

THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICES PART 1 - WHAT ARE THEY? WHY DO THEM? HOW SHOULD WE DO THEM?

From the community charter:

1. The Practices

- Prayer
 - i. 20 minutes total each day - divided into three sessions
- Fasting
 - i. Our fast is 24 hours without food (water is OK).
 - 1. This is a day we designate to fast from food and feast on God.
 - ii. One fast every other week.
- Silence/solitude
 - i. One 60-minute period each week alone with the Spirit in a quiet place
 - 1. This is set aside time for an appointment where we give God our undivided attention.
 - 2. Stillness and quiet is the goal. Not a time of reading or study.
 - 3. It is a time of prayer, in the sense of conversation, but mostly it's a time of learning to listen to God.
- Scripture Study
 - i. 60 minutes of individual study throughout the week
- Self-control
 - i. No more than one hour daily (on average) of non-essential digital media, electronics, screens, phone use. (Essential use consists of work or communication.)
- Confession of Sin
 - i. A 30-minute biweekly session with a partner
 - ii. Followed by: A laying on of hands and prayer for the person confessing
- Celebration/Community
 - i. A once a month gathering for a celebratory meal and fellowship at our place!

INTRODUCTION TO THE CURRICULUM

“A practical guide for spiritual transformation”

Discuss this:

Why “a practical guide for spiritual transformation” needed?

Discuss this:

What was the comparison of Dallas Willard/N.T. Wright and Martin Luther that was discussed?

The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. John 6:63.

Discuss this:

Has anyone tried out Enduring Word Bible Commentary?

Listening vs study, what is the difference?

THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICES – WHAT ARE THEY?

Discuss this:

Dallas Willard says that a spiritual practice is “an activity that is in our power and enables us to achieve by grace what we cannot achieve by direct effort.”

- Piano example

Discuss this:

What are some spiritual practices that are not included in the community charter?

THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICES – WHY DO THEM

1. The Christian life

Spiritual practices
not helpful

a. The New Birth/Regeneration/Adoption/Justification

- i. This is the START of the Christian life.
- ii. Includes
 - 1. Forgiveness
 - 2. The receiving of the gift of the Holy Spirit
- iii. Does adoption/forgiveness depend on our efforts? Can the spiritual practices help bring these about?

Discuss this:

The teachers of the law in Jesus's day were diligent in keeping the spiritual practices. However, the practices did not benefit them. Why is that?

Spiritual practices helpful

b. Sanctification/growth/transformation

- i. This is the REST of the Christian life
- ii. Discuss this:
 - ii. What two-fold role does sanctification play in the Christian life:
 - 1. ?
 - 2. ?
- iii. Growth in Christ depends on our efforts, as well as God's activity in our lives.
 - 1. ***Make every effort...to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. Heb 12:14***
 - 2. *I want to know Christ, to know the power of his resurrection and sharing his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, **but I press on to make it my own**, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and **straining forward** to what lies ahead, **I press on** toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3: 10-14*
 - 3. *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore, I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. **No, I strike a***

blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Discuss this:

“Grace is not opposed to effort; it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action.” said Dallas Willard

Prior to the new birth, is real human improvement possible?

After the new birth, is real human improvement possible?

- What makes the difference?

Discuss this:

How does the Bible use wind and fire to signify the work of the Holy Spirit?

Discuss this:

“Grace perfects nature” as Aquinas observed. He said, “grace does not destroy nature, but fulfills its potential.”

Discuss this:

Dallas Willard “It is not sinners who use up grace, it is saints. Saints burn it up at astonishing rates, like a commercial airliner going through jet fuel.” “Even if we had never sinned, we would still need grace.”

Our effort AND God’s action working together:

*His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, **so that through them you may participate in the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption in the World caused by evil desires. For this very reason, **make every effort** to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. 2 Peter 1:3-7*

Discuss this:

Why doesn’t God just snap his fingers and turn us into perfect Christians? Why does sanctification require effort on our part?

Discuss this:

Why are the practices necessary in Christian growth?

“This kind can come out only by prayer and fasting.” Mark 9:29

“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Matthew 26:14

Discuss this:

Why are preparatory efforts necessary on our part in order for us to succeed in critical moments of testing?

Discuss this:

Why is it significant that the spiritual practices involve our whole person (the body, the will, the emotions, etc), instead of just involving the mind?

Discuss this:

Why the practices must be a regular, ongoing part of our Christian life?

THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICES – HOW TO DO THEM

Discuss this:

We discussed common pitfalls with the practices. What are some of these?