

**Celebration of Discipline**  
The Discipline of Study  
(Excerpts from Richard Foster)

**The Purpose**

1. The purpose of the Spiritual Disciplines is the total transformation of the person. They aim at replacing old destructive habits of thought with new life-giving habits. Nowhere is this purpose more clearly seen than in the Discipline of Study.
2. The apostle Paul tells us that we are transformed through the renewal of the mind (Rom. 12:2). The mind is renewed by applying it to those things that will transform it (Phil. 4:8). Therefore, we should rejoice that we are not left to our own devices but have been given this means of God's grace for the changing of our inner spirit.
3. Jesus made it unmistakably clear that the knowledge of the truth will set us free (John 8:32). Good feelings, ecstatic experiences or "getting high on Jesus" will not free us. Without a knowledge of the truth, we will not be free.

**What is Study?**

1. Study is a specific kind of experience in which through careful attention to reality the mind is enabled to move in a specific direction. Remember, the mind will always take on an order conforming to the order upon which it concentrates.
2. Perhaps we observe a tree or read a book. We see it, feel it, understand it, and draw conclusions from it. As we do, our thought processes take on an order conforming to the order in the tree or book. When this is done with concentration, perception, and repetition, ingrained habits of thought are formed.
3. The Old Testament instructed the Israelites to a regular exposure to God's instructions (Deut. 11:18). The purpose of this instruction is to direct the mind repeatedly and regularly toward certain modes of thought about God and human relationships.
4. What we study determines the kind of habits that are formed in the mind, which is why Paul urges us to focus on things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and gracious.

**The Difference Between Study and Meditation**

1. The process that occurs in study should be distinguished from meditation. Meditation is devotional; study is analytical. Meditation will relish a word; study will explicate it.
2. Although study and meditation often overlap, they constitute two distinct experiences. Study provides a certain objective framework within which meditation can successfully function.

## **Four Steps**

1. Repetition—repetition regularly channels the mind in a specific direction. This is why the issue of television programming is so important. With innumerable murders being portrayed each evening on prime time TV, the repetition alone trains the inner mind in destructive thought patterns.
2. Concentration—concentration focuses the attention on what is being studied. We live in a culture that does not value concentration. Distraction is the order of the day. Some will read a book and watch TV at the same time. Most people find it virtually impossible to go through an entire day focusing on a single thing.
3. Comprehension—comprehension focuses on the knowledge of the truth. All of us have had the experience of reading something over and over and then, all of the sudden, we understand what it means. This “eureka” experience of understanding catapults onto a new level of growth and freedom.
4. Reflection—reflection defines the significance of what we are studying. Reflection brings us to see things from God’s perspective.

## **An Essential Quality**

1. It soon becomes obvious that study demands humility. Study simply cannot happen until we are willing to be subject to the subject matter. We must submit to the system. We must come as student, not teacher. Arrogance and a teachable spirit are mutually exclusive.
2. All of us know persons who parade their information in an offensive manner. We should feel profound sorrow for such people. They do not understand the Spiritual Discipline of Study. They have mistaken the accumulation of information for knowledge. They equate the spouting of words with wisdom. How tragic!

## **Study of Books**

1. Three intrinsic rules.
  - a. Understanding of the book—what is the author saying?
  - b. Interpreting the book—what does the author mean?
  - c. Evaluating the book—is the author right or wrong?
2. Three extrinsic rules
  - a. Experience—experience is the only way we can interpret and relate to what we read.
  - b. Other books—books often have meaning only when they are read in relation to other writings.
  - c. Live discussion—live discussion refers to the ordinary interaction that occurs among human beings as they pursue a particular course of study.

## **Non-Verbal Books**

1. We now come to the least recognized but perhaps the most important field of study: the observation of reality in things, events, and actions.
2. Pay attention to nature—the mysteries of God often are experienced there, like the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly.
3. Observe relationships. Observe how we relate in these relationships. What controls us? Where do we need transformation?
4. We also need to study institutions, cultures, and events of our time.