

INWARD DISCIPLINES

The “Inward Disciplines’ help us with our Spiritual Formation by helping us remain focused in spiritual journey by helping us remain in communion with God by helping us remain focused. The Inward Disciplines discussed by Foster are Meditation, Prayer, Fasting and Study. One of the books I used in my “Spiritual Journey” this summer was entitled “Canoeing the Mountains by Ted Bolsinger. The book encouraged me to make a paradigm shift during the last five months by developing an Adaptive Alternative to Church Life because during the required “Stay At home order we have been worshipping remotely. This unprecedented reality, has compelled me to more intensely practice the “Inward Disciplines.

When I contemplate regarding the first “Inward Discipline of Meditation,” I’m reminiscent of the first line in my favorite poem, “Desiderata.” It reads, “Go placidly amid the noise and haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence.” I practiced Meditation frequently this summer. Coincidentally, my church in conjunction with another church held five Meditation workshops. It was quite relaxing and required extreme silence and discipline. It was also moderator of the workshops explained that meditation can be done invoking the Spirit and name of Jesus. Many including myself we relieved at this notion.

The frustration I experienced was simply setting aside time during the course of a busy day for meditation. Foster states “Christian Meditation”, very simply, is the ability to hear God’s voice and obey his word” (Foster,p17). Foster cites biblical examples of meditation (Gen. 24:63 and Rev. 3:20). I agree with Foster when he states “Meditation Sanctifies the Imagination.” He gives the analogy of Christian Meditation as an “inner sanctuary.” Foster discusses three types of which I used. They are *Meditatio Scripturarum* which means meditating upon scripture, recollection which is recreating silence, and the third which meditation upon creation. I often

think of the creative order. Thus pondering how God created from what theologians call Ex-Nihilo (Out of Nothing) and gave order.

Foster states of all the “Inward Disciplines,” Prayer is the most essential to the Christian faith (Foster, p.33). The emphasis on Intercessory Prayer is essential to meet the needs of congregants. I need to strengthen my intercessory prayers skills especially regarding praying for those who need healing for healing of physical and mental illnesses. It is especially challenging praying for those who are under Hospice Care. Do I prayerfully encourage them to accept the will of God or encourage them pray for a miraculous healing. I also recognize the fact that I need tremendous prayer after praying with those who are terminally ill.

I have sensed an “inner yes” regarding my prayer life. It has strengthened my resolve and encouraged me to develop an even stronger prayer life. I have learned how to spend time in solitude in prayer and to how to participate in prayer groups. I was quite surprised to learn in the text that prayer is a learning process. I naively thought I already knew how to pray. Foster cites Luke 11:1 when the disciples ask Jesus to teach him how to pray (Foster, p.36). I was enlightened by Foster’s discourse on the prayer of guidance and the prayer of relinquishment. These were two fairly new concepts to me.

I loved Foster’s discourse regarding making the concept of prayer too complicated. There are many prayer conferences and seminars. Some prayer are deemed powerful. I’ve heard other prayers referred to as pitty pat prayers. I believe one can offer a soft toned prayer and open up the windows of heaven. Some appear to think that screaming to the tip of their lungs will somehow how more persuasion with God. The disappointment I have experienced with prayer resonates when Foster cites Luke 22;42, which states “Not my will, but thy will be done. It is difficult when a loved one is dying and God answer appears to be healing in death. These are

The most difficult and challenging times in my prayer life. Through faith, I eventually strengthen my resolve to develop an even stronger prayer life.

The “Inward Discipline” of Fasting is one of the most challenging for me. Foster perceives fasting as a part of Christian devotion. I would also describe fasting as a part of Christian devotion. I commend the fact that Foster acknowledges the fact that other faiths incorporate fasting as part of their spiritual life. In my opinion, the purpose of fasting is for spiritual cleansing and discipline. Self-denial is an important aspect of Christianity. Turning down food requires tremendous discipline, tenacity, and fortitude.

