

The 12 Spiritual Disciplines: Essential Tools for Spiritual Growth

The spiritual disciplines are means by which individuals and communities can very literally “practice” their faith. They are tools by which Christians seek to know God, yield to the Holy Spirit’s sanctifying power, and surrender to the Divine Will in their lives. The disciplines can be instrumental tools as we seek to “tune” ourselves to God’s desires and see his kingdom as he sees it. These holy actions have been practiced by believers since the earliest times, and are firmly rooted in Christ’s commands and examples in the Gospels.

Author and pastor **Richard Foster identifies 12 crucial spiritual disciplines**. These are further organized into sections: inward, outward, and corporate practices.

Disciplines of Personal Development (Inward)

- Prayer – communicating with God (Matt. 6:9)
- Meditation – focusing on God and his will (Phil. 4:8)
- Fasting – a reminder of the source of all nourishment (Luke 5:35)
- Study – careful attention to the reality that God reveals to us, especially through Holy Scripture (Luke 2:46)

Disciplines of Service to the Body of Christ (Outward)

- Simplicity – seeking God’s Kingdom first (Matt. 6:33)
- Submission – placing God’s will above one’s own (Luke 22:42)
- Solitude – withdrawing from the world to spend time with God (Matt. 14:23)
- Service – supportive action toward others (Mark 10:45)

Disciplines of Service with the Body of Christ (Corporate)

- Confession – acknowledging one’s sin with and to others in the community of faith (James 5:16)
- Guidance – giving and receiving direction from others along the journey with Jesus (Acts 15:8)
- Celebration – taking joy in what God has done (1 Cor 5:8)
- Worship – giving God glory through attitudes and actions (1 Cor. 14:26)

The disciplines can help move our perspective from a naturalistic point of view to one that is more holy.

The Natural Man

- is ignorant of God's ways
- is arrogant concerning his place in the universe
- is busy making his own plans
- constantly invites noise into his life
- denies his sin
- is attracted to idols

All of this obstructs our view of Jesus, the one who is worthy of attention, honor, praise, and worship, because of who he is and what he has done.

The disciplines can help clear the path and bring us back into line-of-sight with the Savior.

The Disciplined Christian puts God in the highest place through worship...

The believer joins with others in praise and thanksgiving, placing Jesus in the supreme place of honor in his or her life.

Conclusion

These 12 spiritual disciplines help to combat the sinful nature and our naturalistic worldview. They can bring the believer into a mental, emotional, and spiritual state of higher awareness of God, his nature, and his kingdom. These tools are one way for individuals and communities to begin to bring their focus back to the Holy One and seek his will.

Examples of How Real Change Happens

The Disciplined Christian can know God's ways through study...

He or she spends time soaking in Scripture, becoming intimately familiar with its message, learning the history of God's church, and gaining understanding of the practical implications of theology.

The Disciplined Christian is reminded of the source of all blessing and sustenance through fasting...

Abstaining from food, time commitments and distractions, from anything that takes focus from Jesus brings clarity, focus, and humility.

The Disciplined Christian can slow down through simplicity...

Seeking the kingdom of God first ultimately causes the believer to cast aside anything that is not holy. The pursuit of wealth and power are the antithesis of the kingdom that Jesus models.

The Disciplined Christian can hear God's voice more clearly through solitude...

Alone time with God helps provide room for silence, waiting on God, and hearing the sometimes still, small voice of his Spirit.

The Disciplined Christian is grieved by sin through confession...

Personal and corporate confession provide a way to confront, admit, be convicted of, and deal with sin in the context of a supportive community and ministers of grace.