

Maturing Toward Wholeness in the Inner Life

Chapter Eight

Spiritual Practices

Exercises for Inviting God's Healing Presence into My Inner Life

- 1 – Spiritual practices are exercises to facilitate spiritual growth. We learn them from Jesus and our Judeo-Christian fathers and mothers.
- 2 – Spiritual practices have been used for millennia—Abraham on a pilgrimage; Moses in the desert; David in the pasture; Jesus in the garden.
- 3 – Spiritual practices serve to
 - counteract the effects of our fallenness
 - open our lives to the healing, transforming Presence of God.
- 4 – Spiritual practices must be chosen voluntarily. They cannot be forced on me. What is forced on me by-passes my will—it is not really “me.”
- 5 – The healing and transformation of my person must be directed by my will—my choices. Re-forming my person begins with the re-forming of my will.
- 6 – Spiritual practices have no power at all to help me gain favor with God. They are like the exercises an athlete uses to train his or her body.
- 7 – We must avoid legalism at all costs—believing that doing a certain thing will make us more righteous before God. This is only self-reliance.
- 8 – I can do nothing to make myself more righteous before God except to rely continually on him as he transforms me. Jesus teaches me how.
- 9 – Spiritual practices have also been called “spiritual disciplines.” One protection against legalism—allow love to supersede the discipline.
- 10 – In love Jesus set aside the practice of Sabbath in order to heal. He interrupted times of solitude to respond to the needs of the crowds.
- 11 – Time-proven ways to open my inner life to God prevent him from only being an abstraction. He is calling me into a relationship of intimacy.
- 12 – It is tragic when God is only a concept, a theological proposition, a part of my upbringing, but I do not experience living in his Presence.
- 13 – When ways to invite God into my inner life are not being practiced, the dysfunctions that have negatively shaped me remain unaddressed.
- 14 – Resource books on spiritual practices: *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster and *The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard.

15 – There is no complete list of these practices, but it is helpful to group them into disciplines of

- abstinence
- engagement.

16 – Disciplines of abstinence are practices to weaken or break the power of habits that hinder or block my ability to live in God's Presence.

17 – Practices of abstinence are for emptying. Solitude, fasting, chastity are some examples. The Spirit removes the old and Christ's death works in me.

18 – Disciplines of engagement are practices to open my inner life more fully to God's Presence and support me as I learn how to live there 24/7.

19 – Practices of engagement are for filling. Study, celebration and prayer are some examples. The Spirit imparts the new and Christ's life works in me.

20 – What I do with my body affects my soul. Using my body to sin, I wound my soul. Using my body to place myself in God's Presence leads to healing within my soul.

21 – The parts of my being engaged:

- will—I choose to seek God
- body—I act on my choice with my body
- soul—I welcome God into my person.

22 – Solitude (abstinence)—I withdraw for a time from social contact, physical movement, and sounds, except perhaps the gentle sounds of nature.

23 – Solitude—Being still and quiet before God, I allow my soul to come to rest and clarity. I ask the Holy Spirit for healing insight and I obey.

24 – Solitude—In a way solitude is an entry point into other practices. A life ordered around listening to God will result in a heart of wisdom.

25 – Fasting (abstinence)—I refuse food for a time. This reinforces my ability to focus on God. I use each bodily impulse for food turns my thoughts to him.

26 – Fasting—I learn that I am not bound by the demands of my body. I do not have contempt for my body, but I discover its appropriate place in God.

27 – Fasting—Like other practices, fasting should begin in moderation and develop naturally. We can fast from things other than food—media, etc.

28 – Study (engagement)—I work to reshape my thinking. Old thought patterns rooted in unreality are harmful. I work to establish new ways of thinking. I prioritize the Bible.

29 – Study—I seek more than knowledge. When I don't understand something I don't rely only on my analytical mind. I ask the Spirit for insight.

30 – Study—I am discerning about Christian books. I gravitate toward classics of proven value over time. In new books I look for old wisdom.

31 – Study—Modern “wisdom” says read as many books as possible. The result can be much superficiality. It might be better to focus on proven texts and go deep.

32 – Study—I seek to go below the surface and enter into the author’s thought patterns. I ask “Where did he or she get that?” I ask God for wisdom.

33 – Celebration (engagement)—There is value in the parallel practice of abstinence and engagement. Celebration is a counterbalance to fasting.

34 – Celebration—If I am unable to celebrate, I may not yet be ready to fast. For centuries the church year has included both feasts and fasts.

35 – Celebration—Teresa of Avila expressed joy in both fasting and celebrating: When I fast, I fast; and when I eat partridge, I eat partridge.

36 – Focus and intensity, not compulsivity and heroics, are key in spiritual practices. I can’t have a shower with only one drop of water a minute.

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