

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO

The

Spiritual Disciplines



PRACTICING THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES:

- Identify a discipline to incorporate into your life for a time.
- Seek and attend to God's presence in your practice.
- Pray (as you can).
- Engage with others about your experience: what is life-giving, what is hard, where do you see God?



OTHER RESOURCES FOR THE INNER JOURNEY

Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1978).

Margaret Silf, *Landmarks* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998).

Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1989).

AN INVITATION

We invite you to prayerfully engage with a discipline that stirs the depths of your being, whether it draws you in or repulses you; let all others fall to the side. Accompanying each discipline are suggested entry points, an offering to get you on your way.

For centuries, the Christian Church has been holding and embodying the simple teachings of Christ. Love and be loved. Be transformed to transform. The Spiritual Disciplines are then soul practices to nurture and guide the seeking sojourner in his or her lifelong pursuit of Christlikeness, of holiness.

As you engage in these acts of spiritual formation, seeking God along the way, may God gently nurture within you that primordial seed, and may you grow in ways that allow the Holy Spirit to flow through all of who you are in your living and loving, making this world a better place.

CONFESSION

Easy enough to make a cartoon of it (sitting in the little box with a screen between you and the priest), but that would be unfair to the tradition and to one's own struggle for life, not to mention unfair to the priest.

Perhaps better to think of confession as asking forgiveness, not only from God but, harder still, from the person whose wounded face you see before your very eyes.

And beyond that, granting forgiveness. Granting forgiveness might be the toughest thing and the greatest liberation of all. It's only when these difficult passages of forgiveness have been made that the next meaning of confession comes properly into focus. In the tradition, to confess also means to articulate, word and deed, what you believe - not just with your words but with your wallet and your body and your time. Confession can move its practitioner beyond avoidance and self-deception into the experience of a more authentic life.

IN SCRIPTURE:

James 5:13-16; John 8:1-11.

ENTRY POINTS INTO CONFESSION:

Live vulnerably. ●

Write a letter, one you can choose to send or not,
to an estranged acquaintance/friend/lover. ●

Open up. ●

If it's safe, take down *that* wall. Forgive. ●

Read John 8:1-11. Live what you hear in the passage. ●

Ask for forgiveness. Say "I'm sorry." ●

EVANGELISM

The Greek word from which our word "evangelism" comes literally means *the bringing of good news*. We all know what it is to share news-that-is-good, whether it be the birth of a baby, or a new vocation. However, when it comes to sharing the good news of our faith, we often find ourselves to be reluctant evangelists. Our reluctance often stems from a fear of a caricature of evangelism, one in which the good news is supplanted by a spirit of judgement and self-righteousness.

Exercising the discipline of evangelism means recovering the good news which is at the heart of the gospel, and discerning the ways of communicating it which honour and respect the hearer as much as it does the testifier.

In the Spiritual Discipline of Evangelism lies the ongoing invitation for practitioners to not simply hold beliefs, but to attend to the ways in which those beliefs flow into the world around them.

IN SCRIPTURE:

Acts 2:43-47; Luke 10:1-9.

ENTRY POINTS INTO EVANGELISM:

Truly listen to someone's story. ●

What colour do you see in the Gospels? ●
Bring more of that colour to this world.

Speak beauty where there is little. ●

Share your gifts with someone you love. ●

Illustrate what draws you to Christ. ●
Offer your illustration to those near you.

Invite someone over to break bread. ●

FASTING

It's about food and drink, yes, but not only that. Fasting is one of the practices of abstinence. Abstinence is a way of increasing awareness, appreciation, and insight.

Besides food and drink, there are other things from which one might choose to abstain for a season. For example, what of lying? We all project untruth or conceal truth many times every day - often scarcely aware of it, if aware at all. A fast from untruth, say every Wednesday in Lent between sun-up and sundown, brings to the surface the deceptions that work their way unobtrusively into a life.

As with all the Spiritual Disciplines, fasting puts one in closer touch with reality, and with the presence of God, and with the path of Jesus. Fasting can move its practitioner to a new appreciation for blessings that have been taken for granted and to a deeper solidarity with Jesus in the work of freedom, truth and love.

