

Brandon Alicea
SF503 Initiation in Spiritual Formation
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Spiritual Disciplines

Progressively throughout this semester, we have been charged with taking reflecting on the disciplines and applying them to our day to day lives. Throughout Fosters *Celebration of Discipline*, we can see a foundation for how we can apply these disciplines in our lives and in our relationship with God. As I focused on the different spiritual differences throughout the semester, I have truly found freedom in my worship and in the way that I live and the things that I prioritize. Things that I focused on before are no longer things that I prioritize now. The disciplines illustrated in Fosters book have allowed me to reflect on my own life and have challenged the way that I think, implicitly and explicitly.

The Discipline of Meditation:

The first discipline that I have focused on is the first discipline that Foster introduces and like he mentions, it was strange and uncomfortable to me because of the misconception of how it is used in our society. Foster defines meditation as a form contemplative prayer or prolonged prayer. Throughout the semester, I was able to cultivate this sense of prolonged prayer on a variety of assignments and readings. One moment that comes to mind my meditation on Genesis and how God intended the world to be like. Reflecting on the “imago dei” and being created in God’s image, Gen 1:27, and how could I help institute a sense of reverting back to what we were called to live like before the fall. This situation directly connects with the ministry that I am involved with in my community in the South Bronx and being God’s hand and feet on this Earth. I have been charged meditation and have continued to meditate progressively on the ideas of reverting back to Eden one small step at a time.

Within my meditation, my focus has been to just listen. I have consistently received intense imagery throughout this prolonged prayer and have always been overwhelmed with gratitude. Foster suggests that we can descend with the mind into the heart most easily through the imagination (pg 20). I have interpreted this to mean that through our ability to connect image with action, we can effectively turn our meditation into preparation.

Discipline of Prayer

The discipline of prayer was something that I struggled with before taking Spiritual Formation and it was because I found it difficult to focus with all the distractions that were present in my life. I was charged with addressing those things on my retreats, specifically my first retreat. On my first silent retreat, I was able to eliminate all distractions and focus on what God had been calling my attention towards. Primarily focusing on prayer and fasting my first trip, I was able to identify what my issues were. I had been going out of my way to continue to have a presence in this world on social media, within the workplace, and even in the church to an extent. Providing an obscene amount of attention to things that do not matter and neglecting spiritual growth and communion with God. The charge that I was faced with when focusing on this discipline was that I was called to listen and not act immediately, which was quite difficult. In my time of silence and intentional prayer, I was able to realize that I was not being a good steward of my time or my energy. I was able to recognize relationships and certain things constantly withdrawing and rarely depositing. After coming from back from my first retreat, I was able to limit what I was subscribed to and revamp a more intentional relationship with God through a constant, healthy flow of prayer. One thing that I have noticed throughout my prayer life increasing is that I have felt an abundance of peace in my day to day that was not as consistent as it is now.

Discipline of Fasting:

If I am being honest with myself, I have not had a healthy fasting life. I refuse to blame the church or the congregation or not helping me learn how to fast in a healthy and positive way. Fasting for me looked to be more about will power than actual prayer. Understanding fasting within scripture, it was done for spiritual purposes to strengthen your focus of living a God centered life. Throughout the semester, I have been able to discern that fasting was not a way to for me to illustrate God's favor over my life but to cultivate the same humility that God has called us to live. Fasting enables us to receive a sense of great peace within our lives and within ourselves. I have been able to cultivate that when I am led to fasting and have been able to feel when I am called to fast.

Discipline of Simplicity:

Matthew 6:19-21 is where I go to now when I think of the discipline of simplicity. The stronger my connection grows with the Lord, the more my interests, desires, and ideologies align with His. Matthew 6 speaks on the treasure of the earth and how they are temporary treasures and how we need to focus on more permanent treasures that are in heaven. It speaks about how wherever you are your desires lie, so does your heart and I find this to be true. Throughout this semester, I have been able to reflect on the desires of my heart and the direction that my spirit is pulling me. At first, they did not align but as the idea of simplicity became more relevant in my life, my ideologies shifted in a positive way. I have been progressively been shaping my interest to align with heavenly things so that it is evident that my heart lies with where God is.

Discipline of Solitude:

Solitude has been one of the disciplines that I have been reluctant because, for me, this discipline does not come naturally. However, being able to separate myself to connect on a more

spiritual level with God has been one of the most beneficial experiences that I have encountered. My prior experiences with retreats have always been group retreats and I have always been able to provoke the presence of God within the groups we were in and it was natural because we are called to fellowship. Solitude for me was daunting because I believed that if I were by myself, I would hear things that I would not want to hear. Constantly filling my time with people and places, and often running on fumes from a lack of rest is what my day to day looked like before my retreats. Sometimes I used to serve just to serve because it looked like something Christ would have done and not being specifically called to it. With me constantly being on the go, I was not able to stop and listen to the direction of which I am being called to. Cultivating this solitude, I have been able to rectify that and move with purpose.

