

Supplement
to the Video Program

Celebration of Discipline

Gateway Films
VISION  VIDEO

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FILM 1. SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE: DOOR TO LIBERATION

READING REVIEW

Introduction

If you have never thought about the spiritual disciplines before, you may be unsure of what effect they can have on your life. The disciplined person is the person who can do what needs to be done when it needs to be done, in both group and individual life. True spiritual discipline is a liberation, not a bondage. In fact, joy is one of its most prominent features.

What do the disciplines do in us and for us?

The spiritual disciplines free us from ingrained habits of sin that keep us from knowing the joy and abundance Jesus promised. But the idea of discipline is not easily understood—some people think they can will themselves to be righteous, while others do nothing and wait for God to act. Both ways are doomed to failure.

The classical disciplines of the spiritual life, however, lead to inner transformation. They immerse us in the milieu of the Holy Spirit so that we become instruments of righteousness. Doing the right thing becomes almost a reflex action.

What are some of the pitfalls?

There are several pitfalls: the temptation to turn the disciplines into law; failure to understand the social implications of the disciplines; the tendency to view the disciplines as virtues in themselves; and the tendency to think that the disciplines somehow exhaust God's grace.

How do we start?

All you have to do to begin practicing the spiritual disciplines is to start right where you are—with your job, your family, your friends. If you stumble, get up and start again. Be sure to share what you are learning with others.

QUESTIONS

1. Richard Foster said that the purpose of the spiritual disciplines is to free us from habits of sin. Do you think this could be done some other way?

2. What ideas struck you most forcefully in this film? Were there statements you disagreed with, or were unable to identify with, or perhaps found difficult to understand?

3. Richard Foster told a story of a man who deformed his body to fit a badly made suit. Can you recall an instance in your own life when you “deformed” your thoughts or actions in a similar way?

4. How do you feel about the following statements? Discuss your feelings with the group.
 - a. Discipline means rigidity
 - b. Discipline means joy.

5. Which of the classical spiritual disciplines have you already tried to practice in your own life? Now that you have seen this film, do you think you might practice them in a different way?

6. Richard told of how he tried to make “a frontal attack on gluttony” by saying “No more hot fudge sundaes...Lord, keep me from hot fudge sundaes...” Have you tried to change something you didn’t like by a simple act of will? What happened? Has seeing this film given you a different idea of how you might have handled that situation?

7. Richard says that we can begin to practice the spiritual disciplines at home—for example, he says, “When you plant your garden or stroll in the park, sense again that the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” What other ways can you think of to put the disciplines into practice in your daily life?

DAILY SCRIPTURE READINGS

SUNDAY: The longing to go deeper/Psalm 42

MONDAY: The slavery of ingrained habits/Psalm 51

TUESDAY: The slavery of ingrained habits/Romans 7:13-25

WEDNESDAY: The bankruptcy of outward righteousness/Philippians 3:1-16

THURSDAY: Sin in the bodily members/Proverbs 6:16-19

FRIDAY: Sin in the bodily members/Romans 6:5-14

SATURDAY: The victory of spiritual discipline/Ephesians 6:10-20

FILM 2. THE INWARD DISCIPLINES

READING REVIEW

Introduction

In today's world, with its emphasis on noise, speed, and endless consumption, and understanding of the inward disciplines is especially important. The inward disciplines—meditation, fasting, study, and prayer—can nurture internal righteousness in our lives. This inwardness is exemplified by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

Meditation

Meditation is the ability to hear God's voice and obey his Word. We can hear his voice if we learn to listen. Meditation is the root of all the other disciplines, because it enables us to do God's will.

Fasting

Fasting is the voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function for the sake of an intense spiritual activity. There is nothing wrong with normal life functions, but there are times when we must set them aside to concentrate. We need to fast not only from food, but from other people, from the telephone, from the media, and from other aspects of our gluttonous consumer culture. Fasting helps us see what controls us.

