

Quick Survey: Can you name five spiritual disciplines?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

What do you believe is the most important discipline?

What do you believe is the purpose of spiritual disciplines?

The most common answers I receive are:

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A MODERN EVANGELICAL MOVEMENT

Richard Foster: *Celebration of Discipline*, written in 1978.

“In 2004, When I first began writing in the field in the late 70s and early 80s the term “Spiritual Formation” was hardly known, except for highly specialized references in relation to the Catholic orders.”

“Your perspective will influence your purpose.”

REFORMED VIEW OF SANCTIFICATION:

Justification and sanctification are by _____.

Galatians 3:2-3: *Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*

The 1689 Second London Baptist Confession holds that believers and *“...their ability to do good works is not at all of themselves, but wholly from the Spirit of Christ.”*

The Westminster Shorter Catechism states, *“...for we are not sanctified, except by faith uniting us to Christ.”*

WSC continues,

The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching, of the Word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.

The Belgic Confession of the Reformed Faith states,

Therefore it is impossible that this holy faith can be unfruitful in man; for we do not speak of a vain faith, but of such a faith which is called in Scripture a “faith working through love”, which excites man to the practice of those works which God has commanded in His Word.

Therefore we do good works, but not to merit by them (for what can we merit?); nay, we are indebted to God for the good works we do, and not He to us, since it is He who “worketh in us both to will and to work, for his good pleasure.”

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES: REJECTED BY THE REFORMERS

Martin Luther in *Tabletalk*, 1626 AD:

Yet all these seeming holy actions of devotion ...are nothing else but works of the flesh. All manner of religion, where people serve God without his Word and command, is simply idolatry, and the more holy and spiritual such a religion seems, the more hurtful and venomous it is; for it leads people away from the faith of Christ, and makes them rely and depend upon their own strength, works, and righteousness. In like manner, all kinds of orders of monks, fasts, prayers, hairy shirts ...are mere works of the flesh.

John Calvin in the Acts of the Council of Trent wrote:

In short, I affirm, that not by our own merit but by faith alone, are both our persons and works justified; and that the justification of works [sanctification] depends on the justification [forensic] of the person, as the effect on the cause.

Calvin’s point is that we are both _____ and _____ by faith alone.

D.A. Carson:

It is not helpful to list assorted Christian responsibilities and label them spiritual disciplines. That seems to be the reasoning behind the theology that smuggles in, say, creation care and almsgiving. But by the same logic, if out of Christian kindness you give a back rub to an old lady with a stiff neck and a sore shoulder, then back rubbing becomes a spiritual discipline.

Carson, D.A. *Themelios*, Volume 36, Issue 3, 378.

...some of these so-called spiritual disciplines are entirely divorced from any specific doctrine whatsoever...they are merely a matter of technique. That is why people sometimes say, “For your doctrine, by all means commit yourselves to evangelical confessionalism. But when it comes to the spiritual disciplines, turn to Catholicism or perhaps Buddhism.

Carson, D.A. *Themelios*, Volume 36, Issue 3, 378.

Dr. Carson concludes that this type of teaching, “... subtly cajoles us into thinking that growth in spirituality is a function of nothing more than conformity to the demands of a lot of rules, of a lot of obedience.”

R. Scott Clark:

Christians without conscious confessional commitments or an intentional awareness of the Reformation tend to be rootless. Lacking a tradition of piety of their own they drift from one new thing to the next or borrow eclectically from this tradition and that like three-year olds playing dress up. When those who identify with aspects of Reformed theology however, borrow “spiritual disciplines” that the Reformed churches considered and rejected they are unintentionally creating the pre-conditions for greater problems.

Blog: *On Good Intentions, Spiritual Disciplines, and Christian Freedom*

HISTORY OF THE RISE OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

THE COUNTER REFORMATION

Ignatius of Loyola:

- He founded a group called the Jesuits (also known as the Society of Jesus).
- Most of Ignatius’ writings were attacks against the protestant teachings of Luther and Calvin.
- Ignatius is most famous for his book *The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola* (composed 1522–1524).

