

Spiritual Disciplines:

My experience with the Spiritual Disciplines:

My experience with the “spiritual disciplines” as Foster describe, has not been way different from what he narrates. I come from a background were the Spiritual Disciplines are basically: Pray, read the Bible, and go to church. I practiced them for years, but my heart was willing to hear from God. It took me years to realize what I was doing was not a “discipline” in a sense of doing so as an obligation but a need. Throughout the years, I have come to know myself and discover how each thing I do brings me closer to God.

It has not been so joyful sometimes. With the reading of the book and the materials from the class I have learn to actually “celebrate” the spiritual disciplines more than seeing them as something I have to do or something boring. I see them as a tool that allows me to grow and brings joy to my heart to put them into practice, but most of all, to allow me to feel God’s presence. Sometimes I do not feel it, but I keep trying until I get at least something from Him I can keep in my heart. I also have learned to appreciate tears, and not to remain sad but to come out in victory because I have poured out my heart to Him.

Here are the results applying 9 of the spiritual disciplines:

Meditation: The day of the retreat I had the opportunity to contemplate God’s creation while reading the Bible. I always try to connect every “discipline” with the reading of Scripture. I feel I listen from God that way (not saying is the only way though). I was reading several chapters of the New Testament, but I remembered one verse of the Old Testament: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” Psalm 19:1, immediately I started reading the chapter. I meditate on it and made it my own. I praised God through that Psalm, and I could feel in the wind how real He is and how He is with me in any place I am at.

Foster says meditating is to listen God's word, to reflect on His works, to rehearse God's deeds.¹ Is a "listen" in response to obey. There must be a willingness from my side to listen with that attitude, filling my mind with Scripture, with God. I did not hear an audible voice of Him that day, but I could feel His presence as if I was receiving a hug from my parents or someone I love. That day I could be with Him, saying nothing, just meditating on His word.

Prayer: I wish I could say I give myself continually to prayer because is not true. I try to do it every day, however, I do not. I do not like to come into repetitions where I am not really talking with God. Rather I am asking for things my heart is willing to receive, and this is not the kind of prayer that will lead me to grow spiritually. I have learned to pray in a way that I can pour out my heart to God, where I can express to Him how I feel and just to thank Him for the things He has done to me. This kind of prayer do not occur very often in my life. I met with some family friends to pray for the family, and I had one of those moments where I do feel I am connected to God while praying, I felt Him in a very strong way and I had a very uplifting moment that day that made me want more of Him because sometimes I do not separate enough time to do so. That is why I am still struggling with this discipline.

Fasting: This was the most difficult discipline I have ever tried. Since the last year I have been trying to do a fasting of solid food only, because I have never fasted before. In my life, fasting is not a common thing to do. I was taught that fasting needed a specific request to God or something specific I wanted Him to reveal to me, but I was not interested to even try it. Foster says that fasting must be centered on God and that it reveals the things that control us.² I think the reason why I was not strong enough to do a fasting of food was that somehow it controls me. I did a 2-day fasting, only drinking liquids and I could not focus because I was thinking about food. Thanks God I was able to complete it and I felt like I had conquered the world when I finished it. I also asked God for a job for those two days, and He responded giving me a few extra hours working at the school.

¹ Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2018. Pages 19-20

² Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. Page 67

I also practiced a different way of fasting. I closed my social media for one month because I think sometimes I depend so much on them since my friends and family are abroad. So, I feel I connect with them through social media, however, sometimes I get into the virtual world of having distant relationships while I do not focus on the ones I have around. During that period of time I had more time to read my Bible and do Homework.

Study: I like what Foster says about the discipline of studying “in the study of Scripture a high priority is placed upon interpretation: what it means. In the devotional reading of Scripture, a high priority is placed upon application: what it means for me.”³ This is one of my most common disciplines used in a daily basis. Actually, is the one I enjoy the most. I love studying the Bible, and I have learned to integrate study of the Bible with application. I like to learn the real meaning of the text, using the original languages and understanding the culture, the author, etc. For this assignment I chose 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy to study in depth, but only to study those two books. I used resources from the Library and I still felt I was finding some sort of application for my life.

Simplicity: Since I came to this country I realize there are several things I did not have before that has become a necessity in my life just because it is a necessity for the environment I am surrounded by. In Ecuador I had my car and I could go wherever I want but I used to walk too. In this country because of the cold or because no one wants to walk, it seems I got contagious and started to like good things, including driving to place to place. I decided one day walk back to ATS because material things were getting more important than God. The day before planning to walk because I had no car that day, no friend who could give me a ride and I had recently lost my job, so I could not afford an Uber. As an international student and cannot work outside campus and I was in despair. I walked to ATS with a friend with the desire in my heart of trusting God will make a way, and I shared this with my friend all the way there. And that day the dean told me he was going to try help me find a new job. I never asked for help, he came out of the blue saying he knew about my difficulties. Still, I did not find the job but I got the

³ Ibid. Page 85

assurance God will not abandon me while I live in the USA. He had provided every single thing I needed, and still does. Simplicity reminds me God is in control, not me. And reminds me to seek His kingdom first.

Submission: This is the most difficult discipline for me to practice. Foster says, “only in submission are we able to bring this spirit to a place where it no longer controls us.”⁴ Is a way to get rid from our self-will to accept God’s.

There was something going on in my life where I did not want to accept to be away from my home anymore. I decided to apply the discipline of submission while reading some Scripture and I felt like my burden was taken away. I need to practice this discipline more often though. Is one of those hard for me to do.