IN SCRIPTURE:

Luke 4:1-12; Matthew 6:16-18.

ENTRY POINTS INTO FASTING:

Let go of that app, that website, that magazine. ●

Feeling sedentary? Move. Feeling busy? Pause. ●

Disconnect. Turn *it* off. ●

Substitute a meal or two for time in prayer. ●

Give up gossip. Or complaining. Or lying. ●

Embrace frugality. ●

What do you crave? Can you surrender it? ●

PRAYER

"Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep....." For many of us raised in the Christian tradition, this is the first prayer which we were taught. Our teacher was usually a trusted parent. As we grow older, our child-like trust in the power of prayer often wanes and we become increasingly uncertain about the content of our prayers and what constitutes an answer to prayer.

In the 11th Chapter of Luke's gospel, Jesus' disciples see him in prayer and ask him to teach them how to pray. Jesus doesn't assume that because they have grown up in a prayer tradition that they would automatically have a prayer life. Rather, he welcomes their request and teaches them how to pray.

As inheritors of that teaching and the power that it can have in our lives and in the life of our community, prayer invites us into a living dialogue with the God who spoke to Abraham, who spoke to Jesus, and who still speaks today.

IN SCRIPTURE:

Ephesians 3:14-21; Luke 11:1-10.

ENTRY POINTS INTO PRAYER:

Write. Listen. Write. ●

Uncover a new (to you) way of praying. ●

Sit in a coffee shop. Ask God to move in what you hear. ●

Learn about the *Liturgy of the Hours*. Try it. ●

Talk to God during your drive, jog, or walk from A to B. ●

Read Scripture. Pause on a word/phrase that stands out. ●

Stay with that word/phrase throughout the day.

Try out sacredspace.ie (a website by Irish Jesuits). ●

SILENCE & SOLITUDE

“Be still, and know that I am God,” proclaims the Psalmist. The dual practices of silence and solitude create a sacred space through which God’s still, small voice is given the room to emerge from under the urban clutter of our frenetic anxieties and twitchy expectations.

But what to do with the pervasive sense of isolation and looming fear of loneliness that too often creep in, keeping us from encountering the holy through such disciplines? Well, for one, what if the key to leveraging these dimensions of our 21st century lives lies not in resisting these oft vilified realities, but in learning from their presence, peering headlong behind their veil?

Silence and solitude then invite practitioners to move *beyond*, to rediscover the infinite closeness of a God who is present, always, and alive, truly.

IN SCRIPTURE:

1 Kings 19:11-12; Psalm 46; Psalm 23.

ENTRY POINTS INTO SILENCE & SOLITUDE:

Limit your spoken words over a 24 hour period. ●

Watch the sunrise, on your own. ●

Light a single candle in a dark room. ●

Sit in God's presence.

Listen to your breathing/heartbeat. ●

Drive without the radio on. Live without the TV on. ●

List all the sounds you hear from your bedroom. ●

Surround yourself in silence for 5 minutes every day. ●

SIMPLICITY

Simplicity is the Spiritual Discipline of Enoughness. It's the practice of peeling back the layers, one by one by one, until all you have left is you. And God.

It is in that emerging nothingness that practitioners of simplicity uncover the everythingness of being loved and held by *Jehovah Jireh*, the God who provides.

The God who feeds the sparrows.

The God who clothes the lilies.

Have you ever stared into someone's eyes for an extended period of time? What you see there, in that moment, is what lies at the root of simplicity.

Simplicity then, spiritually, is a return to Eden - the daily abandon of the structures we erect to prop up our *raison d'être*. It is the Great Equalizer, and from its spring inescapably bursts forth a deeper understanding of *the other*. Of God.

IN SCRIPTURE:

Matthew 6:19-21, 25-33.

ENTRY POINTS INTO SIMPLICITY:

Breathe. Be. Walk. Dream. ●

Sit in the rain. Let it soak you. ●

What can't you live without? Try living without it. ●

Downsize (that closet, that latte, that budget). ●

Limit your power consumption. ●

Use and eat only what you need. ●

Sleep without your pillow. Or blanket. Or mattress. ●

With Love.



2062 Esquimalt Ave, West Vancouver, BC
wvuc.bc.ca & westvanyouth.com