17th Century:

- Puritans – first protestant group to integrate

Pastor and American church historian Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe observed:

*Puritans knew and used classic Catholic devotional works. The most popular, judging from the number of editions, were the works of St. Augustine, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas à Kempis’s perennial *The Imitation of Christ*, and the primers...It was not unheard of for a Protestant to pirate the work of a Catholic writer and present himself as the author...Perhaps most important,*

excerpts and phrases from medieval classics and Church Fathers worked their way silently into Protestant devotional manuals, sermons, and treatises and so were passed on to the laity.

The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England

The church historian Richard Lovelace wrote:

It is not surprising that [some] Puritan writings are saturated with references to patristic authors. There are more references to the fathers than to Luther and Calvin. Puritanism is thus a bridge movement in which modern evangelicals and Roman Catholics may find spiritual common roots. Cotton Mather's omnivorous spiritual appetite smuggled in many Catholic devices: short ejaculatory prayers, vows and intentions of piety, and day- and night-long vigils (depriving one's sleep).

Lovelace believes that many of the practices we have today originated from Puritan theology.

Modern evangelical spirituality has retained many instruments pioneered during this era. The "quiet time" at the outset of the day springs directly from the Scripture reading and reflection prescribed for Puritan laity. The Puritans added graces at meals, prayer with spouses, and household devotions at the evening meal. Beyond this they recommended continual short prayers during the day, and also "occasional reflections"—mystical insights drawn from the symbolic meaning of events and objects, a devotion tracing back to the medieval Victorine theologians. Puritans invented the use of spiritual diaries as a kind of Protestant substitute for the confessional.

18th Century:

- Jonathan Edward
 - Example: Resolutions
- John and Charles Wesley

Methodist professor Randy Maddox wrote in *Christianity Today* that John Wesley:

...championed pursuit of holiness through spiritual disciplines, typically describing the Christian's goal as "perfect love." Simultaneously, he issued denials of any "perfect" holiness in this life.

19th Century:

- Charles Finney: _____ of Modern Revivalism

In his systematic theology, Finney asks, "Does a Christian cease to be a Christian, whenever he commits a sin?" He answers,

Whenever he sins, he must, for the time being, cease to be holy...The Christian, therefore, is justified no longer than he obeys, and must be condemned when he disobeys; or Antinomianism is true...In these respects, then, the sinning Christian and the unconverted sinner are upon precisely the same ground.

- Billy Sunday
- D.L. Moody

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES: MODERN-DAY INFLUENCERS

Richard Foster:

- Quaker writer and theologian
- Famous book: *Celebration of Discipline*, 1978
- This book was the cause of the modern rise of spiritual disciplines

Quotes from Celebration of Discipline:

“Today it is a rare person who has not heard the term. Seminary courses in Spiritual Formation proliferate like baby rabbits.”

“...inner righteousness is a gift from God to be graciously received. The needed change within us is God’s work, not ours.”

“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.”

Roman Catholic Influence:

- _____

“Seek to live the experience, remembering the encouragement of Ignatius of Loyola to apply all our senses to our task.”

- Thomas Merton:
 - 20th century theologian
 - Famously known as a Trappist monk in Gethsemani, KY
 - 70 books on the subject of spirituality
 - Merton’s autobiography *The Seven Storey Mountain*, 1948

Foster, in an attempt to encourage the Roman Catholic concept of meditation, points his readers to Merton’s writings:

Thomas Merton writes that the person, “who has meditated on the Passion of Christ but has not meditated on the extermination camps of Dachau and

Auschwitz has not yet fully entered into the experience of Christianity in our time.

- Henri Nouwen:
 - Known for teaching that God is already within every human

“The God who dwells in our inner sanctuary is the same as the one who dwells in the inner sanctuary of each human being.”