Foster cites scriptural references to support the inward discipline of fasting. The scriptures that help me with fasting are Matthew 4:1-11. The fact that Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights helps me realize that I too can have the willpower to fast. It also encourages me to be disciplined. Foster cites Matthew 6:16-18 regarding the purpose of fasting. I try to look my best and not inform everyone that I am fasting. I understand the fact that I should have the right motivation when I fast. I also am inspired by the scripture cited in the text which is Zechariah 7:5. Another favorite scripture of mine regarding fasting is Isaiah 58:5-7, which states, “Is this such a fast you shall choose?” These texts are preached frequently during the season of Lent. I realized over the years that fasting should not be seasonal. It should not only occur during the season of Lent. Fasting should occur yearlong. Another one of my favorite scriptures Daniel 10:3. Based on this scripture, many including myself have done the Daniel-fast. I believe it is popular amongst church congregants because it is a partial fast. I have done the Daniel fast several times. It is spiritual rewarding and it has some health benefits as well. Another benefit of the Daniel fast is the team support. The church or a group usually fasts together. It takes

tremendous discipline to fast. As Foster states, once you get past the light-headedness and dizziness, you reach a level of spiritual maturity that is unprecedented.

Foster cites Romans 12:2 “Be Ye transformed by the renewing of your mind regarding the “Inward Discipline of Study.” The word “Study” conjures up very good images for me because I always loved learning and I was a very good student. My favorite scripture regarding biblical study is 2 Timothy 2:15 which states “Study to show thyself approved, workmen that needeth not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

I have used the four components mentioned by Foster in the discipline of study which are 1) repetition; 2) concentration; 3) comprehension; and reflection. These components are used in both my secular and religious studies. Repetition is a popular teaching method which I learned at home and in school. I learned the Lord’s Prayer and passages of scripture through repetition. I have learned the importance of concentration. I have learned to remain focused on my area of study. I usually go into a quiet room to avoid distractions while studying the scriptures. Comprehension is key. The Bible admonishes us to get “knowledge and understanding.” Foster cites John 8:32 which states “the knowledge of the truth sets us free.” The fourth component, Reflection, helps us see the significance of what we are learning and God’s perspective (Foster, p.66).

Other areas of study that influence me most are historical, political, and social aspects of a particular topic or passage in scripture. Other forms of study that interest me are Study Groups, Seminars, and Lectures. The discipline of study develops over the course of time. The most important scripture cited in the text in relation to study is 2 Timothy 3:16, which states “All scripture is for reproof of doctrine.” As a disciple of Christ, I strive to master the discipline of study so I can continually expound upon my knowledge of the scriptures.

OUTWARD DISCIPLINES

Richard J. Foster describes the “Outward Disciplines” as Simplicity, Solitude, Submission, and Service. In my Spiritual Formation quest, I have challenged myself to practice these disciplines. Sometimes I have been more successful with one discipline more than the other. I continue to strive to master these disciplines in my daily life. City Life can be challenging in achieving some of these outward disciplines. Nonetheless, as stated in Philippians 3:14, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus.”

First, I need more practice regarding the outward discipline of “Simplicity.” I am so accustomed to multi-tasking as well as the pace of the city. Foster describes simplicity as “An inward reality that results in an outward lifestyle.”¹ In addition, he states “Simplicity is freedom which brings joy and balance.”² The author also expounds upon what Thomas Kelly calls “The Divine Center.”³ The author further elaborates on how our complex lives leave us insecure and we develop a competing attachment to material things, This is certainly true in my life. I have developed habits such as shopping on HSN and acquiring designer clothing. I am maturing spiritually and realizing that simplicity builds character. The chapter on simplicity also mentions hoarding. I am most definitely a hoarder. My frustration comes in my struggle to declutter. I need to declutter spiritually, psychologically and physically. This will help me lead a more simplistic life. I have learned that simplicity helps me keep my life in the proper perspective. Simplicity also enhances my interaction with others. I am learning to refrain from making my life with others less conflictual through simplicity. I am learning to accentuate the positive

¹ Richard J. Foster. *Celebration of Disciplines* (Harper and Row: San Francisco), 1983. p.79.

² *Ibid.*, p.80.

³ *Ibid.*, p.81.

qualities in others. Scripture serves as my guide to maintain Simplicity. I had a reality check when the author quoted the biblical text Matthew 6:21 which states, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth.”⁴ I still struggle to maintain “Simplicity.” I am contemplating attending retreats so I can continually develop a true sense of simplicity. I will strive to “Seek ye first the kingdom” and lessen the importance of giving and receiving expensive gifts during the holiday season.

