

The Spiritual Disciplines: Door to Liberation

Open: When you hear the words “spiritual disciplines,” what comes to mind? Do they produce primarily negative or positive feelings? Why?

Some Preliminaries:

1. Richard Foster begins the first chapter of his book *Celebration of Discipline* with this observation: “Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant gratification is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people or gifted people, but for deep people” (p. 1).
 - a. Do you agree or disagree with this assessment?
 - b. What are some examples of superficiality in our culture? In church? In your life?
2. “Those who have heard the distant call of deep within and who desire to explore the world of the Spiritual Disciplines are immediately faced with two difficulties. The first is philosophic. The materialistic base of our age has become so pervasive that it has given people grave doubts about their ability to reach beyond the physical world” (Ibid., p. 2).
 - a. Read Psalm 42:1-2. Have you ever had such a longing for God?
 - b. Have you ever wondered why you don’t long for God like this?
 - c. What do you think of Foster’s observation about the materialistic base of our age inhibiting us from reaching beyond the physical world?

Reality of Sin

1. Sin is more than individual acts of disobedience to God. While this is true, Scripture goes much further (Rom. 3:9-18; 7:5ff; Isa. 57:20). How do these Scriptures describe sin?
2. How do we typically address sin in our lives? Read Col. 2:20-23. What does Paul call outward forms of controlling sin? What generally happens when we attempt to control sin by sheer will power?

Enter the Spiritual Disciplines

1. Read Romans 5:17. What implications flow out of the statement: “the free gift of righteousness?”
2. How do we receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness?
3. “The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us” (Foster, p. 7).
4. Turning the Disciplines into leads to, not spiritual life, but spiritual death.

Looking Ahead

1. The first Discipline we'll explore (and practice) together is Meditation.
2. Some passages that talk about intentional reflection on God and His word in light of our circumstances (Psa. 1:2; 119:97,101,102,148; Gen. 24:63).
3. To prepare for this discipline, read Psalm 8. Try to memorize this psalm or at least become very familiar with it. Spend some time thinking about some of its key phrases "When I consider your heavens." "What is humankind that you are mindful of them?" Try keeping a journal of your insights and impressions during times of thinking about God, your life, your world. The assumption is that God engages us as we open our hearts to his presence.