Foster on Nouwen’s theology of meditation in the opening quote of his book on *The Discipline of Solitude*:

Henri Nouwen has noted that,

“...without solitude it is virtually impossible to lead a spiritual life.” Why is this so? Because, in solitude, we are freed from our bondage to people and our inner compulsions, and we are freed to love God and know compassion for others.

J.I Packer in Don Whitney’s book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*:

Ever since Richard Foster rang the bell with his Celebration of Discipline (1978), discussing the various spiritual disciplines has become a staple element of conservative Christian in-talk in North America. This is a happy thing.

DALLAS WILLARD:

- Influenced both Foster and Whitney

Willard in *The Spirit of the Disciplines*:

I want to explain, with some precision and detailed fullness, how activities such as solitude, silence, fasting, prayer, service, celebration— disciplines for life in the spiritual kingdom of God and activities in which Jesus deeply immersed himself— are essential to the deliverance of human beings from the concrete power of sin and how they can make the experience of the easy yoke a reality in life. By focusing on the whole of Christ’s life and the lives of many who have best succeeded in following him, I will outline a psychologically and theologically sound, testable way to meet grace and fully conform to him.

Willard in *Spiritual Formation: What it is, and How it is Done* (dwillard.org):

Sometimes we think of spiritual formation as formation by the Holy Spirit. Once again: That’s essential. . . . But now I have to say something that may be challenging for you to think about: Spiritual formation is not all by the Holy Spirit. . . . We have to recognize that spiritual formation in us is something that

is also done to us by those around us, by ourselves, and by activities which we voluntarily undertake . . . There has to be method.

DON WHITNEY:

- *Most famous book: Spiritual Disciplines For The Christian Life.*
- Claims to hold a Reformed view of spiritual Disciplines
- Influence of both Foster's and Willard's writings are very evident in Whitney's theology

"I will maintain that the only road to Christian maturity and Godliness passes through the practice of the Spiritual Disciplines." *Spiritual Disciplines For The Christian Life*, 16-17

Whitney's list of disciplines is very similar to what we have already seen in Foster and Willard:

This book examines the Spiritual Disciplines of Bible intake, prayer, worship, evangelism, service, stewardship, fasting, silence and solitude, journaling, and learning. This is by no means, however, an exhaustive list of the Disciplines of Christian living. A survey of other literature on this subject would reveal that confession, accountability, simplicity, submission, spiritual direction, celebration, affirmation, sacrifice, 'watching,' and more also qualify as Spiritual Disciplines. - Spiritual Disciplines For The Christian Life

Whitney:

And so, the urgent question every Christian should ask is, "How then shall I pursue holiness, the holiness without which I will not see the Lord? How can I become more like Jesus Christ?" We find a clear answer in 1 Timothy 4:7: "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (NASB). In other words, if your purpose is godliness — and godliness is your purpose if you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, for He makes godliness your purpose — then how do you pursue that purpose? According to this verse, you "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness. - Spiritual Disciplines For The Christian Life

DAVID MATHIS:

- Executive Editor for Desiring God Ministries
- Book: *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus Through Spiritual Disciplines*
- Presents a mix of spiritual disciplines and means of grace

Mathis, in stating his purpose for the book, writes:

In particular, I am eager to help Christians young and old simplify their approach to their various personal habits of grace, or spiritual disciplines, by highlighting the three key principles of ongoing grace: hearing God's voice (his word), having his ear (prayer), and belonging to his body (fellowship).

Mathis continues:

Whatever the term, the key is that God has revealed certain channels through which he regularly pours out his favor. And we're foolish not to take his word on them and build habits of spiritual life around them.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES:

- *Recovering the Reformed Confession* – R. Scott Clark
- *Studies in Dogmatics: Faith and Sanctification* - G.C. Berkouwer
- *The Gospel Driven Life* – Michael Horton
- *Pilgrim's Guide to Rest* – Theocast
- "On Good Intentions, Spiritual Disciplines, and Christian Freedom" (Blog) - R. Scott Clark