Solitude is an outward discipline, I have not practiced much solitude. The challenging last nine months have renewed my interest in practicing the outward discipline of “Solitude.” In the coming months, I hope to practice solitude by allocating more time for self-reflection. Foster clearly distinguishes “Solitude” from loneliness. He states “We can cultivate an inner solitude and silence that sets us free from loneliness and fear.”⁵ Solitude as emptiness is synonymous with loneliness. The author describes loneliness as “inner emptiness” and solitude as “inner fulfilment.”⁶ Solitude as richness is very important. It is always advantageous to more quiet time alone reflecting upon life and the word of God. Moreover, the author cites Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer states in his work, “Life Together,” being together and alone are both essential for “spiritual success.”⁷ Foster’s discourse on Solitude and Silence resonated with me. “Silence sometimes involves the absence of speech and it always involves the act of listening.”⁸ The author states “inner solitude” and “inner silence “are inseparable.”⁹ This concept is new to me. Nonetheless, practicing solitude and silence extends to all aspects of life for me. One of my ongoing struggles is learning how to stay out of the office gossip. I am disciplined regarding refraining from Church gossip. I loved the scriptural text used regarding “The Transfiguration.”

⁴ Bible

⁵ Richard Foster. Celebration of Disciplines. (Harper and Row: San Francisco), 2015, p. 96.

⁶ Ibid, p.96.

⁷ Ibid, p.97.

⁸ Ibid, p.100.

⁹ Ibid, p.100.

Peter could not savor the moment with silence and spoke about building three tabernacles for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah (Matthew 17:4). I will incorporate Solitude and silence as an outward spiritual discipline. I will also contemplate that there were times when Jesus told the disciples not to tell anyone what they witnessed. I will remember sometimes “silence is golden” and I will incorporate Solitude and silence as an act of spiritual formation in my church and secular life.

The most difficult discipline for me to master is the third outward discipline of “Submission.” The section that resonates for me is the section entitled “The Freedom in Submission.” The most important statement for me occurs when Foster states “It is the ability to lay down the terrible burden of always needing to get our own way.”¹⁰ Relatives and friends have always told me “It’s either my way or the highway.” Submission is especially difficult for me when I think I’m right in a particular situation and others are wrong. God’s grace and guidance helps me learn to be more yielding. I am learning that submission is not a weakness but a strength,

Submission is a hot button issue in marital and courting relationships. Is a spouse or fiancée hierarchal or egalitarian? Foster imparts words of wisdom when he states “Scripture does not attempt to set forth a series of hierarchal relationships but to communicate to us an inner attitude of mutual submission.”¹¹

“Slaves Obey your masters” is a difficult to text for those who have endured a history of slavery. However, submission to the will of God can also be very difficult. The most difficult time for me regarding Submission to the will of God is regarding the death of a loved one. Foster cites excellent scriptural references that help me with the outward discipline of submission. They are Mark 8:34 which states “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up

¹⁰ Richard J, Foster, Celebration of Disciplines. (Harper Row: San Francisco), 2015, p 111.

¹¹ Ibid., p.112.

his cross and follow me.”¹² The ultimate inspirational scriptural reference for me regarding the outward discipline of submission is “He humbled himself and become obedient unto death even death on a cross (Phil 2:8).”¹³ This is the ultimate act of submission that resonates strongly for me. Thus, there is joy and freedom in submission because we are no longer in bondage to people and things that hinder our progress both in the spiritual and secular worlds.

The fourth outward discipline, “Service,” is the most easy for me to master. In my opinion, Foster gives a brilliant introduction in the chapter on “Service.” He gives the analogy of the disciples at “The Last Supper.” Jesus stated “He who is greatest among you shall be your servant.” (Mark 9:45).¹⁴ Rendering service is a strength for me. The discourse and true service and the humility of service were enlightening. The comparative analysis of service in the marketplace and the Discipline of Service was intriguing. Service strengthens us in using other disciplines because (e.g. Administration, Discernment, Hospitality, Exhortation) it helps edify all aspects of the body of Christ. Thus, we become one body in Christ Jesus.

Romans commands to “”¹⁵Present ourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to good which is our reasonable service (Romans 12:1). The author cites I Peter 4:9 which admonishes us to give the service of hospitality to others. “Hospitality” is one of the spiritual gifts. Christian service edifies the kingdom of God. I strive every day to become an even better servant of God through disciplined consistent, persistent service to the Lord and to others. AS a servant leader, I realize I cannot lead others to Christ until I have done introspection regarding my life. Then, I will be equipped with the spiritual disciplines and gifts that are needed to edify the kingdom of God and bring others to Christ Jesus.