Study

Study is the experience in which the mind takes on an order conforming to the order of what it concentrates on. In study we come to understand who God is, what he is like, and how he works with his children. Through study we come to know the truth that sets us free. The Bible and classics of Christian literature are not the only books to be studied. Literary classics and the "nonverbal books" of nature and life are also important parts of study.

Prayer

Prayer is the experience of perpetual communion with God. This is at the heart of the inner life with God. When attempting to pray the prayer of intercession, it is important to listen, ask, believe, and give thanks.

When these spiritual disciplines are freely exercised, the result is liberation from the ingrained habits of sin and the construction of habit patterns of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

QUESTIONS

1. Richard Foster begins by contrasting the concern of the Scribes and Pharisees with external control and manipulation with Jesus' idea of internal righteousness. In the following example, which statement do you agree with? Discuss your reaction with the group.
 - a. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.
 - b. Do not return evil for evil.
2. How did you first react when you heard Richard speak of meditation? What do you like about it? What threatens you about it?
3. What things make your life crowded? Do you think you have a desire to meditate in order to hear the Lord's voice in the midst of all the clutter?
4. When Richard Foster spoke of the need for fasting, did you think "ugh," "hmmmm," "wow," or "you have to be kidding"?
5. How do you think fasting reveals what controls your life? Were you surprised to hear Richard say that *things* can control your life? Can you list people or things in your own life that you might want to fast from?
6. What does the word "study" remind you of? School? A library or den? How do you think study might transform you?
7. Outside of the Bible, what book has had the greatest influence on your life? Why?
8. In discussing the prayer of intercession, Richard Foster stresses the importance of listening, asking, believing, and giving thanks. Have you applied these ideas to your own prayers? If not, how do you think your prayers might be changed by them?

DAILY SCRIPTURE READINGS

SUNDAY: The glory of meditation/Exodus 24:15-18

MONDAY: The friendship of meditation/Exodus 33:11

TUESDAY: God's chosen fast/Isaiah 58:1-7

WEDNESDAY: A partial fast/Daniel 10:1-14

THURSDAY: The call to study/Proverbs 1:1-9, 23:12, 23

FRIDAY: The study of a nonverbal book/Proverbs 24:30-34

SATURDAY: The pattern of prayer/Matthew 6:5-15

FILM 3. THE OUTWARD DISCIPLINES

READING REVIEW

Introduction

Sometimes we forget, or even ignore, other people. We either want to surround ourselves with so-called friends, or get away from people altogether. Of course, neither way makes us feel really good about ourselves and others. The outward disciplines—solitude, submission, service, and simplicity—nourish the social dimension of the spiritual life. Without this social dimension, the spiritual life can degenerate into a search for self-satisfaction.

Solitude

Solitude frees us from our bondage to ourselves and others, and allows us to love God. Until we have learned to be alone, we will not be able to help others.

Submission

Submission is the liberating life that enables us to lay down the everlasting burden of needing to get our own way. It is the simple understanding that “no man is an island”—we live in community with others. We can live in submission to the Triune God, to the Scriptures, to our families, to our neighbors, and to the world.

Service

Through service we experience the many little deaths of going beyond ourselves. True service comes from a relationship with a Divine Other inside us, while self-righteous service comes through human effort only.

Simplicity

Simplicity is the life of single-hearted devotion to God, which produces an outward lifestyle of integrity. In the cultivation of inward simplicity, it is important to “seek first the kingdom of God.” There are many principles to help us in the outward expression of simplicity—the following ten suggestions may help: (1) buy things for usefulness, not status; (2) reject anything you may become addicted to; (3) give things away; (4) stay away from gadgets—buy things that are durable; (5) enjoy things without owning them; (6) try not to buy on credit; (7) develop a deeper appreciation for the creation; (8) use plain, honest speech; (9) reject anything that will breed oppression in others; (10) shun whatever would distract you from the kingdom of God.

