

Assignment Title: LE3 Assessment Paper  
Which Spiritual Disciplines Can Deepen My Relationship with Christ?

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Campus Location: Online

Course Title: Initiation in Spiritual Formation: OA  
Course Number: SF503  
Semester & Year: Spring 2020  
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Date Submitted: 04/05/2020

When I reflect on the spiritual disciplines that I experienced this semester and especially the two silent retreats, I realized that there are disciplines that are almost second nature and others which feel like a struggle. I know that each of the disciplines that are outlined in the book, Celebration of Discipline by Richard J. Foster, are all very important and hold a great value and purpose in allowing God to speak into our lives, but because of the nature of who I am as a person I find it refreshing to be in silence and solitude; to study and meditate on God's word and to pray in solitude. These are the disciplines that I seek each morning and during the day when I can be out in nature.

The retreats were truly a unique and refreshing experience and they allowed me to focus on myself in a positive way, and to examine and reflect on who I believe I am and who I really am meant to be in Christ. Being a husband, father, pastor, student etc. can be overwhelming and at times it is easy to neglect the emotional, spiritual and even physical aspects of my health. There is a constant noise and an incessant need to fill each moment of the day with what appears to be important things to do or to consume. Silence was missing in my life, silence from music, people, opinions, background noise and even the silence of technology. Admittedly, my initial reaction to the retreats was one of inexplicable anxiety and I found myself in a moment of fear. It was an odd feeling that really made no sense at all, but as I worked through the two books for our retreats I noticed that there were a lot of negative misconceptions about myself that were still plaguing my mind, and I don't think that I wanted to really face them alone. I prayed before each of my retreats and realized that I was not alone and not only was I not alone, but it was not my job to fix myself. All I needed to do was leave myself in God's hands and let Him do the work that needed to be done in my life and in the time that He appointed it to be done. This was

the first step in submitting to God and initially it seemed very scary, there are moments when I feel my “false- self” rearing its ugly head and wanting to take back control of my life. During the second of the two retreats I initiated a fast which physically made me irritable and impatient, but after a few hours I realized that those initial symptoms seemed to subside after drinking water and it allowed me to have a deeper focus on what I was studying and praying about during the retreat. Fasting was not a discipline that I was familiar with in spiritual development and I honestly only fasted when I was required too for medical tests.

The simplicity that I found being away from home led me to an understanding that my life needed to be less chaotic. There are things in my home that I know that I neither need or use and it is time to re-evaluate what is truly important and what I can live without. My father had a saying that he passed on to his children and it went like this: when you go out to buy something ask yourself a couple of questions. Do you really need this item, or do you want this item? If it is something that you want can you live without it? Of course, if you need it then get something of good quality that will last and that you can use for a long period of time. My father passed on that advice from his grandmother and it is something that stuck in our family. Determining what we “need” and what we “want” in society today can be confusing. I realized that de-cluttering my life allows me to spend less time looking for things that I own, it allows a sense of order and peace and there is less time spent on acquiring and taking care of things and more time to be cognizant of the experiences that really matter in life.

Stepping into the role of a pastor these few years has led me to study, meditate and pray more than I ever did before in my life. There is a gravity to the role of serving other people and

too doing it well with love and care. Sunday worship is of course one of the main corporate disciplines that we experience each week and there is a tendency to lose the awe and wonder of worship and find it a tedious or even a contentious endeavor that must be accomplished each week. It can be easy to lose sight of why we are at church because there is too much concern for how everything looks or sounds or what new technique or fad needs to be tried or tested. One of the benefits of the pandemic that we are living through is that people are missing church. That may sound strange, but what I mean is that there is a new appreciation for Sunday worship (or whatever other day you may worship). It has taught us to look with a lens of appreciation rather than criticism. It has also shown many of us who have been long time Christians the importance of our relationships with not only our biological families but our church families as well. We also learn to rely less on buildings and places of worship and focus more on the relationships we develop in worship first and foremost with God and then with our neighbor.

The discipline of service is one that many people (including myself) really gravitate and latch on to because it is a discipline that we feel we can control and can give us tangible results. When we feed and clothe the poor or support a mission that helps others it gives us a sense of accomplishment. It allows us to put our faith into concrete action and show our neighbor that we have compassion and love because we are loved by God. Again, this pandemic has amplified the need for service more than ever in our modern history. It is refreshing to see the importance of those whose efforts usually go unnoticed or unappreciated; the cleaning crews (janitors, custodians, etc.), the nurses, the teachers, doctors, police officers, sanitation workers, the delivery workers and the store clerks that are on the frontline of serving their communities. We take many people for granted because we think that service is something that must have a major

impact or result. It is the smile, the encouraging word, the phone call to say hello or the note that tells someone that we are thinking of them that can make all the difference in a persons' life. It may be the silver lining in an otherwise difficult time. It has shown me the importance of people and services that I know that I took for granted.

Moving forward I realize that there are a lot of benefits to practicing spiritual disciplines. The moments that I take to separate myself from the necessary daily routines that can sometimes become overwhelming or even overbearing are moments to listen and recognize that God is not only alive but wants to have a deeper relationship with me. These are times when He can finally have my undivided attention. It can be easy to drift away from God even when we think that we are ministering and doing His work. More important than the work is the relationship that we have with Jesus Christ; with Jesus in our lives the ministry and work (despite obstacles) becomes second nature. Loving God allows us to love ourselves and in turn love our neighbors; but how can we love someone we don't spend time with, or listen too, or become intimately involved with throughout our days? Experiencing the spiritual disciplines in a methodic and practical way opens me up to experience a real relationship with Jesus. A relationship that is not confined to a church building or to a moment or two during the day but a relationship that penetrates to the parts of myself that I don't even care to see.

## SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES LOG REPORT FORM

ATS.SF503 – Initiation in  
Spiritual Formation

Date	Spiritual Discipline	How you practiced this discipline (Foster & Helmers' book)	Results
01/31/2020	Solitude	24 hours	Centeredness, focus, a clarity of mind that allowed me to meditate on scripture and how it impacts both my spiritual development but also my emotional strongholds
01/31/2020	Silence	24 hours	Focus, A spirit willing to listen and to examine the deeper emotional and spiritual blocks that hinder my growth
03/20/2020	Fasting	12 hours	Irritability, exhaustion, awareness of the physical dependency of food, a strange clarity of mind and a lightness in my body.