Discipline of Confession:

The discipline of confession has been a crippling task. The embarrassment that comes with not fully living as God has called us to live has always been difficult to live with. In fact, it was something that I would be fearful of. I would often put my head in the sand and not want to talk about it and as a result lose that peace that came with my connection with God. It would grow and push me further away from relationship with God. At the beginning of this semester, a newer member of my church had been able to connect for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic and we were able to speak on things that have helped us strengthen our sense of peace. One thing that he had mentioned was the amount of openness and transparency with the Lord has helped him with his daily peace and I was immediately charged with that. The idea of confession pairs with forgiveness, which was foreign to me. The consequence for action typically requires payment but what we receive is an abundance of grace.

Discipline of Submission:

Tying into confession, submission has also been a discipline that I have to be intentional about. Since the beginning of the semester, I have been able to identify what submission for me looks like. Identifying that I must submit schedule to Him and understanding that I have not been able to manage my schedule efficiently, I was led to submit my schedule to Him. I was led to incorporate time for prayer in fasting on a daily and weekly basis, time to disciple others and myself through the disciplines progressively throughout the semester, and ultimately be intentional about identifying what the source was. If I am being honest, social media and video games have been things that I have always used to mask my grief. When charged with this discipline, I was challenged to put an immediate halt to masking that grief and to confront it head on. Out of sight, out of mind was how I lived, and it was hindering my spiritual, emotional, and mental growth. Letting God in on the pain and the grief for me was an act of submission. Allowing yourself to fall and be healed is an act of submission. We are a work in a progress, and we are grateful to serve a God who understands it all in His divinity and in His humanness.

Discipline of Guidance:

The discipline of Guidance has been something that I have recognized that I was lacking in my life. It is the primary reason for me applying for seminary. Growing up in the South Bronx, I have encountered communities, individuals, and churches that absolutely adore God but do not know what it means to serve. A lot of my misconception of service comes from the lack of guidance. Recognizing this, I have pushed myself to find understand how to be led so that I am able to push that same understanding forward. Reflecting on the true definition of guidance has humility intertwined. Humility has been a battle that I have had to address and became more and more apparent that it was hindering me spiritually. Through intentionally focusing on

submission, humility became a byproduct. Understanding that I do not have all the answers and understanding that regardless of the level of education or what someone's life looks like, God can always give you a word.

Discipline of Celebration:

I am still in the process of fully understanding the discipline of celebration. My immediate reaction to this is the worship that we have within our hearts being illustrated through our actions of spiritual dancing (pantomimes), singing worship songs, etc. However, for me, it became more than that. I have been able to allow myself to be joyous and feel gratitude which are reflections of my heart as a result of the practices of the disciplines. Spreading the same joy that dwells within my heart about the goodness of God is my form of Celebration. Seeing someone receive the gift of salvation brings constitutes a joy that resembles a celebration for me. The recognizing the same access that Moses had with God is the same access we have today is something worth celebrating.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES LOG REPORT FORM

Date	Spiritual Discipline	How you practiced this discipline (Foster & Helmers' book)	Results
10/5 and weekly after	Meditation	Focus on Psalms, Proverbs, Job, & the Gospels.	Strengthened faith and peace within my day to day.
Daily	Prayer	Focuses on Genesis and Proverbs	This focus has allowed me to be reminded of where God intended us to be and not where we currently are. A constant desire to stay heaven minded.
Every Monday	Fasting	I have taken on the corporate fast of the church.	Starting the week off being God focused and God centered. This has strengthened not only my connection to God but strengthened my ability to corporately minister.
Indefinite	Simplicity	Limited access to social media // external influences.	I have been able to realign my wants and recognize where my heart NEEDS to be.
10/2; 10/30-31	Solitude	Two silent retreats; Have limited distractions. Have placed a focus on separating and reading God's word.	I have been able to become more aware of what God is speaking over my life and focus on sustaining peace within my day to day.
Daily	Confession	I have become intentional about keeping an open line of communication with God.	Overwhelming gratitude in knowing that I serve and gracious God who knows exactly what I need.
Daily	Submission	Focusing on humility and how I can be led.	Have been able to receive sermons, words from God, and serve in a more efficient way.
11/2; 11/10	Guidance	Meeting with Mentor	Have been able to work through the issue of Humility and have been able to identify what lack of humility looked like.
Daily	Celebration	Allowing myself to embrace this sense of gratitude and act accordingly.	Living in freedom. Allowing my joy to overflow and influence those around me.