard Foster in *Celebration of Discipline*, p. 7

Ordinary time - Introduction to spiritual disciplines

If you have been following this year of contemplative study, hopefully you have gained a **VISION** of living in God’s kingdom here and now, and also a desire and **INTENTION** to do this on a deeper level. Now we will turn to learning about the spiritual disciplines - the **MEANS** for helping you grow in your life with God.

Scripture:

Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another. Galatians 5:16-26

Voice of wisdom:

“We are accustomed to thinking of sin as individual acts of disobedience to God. This is true as far as it goes, but Scripture goes much further....Sin is part of the internal structure of our lives. No special effort is needed to produce it. No wonder we feel trapped. Our ordinary method of dealing with ingrained sin is to launch a frontal attack. We rely on our will power and determination...we determine never to do it again; we pray against it, fight against it, set our will against it. But the struggle is all in vain....Willpower will never succeed in dealing with the deeply ingrained habits of sin....The will has the same deficiency as the law - it can deal only with externals. It is incapable of bring about the necessary transformation of the inner spirit.

“When we despair of gaining inner transformation through human powers of will and determination, we are open to a wonderful new realization: inner righteousness is a gift from God to be graciously received. The needed change within us is God’s work, not ours. The demand is for an inside job, and only God can work from the inside. We cannot attain or earn this righteousness of the kingdom of God; it is a grace that is given.

“The moment we grasp this breathtaking insight we are in danger of an error in the opposite direction. We are tempted to believe there is nothing we can do. If all human strivings end in moral bankruptcy (and having tried it, we know it is so), and if righteousness is a gracious gift from God (as the Bible clearly states), then is it not logical to conclude that we must wait for God to come and transform us? Strangely enough, the answer is no. The analysis is correct - human striving *is* insufficient and righteousness *is* a gift from God - but the conclusion is faulty. Happily there is something we can do. We do not need to be hung on the horns of the dilemma of either human works or idleness. 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.

Richard Foster in *Celebration of Discipline*, pgs. 4-7

Study 35

Contemplation:

What key words and ideas stand out to you? How do they help you take a deeper look at sin and how you deal with sinful habits in your life?

How do you react to Foster's statements about the futility of will power and determination?

On the other hand, what do you think about the position of just "wait(ing) for God to come and transform us"?

What feelings or thoughts does the phrase "spiritual disciplines" bring to you?

Practices:

Write down one or two of the key phrases that are important to you. Hold them (literally) before God and wait silently on him. Record any further thoughts he may give you.

V-I-M (vision, intention, means) is a concept Dallas Willard taught was foundational to any transformation. Before we delve any further into the means of the spiritual disciplines, take some time this week to solidify the "V" and the "I" in your journey.

Can you articulate your vision of life in the kingdom of God, if not to another person, at least on paper for yourself?

What is your intention for growth in your life with God? How committed are you to maturing in this way?

Come back to these questions several times this week, prayerfully asking God to speak to you about your answers.

©sharonracke These contemplative studies are the result of the thoughtful and transformative teaching I have received both at The Dwelling Place (dwellingplaceindy.org), and as a student of The Renovare Institute (renovare.org). I pray that as you use them, you will experience the presence and love of God, and learn more about living with Christ daily. Sharon Racke (recess.racke@gmail.com)