

# What Are the Spiritual Disciplines?

- Not a replacement for grace
- Not improving ourselves by willpower

Him [Christ] we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. 29For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

--Colossians 1:28-29 ESV

...for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

--Philippians 2:13 ESV

# What Are the Spiritual Disciplines?

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- Not improving ourselves by willpower
- Not asceticism

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

--Colossians 2:20-23 ESV

Asceticism and simplicity are mutually incompatible. Occasional superficial similarities in practice must never obscure the radical difference between the two. Asceticism renounces possession. Simplicity sets possessions in proper perspective. Asceticism finds no place for a "Land flowing with milk and honey." Simplicity rejoices in this gracious provision from the hand of God. Asceticism finds contentment only when it is abased. Simplicity knows contentment in both abasement and abounding. (Phil 4:12).

--Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, p84

# What Are the Spiritual Disciplines?

- Not a replacement for grace
- Not improving ourselves by willpower
- Not a way to control God
- Not externally imposed

Everyone thinks of changing the world,  
but no one thinks of changing himself.

--Leo Tolstoy, "Three Methods of Reform"

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- A right way to combat sin

But the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up mire and dirt.

--Isaiah 57:20

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- Not externally imposed
- A right way to combat sin
- Something we do (practices)

As practices, the spiritual disciplines are first about doing, then about being. The spiritual disciplines are right doing that leads to right being. That is, the purpose of doing the practices known as spiritual disciplines is the state of being described in 1 Timothy 4:7 as “godliness.”

--Donald S. Whitney, *A God-Entrancing Vision of All Things*  
(Piper and Taylor, ed.)

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- Not a replacement for grace
- Not improving ourselves by willpower
- Not a way to control God
- Not externally imposed
- A right way to combat sin
- Something we do (practices)
- Biblical practices
- Sufficient for godliness

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

--2 Timothy 3:16-17 ESV

# What Are the Spiritual Disciplines?

- Not a replacement for grace
- Not improving ourselves by willpower
- Not a way to control God
- Not externally imposed
- Not divorced from the Gospel
- Not ends
- **Not a replacement for relationship**
- A right way to combat sin
- Something we do (practices)
- Biblical practices
- Sufficient for godliness
- Derived from the Gospel
- Means

..[W]e humans are constantly trying to create relationships with other people by impressing them, attracting them, and appealing to their desire to be "made happy." It is all highly dysfunctional and delusional. We sense the need for relationships, but in classic human fashion, we try to *make things happen* rather than seek to cultivate genuine, personal connections. It is no wonder, then that we apply our dysfunctional interpersonal habits to God.

--Matthew Jacoby, *Deeper Places*

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

--Matthew 22:34-40 ESV

The most fundamental implication of the twofold "love commandment"...is this: Relationships are to be valued and enjoyed above everything else in life--first our relationship with God and then our relationships with others. Relationships, in other words, are to be treated as the highest of all ends.

--Matthew Jacoby, *Deeper Places*

If we regard our relationship with God as a means to some other end, then...the complexity of the relationship will be an annoyance, and we will find ourselves trying to reduce the relationship to a simpler pragmatic form. We will want to simplify it down to *doing* certain things. We will want to feel we have fulfilled our spiritual duty by spending half an hour reading the Bible and praying each day and by serving in the church. We will begin to regard these spiritual exercises as we regard physical exercise.

--Matthew Jacoby, *Deeper Places*

The Disciplines are for the purpose of realizing a greater good. In and of themselves they are of no value whatever. They have value only as a means of setting us before God so that he can give us the liberation we seek....[The disciplines] are not the answer; they only lead us to the Answer.

We must clearly understand this limitation of the Disciplines if we are to avoid bondage. Not only must we understand, but we need to underscore it to ourselves again and again so severe is our temptation to center on the Disciplines. Let us forever center on Christ and view the Spiritual Disciplines as a way of drawing us closer to his heart."

Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*