

# How might the Spiritual Disciplines help me to fulfil my calling?

Here they are summarised in the words of Richard Foster; his book is full of practical suggestions, as is Dallas Willard's 'The Spirit of the Disciplines' (HarperCollins, 1991).

## THE INWARD DISCIPLINES

### The Discipline of Meditation

'The purpose of meditation is to enable us to hear God more clearly. Meditation is listening, sensing, heeding the life and light of Christ. This comes right to the heart of our faith. The life that pleases God is not a set of religious duties; it is to hear his voice and obey his word. Meditation opens the door to this way of living...

...In the Discipline of meditation we are not so much acting as we are opening ourselves to be acted upon. We invite the Holy Spirit to come and work within us – teaching, cleansing, comforting, rebuking.' (p.37)

### The Discipline of Prayer

'In prayer, real prayer, we begin to think God's thoughts after him: to desire the things he desires, to love the things he loves, to will the things he wills. Progressively, we are taught to see things from his point of view.' (p.43)

'Listening to God is the necessary prelude to intercession. The work of intercession, sometimes called the prayer of faith, presupposes that the prayer of guidance is perpetually ascending to the Father. We must hear, know, and obey the will of God before we pray it into the lives of others. The prayer of guidance constantly precedes and surrounds the prayer of faith.' (p.48)

### The Discipline of Fasting

'Throughout Scripture fasting refers to abstaining from food for spiritual purposes.' (p.61)

'The central ideal in fasting is the voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity.' (p.73)

### The Discipline of Study

'The apostle Paul tells us that we are transformed through the renewal of the mind (Rom. 12:2). The mind is renewed by applying it to those things that will transform it.

'Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, 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' (Phil. 4:8, [italics added]). The Discipline of study is the primary vehicle to bring us to '*think* about these things.' (p.78)

'The principal task of study is a perception into the reality of a given situation, encounter, book, etc.' (p.80)



## THE OUTWARD DISCIPLINES

### The Discipline of Simplicity

'The Christian Discipline of simplicity is an *inward* reality that results in an *outward* life-style... Simplicity begins in inward focus and unity.' (p.100)

'The central point for the Discipline of simplicity is to seek the kingdom of God and the righteousness of his kingdom *first* and then everything necessary will come in its proper order.' (p.106)

'Simplicity is the only thing that sufficiently reorients our lives so that possessions can be genuinely enjoyed without destroying us... Simplicity sets us free to receive the provision of God as a gift that is not ours to keep and can be freely shared with others.' (p.105)

### The Discipline of Solitude

'Solitude is inner fulfilment. Solitude is more a state of mind and heart than it is a place. There is a solitude of heart that can be maintained at all times. Whether alone or among people, we always carry with us a portable sanctuary of the heart... There is the freedom to be alone, not in order to be away from people but in order to hear the divine Whisper better.' (p.120-1)

'Without silence there is no solitude. Though silence sometimes involves the absence of speech, is always involves the act of listening... We must understand the connection between inner solitude and inner silence; they are inseparable... The purpose of silence and solitude is to be able to see and hear. Under the Discipline of silence and solitude we learn when to speak and when to refrain from speaking.' (p.122-3)

### The Discipline of Submission

'The touchstone for the biblical understanding of submission is Jesus' astonishing statement, 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.' (Mark 8:34) Almost instinctively we draw back from these words. Jesus calls us to self-denial without self-hatred. Self-denial is simply a way of coming to understand that we do not have to have our own way. Our happiness is not dependent upon getting what we want.' (p.140-1)

'In submission we are at last free to value other people. Their dreams and plans become important to us. We have entered into a new, wonderful, glorious freedom – the freedom to give up our own rights for the good of others.' (p.139)

### The Discipline of Service

'In the Discipline of service there is also great liberty... Service enables us to say 'No!' to the world's games of promotion and authority.' (p.158)

'True service comes from a relationship with the divine Other deep inside... True service is a life-style. It acts from ingrained patterns of living. It springs spontaneously to meet human need.... True service builds community. It quietly and unpretentiously goes about caring for the needs of others.' (p.159-61)



## THE CORPORATE DISCIPLINES

### The Discipline of Confession

'Unless God gives the grace, no genuine confession can be made. But it is also a Discipline because there are things we must do. It is a consciously chosen course of action that brings us under the shadow of the Almighty... Confession is a difficult Discipline for us because we all too often view the believing community as a fellowship of saints before we see it as a fellowship of sinners... But if we know that the people of God are first a fellowship of sinners, we are freed to hear the unconditional call of God's love and to confess our needs openly before our brothers and sisters... In acts of mutual confession we release the power that heals. Our humanity is no longer denied, but transformed.' (p.181-2)

### The Discipline of Worship

'Worship is the human response to the divine initiative.... It is kindled within us only when the Spirit of God touches our human spirit.' (p.197-8)

'If the Lord is to be *Lord*, worship must have priority in our lives.... The divine priority is worship first, service second. Our lives are to be punctuated with praise, thanksgiving, and adoration. Service flows out of worship.' (p.200)

'One reason worship should be considered a Spiritual Discipline is because it is an ordered way of acting and living that sets us before God so he can transform us.' (p.205)

### The Discipline of Guidance

'... the knowledge of the direct, active, immediate leading of the Spirit is not sufficient. Individual guidance must yield to corporate guidance. There must also come a knowledge of the direct, active, immediate leading of the Spirit *together*.... God does guide the individual richly and profoundly, but he also guides groups of people and can instruct the individual through the group experience.' (p.218-9)

'Unity rather than majority rule is the principle of corporate guidance. Spirit-given unity goes beyond mere agreement. It is the perception that we have heard the *Kol Yahweh*, the voice of God.' (p.226)

'... the idea of the spiritual director... is a beautiful expression of divine guidance through the help of our brothers and sisters.' (p.228)

### The Discipline of Celebration

'Without joyous celebration to infuse the other Disciplines, we will sooner or later abandon them. Joy produces energy. Joy makes us strong.' (p.239)

'In the spiritual life only one thing will produce genuine joy, and that is obedience... To elicit genuine celebration, obedience must work itself into the ordinary fabric of our daily lives... Joy is the end result of the Spiritual Disciplines' functioning in our lives. God brings about the transformation of our lives through the Disciplines, and we will not know genuine joy until there is a transforming work within us.' (p.239-40)

*all quotations from 'Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth' (Hodder, 2008)*