Service: My best friend Andrea got married recently, and since she is short of money as we all are, I promised her I will help in her wedding with everything she may need. The day of the wedding, at the reception, there was no people hired to serve, neither to do the dishes, so I did it. Some people looked at me like I was crazy since I was a guest, but I spend the whole reception cleaning dishes and serving food. To see my two friends smiling and not getting worried about anything was more gratifying for me than anything else. I could praise God while I was working on serving others and meditate on how good is to serve instead of being served. “When we choose to be a servant, we surrender the right to decide who and when we will serve. We become available and vulnerable.”⁵

Worship: In Ecuador, we never ever have snow. The day we had the first snowfall of the year here at Nyack, I was driving my friend’s car and went to Target to buy eggs and food for the week before returning her car. When I came out, everything was full of snow and of course I got trapped in the way back home. Took me 5 hours to get from Target to the Jaffray dorms from the School. I was freaking out since was my first time stuck on the snow, but I was listening to the K-love radio station and it happened

⁴ Ibid. Page 138

⁵ Ibid. 163

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that I heard the song: “my fear doesn’t stand a chance when I stand in your love”⁶ and I started praising and worshiping God. All the time I was stuck in the car I had an amazing time of worship. The result was an explicable joy in a day that for many was the worst. I also praised God nothing happened to me, neither to my friend’s car, but I really had so much joy that day feeling the love of the Father in the middle of something threatening to me.

Guidance: For me is very difficult to accept I can learn from others. I do not have any problem teaching or providing some sort of guidance to people around me. But most of the times I do not seek to people to learn from them. Foster talks about a “corporate guidance”⁷, and in this country I have found corporate guidance in a family that has adopted me while I live here. All the time I have difficulties I receive support from them, but to get to the point where we can share between each other, a lot of things needed to happen.

There was one day that I specifically had to travel to meet with them because I was going through very difficult moments: I had no money, I had to clean houses and that is something I had never done in my life because in my country I have someone to do it for me and I am dentist and do good money as a dentist. My grandmother, who is very close to me was dying and I felt I was not there with my family and my friends and I were distant because I did not want to be with anyone. God taught me those times I need from people to give me words for encouragement and that can pray with me. I learned how good could be to receive guidance from others and that there is always something new to learn.

My experience at the class retreat:

Several things were new for me at the retreat, one of them was the discipline of silence. Even though it was so hard to me to remain in silence, I tried my best to accomplish what we were doing, and I

⁶ Josh Baldwin song: “Stand in your love”

⁷ Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. Chapter 12

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was trying to get the best of every experience. I am not going to lie saying I was hundred percent concentrated, as a matter of fact, I wanted to laugh and make fun of everything. However, I realized this was a distraction from what we were doing. I tried so hard to listen what God has to say to me, but all I got was my worries about future, etc. I will try this discipline another time.

I really enjoyed worship time, it was refreshing. I went with very high expectations of what was going to happen there, and I think I met all of them. I really needed that extended worship time, specially the one we did during the night; that was my favorite because the environment was set in a way that I did not have to worry on how to worship my God. I did not have to worry about who was looking at me and what were other people doing or not. I was very focused on the lyrics praising God, worshiping Him and giving thanks for all things He has done to me. I felt each word coming out of my mouth and mind as if they were coming out from my heart.

I also liked that we got the chance to share in our small groups, sometimes I felt my small group is not quite sincere sharing, and that difficult my openness with them. (Like no one wants to truly open) But I think we have all connected very well and I find support in my new friendships. Since we kind of know one another, there is more confidence on what needs to be said in order to encourage one another.

In my solitude time, I got the chance to practice the discipline of meditation, explained above. I also included some worship and the reading of Scripture. I felt the conviction God was there I could feel His presence in a very strong way. I prepared myself for that retreat in every way possible, confessing whatever I had to confess and forgiving every person I needed to forgive. What I did not do was the fasting, because I forgot. But I did it after the retreat.

Before the retreat several things affected my personal life, I got tons of problems coming one after another, and I was quite unsure on going to the retreat. I only went because it was a requirement to pass the class and I do not regret. I had a very special moment with God and my classmates. And all of that came at the right time and moment of my life.

ATS.SF 503 Initiation in Spiritual Formation - Spiritual Disciplines Log Form:

DATE	SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE	HOW YOU PRACTICED THIS DISCIPLINE?	RESULTS
Sep. 19/18	Simplicity	Walking to ATS instead of asking a ride from Jaffray.	God responded through someone who had no idea what was happening in my life. I felt how God is with me, specially when I am willing to renounce to comfort and the easy lifestyle or abundance.
Oct. 1-4/18	Study	Study 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy	Regular practice, I always find something new when I study the Bible.
Oct. 24/18	Guidance	Met with my mentor to receive some sort of comfort in a difficult time	Confirmation from God of a decision I needed to make.
Oct. 25-26/18	Fasting	2 days of fasting. Only liquids were allowed.	Felt God was in control of the situation I was going through. Experienced support from friends.
Nov. 3/18	Meditation/ Solitude	Time of solitude while on retreat, awesome experience with nature and God. Meditating on Scripture.	Speaking truth from Scripture when I feel defeated or surrounded.
Nov. 15/18	Worship	Worship while trapped in the snow storm.	Found comfort in the midst of something threatening for me
Nov. 17/18	Service	Serving food and cleaning dishes at my best friend's wedding	Experienced joy serving instead of remaining seated. I felt useful and I got great satisfaction to see my friends happy that special day for them
Nov. 20/18	Prayer	Separated time to pray for the family	Poured out my heart to God in front of people I love but that I forgot were there at that place, it was a very uplifting moment from both sides.
Nov. 25/18	Submission	Submitted to God's will in my life to continue being separated from my family abroad	God's confirmation that I am doing the right thing.