QUESTIONS

1. How can practice of the outward disciplines help to “nourish the social dimension of the spiritual life”?
2. What do you think is the difference between loneliness and solitude? How might you reorder your life to make room for God?
3. How did you feel when Richard Foster first used the word “submission”? Have you ever seen anyone abuse this discipline?
4. List several ways you might practice submission to your family. What do you think their reaction would be?
5. Can you think of any instances in your life that you practiced self-righteous service? How would you live that situation again in order to practice true service?
6. Is this the first time you have heard listening, courtesy, and hospitality spoken of in terms of service? How do you think this understanding might change your habits in the future?
7. List five ways you can simplify your life this week. Do them and observe the results.
8. What is your reaction to the ninth principle of simplicity? If you are in a group, debate the pros and cons of practicing this in the “real world.”

DAILY SCRIPTURE READINGS

SUNDAY: The freedom to control the tongue/James 3:1-12, Luke 23:6-9

MONDAY: Prayer and solitude/Matthew 6:5-6, Luke 5:15

TUESDAY: The call to submission/Mark 8:34, John 12:24-26

WEDNESDAY: Submission in the family/Ephesians 5:21-6:9, 1 Peter 3:1-9

THURSDAY: The call to service/Matthew 20:20-28

FRIDAY: Simplicity as singleness of heart/Matthew 6:19-24

SATURDAY: The freedom from covetousness/Luke 12:13-34

FILM 4. THE CORPORATE DISCIPLINES: CELEBRATION

READING REVIEW

Introduction

In our society, with its emphasis on “looking out for number one,” we tend to forget that at its heart Christian worship is a corporate experience. This means that Christian fellowship has no functioning body unless we all work together in community. The same goes for the spiritual disciplines: they must be practiced as a system, not in isolation. The corporate disciplines are confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.

Confession

Confession draws us into the divine mystery of redemption. It frees us from the burdens and hurts of the past and from ourselves, and releases us to worship.

Worship

It follows that the heart and soul of worship is confession—the confession that Jesus Christ is alive and here to teach his people about himself.

Guidance

Guidance means to live responsive to God’s voice. Jesus’ purpose was to teach us how to live under God’s rule, and we can hear his voice most clearly when we are together.

Celebration

Celebration is the “motor” that powers the rest of the spiritual disciplines. Without celebration, they will become dry and dull, without life. Joy comes from obedience to Christ, and keeps us from taking ourselves too seriously. We sometimes need to remind ourselves to celebrate, and we can do this by having festivals of worship, redeeming the festivals of our culture, celebrations of rites of passage, and celebrations in our own daily lives.

QUESTIONS

1. How do you think the corporate disciplines relate to the idea of Christian community? How do you think their practice leads to celebration?
2. When is the discipline of confession an unhealthy preoccupation with sin, and when is it a proper recognition of our need for forgiveness? Give an example from your personal experience.
3. Richard Foster told a story about a man whose confession of his war experiences led finally to celebration. Are you carrying around a similar burden that might be lifted by confession? If you are in a group, would you feel comfortable discussing it?
4. Which forms of worship that you have experienced have been especially meaningful to you? Do you have any sense of why these particular forms have been more meaningful than others?
5. If living in guidance comes about mainly through entering into friendship with God so that we know and desire his ways, what should you drop from your life? What should you add to your life in order to deepen your intimacy with Christ?
6. Do you enjoy God?
7. Why do you think that human beings often find celebration so difficult? List three ways you can bring celebration into your own life. Try them and see what happens.
8. If you are in a study group, would you be willing to devise together some hearty holy shout and try it out together before dismissing the meeting?

DAILY SCRIPTURE READINGS

SUNDAY: The need for confession and forgiveness/Isaiah 59:1-9, Romans 3:10-18

MONDAY: The promise of forgiveness/Jeremiah 31:34, Matthew 26:28, Ephesians 1:7

TUESDAY: Worship in spirit and truth/John 4:19-24

WEDNESDAY: The life of worship/Ephesians 5:18-20, Colossians 3:16-17

THURSDAY: The guidance of divine Providence/Genesis 24:1-21

FRIDAY: The joy of the Lord/2 Samuel 6:12-19

SATURDAY: Hallelujah!/Revelation 19:1-8