¹²Ibid., p.113.

¹³ Richard J. Foster. Celebration of Discipline. (Harper and Row: San Francisco), 2015, p.115.

¹⁴ Bible, Mark 9:45

¹⁵ Bible,, Romans 12:1

The most difficult aspect of servant life is humbling myself and not feeling compelled to compete with others. Jesus told the disciples “He who is greatest among you shall be your servant” (Mark 10:45). I realize I can be the best servant leader simply by serving others.

My ultimate goal regarding the four outward disciplines of Simplicity, Solitude, Submission, and Service is to master them. If I master them, I will be someone listening for my name. I want to hear the Savior say. “Well Done, Thou Good and Faithful Servant.” The outward disciplines are an essential part of my spiritual formation in my ministerial journey.

CORPORATE DISCIPLINES

Richard J. Foster's final discourse on the Corporate Disciplines provides insight regarding the collective spiritual life of Christians. He devotes four chapters to each of the Corporate Disciplines. The Corporate Disciplines he developed in the book entitled “The Celebration of Disciplines” are 1) Confession, 2) Worship; 3) Guidance; and 4) Celebration.¹⁶ Foster gives thought provoking insight regarding each Corporate Discipline. He provides a spiritual guide and blueprint to utilize these disciplines in our daily lives. He also gives a detailed analysis of biblical references and spiritual development needed to practice each of the four corporate disciplines.¹⁷ Firstly, “Confession and forgiveness keep us grounded.”¹⁸ Richard J. Foster states “God admonishes us to give and forgive as a part of the redemptive process, culminated in the cross and confirmed in the Resurrection.”¹⁹ The author asks a pertinent question regarding the corporate discipline “Confession.” “Why is confession a corporate and not a private discipline?” Foster cites Philippians 2:12 which states “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but much more in my absence—continue to work out your

¹⁶ Richard J. Foster. Celebration of Disciplines.

¹⁷ Ibid., p, 147.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 147.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 147.

salvation with fear and trembling.”²⁰ Foster cites John Wesley’s “Repentance of Believers” sermon to make a persuasive argument that the corporate discipline, Confession, is vital to the Christian experience.²¹ One of the most compelling argument the author makes regarding the importance of Confession from a Christian perspective. He states “Without the cross, the discipline of Confession would only be psychologically therapeutic.”²² Moreover, the author cites Mark 15:34 which states “Eli Eli Lama Sabathani,” This Aramaic expression means “My God, My God, Why has thou forsaken me? Just as Jesus borne the sins of the world in this statement, we must confess our sins to be cleansed, Furthermore, the author cites John 3:16 which states :For god so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son whosoever believes on him shall not perish but has eternal life.”²³ Foster contends “Love brought Jesus to the cross.”²⁴ Therefore confessing our sins reconciles us to Jesus Christ. The author cites Dietrich Bonhoefer and John Wesley to encourage us to abide in Christian love through confession, Foster also cites the first word of “Forgiveness” which Jesus uttered on the cross. The author also cites what he calls Reality Therapy and quotes a principle of reality therapy which is “The man who confesses his sins in the presence of his brother or his sister is never alone.”²⁵ Foster also cites Douglas Sreare’s discourse entitled “An Examination of Conscious.” The recurring theme of the discourse states “The ancient Christian idea of examination of conscious as a preparation for confession is light years away from “Let your conscious be your guide.”²⁶ Moreover, he also cites Douglas Steare’s

²⁰ Holy Bible, New International Version.

²¹ Ibid., p. 149.

²² Richard J, Foster. The Celebration of Disciplines.

²³ Richard J, Foster. The Celebration of Disciplines.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 145.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 148.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 152.

Viewpoint that the conscious by itself is depraved and culturally conditioned- a most unreliable guide for matters of faith and belief.²⁷ In other words, we need Confession in a Christian culturally context to be freed from guilt and sin. Finally, Richard J, Foster concludes that “The Discipline of Confession,” brings an end to pretense.”²⁸ He further states “Honesty leads to Confession and Confession leads to change.”²⁹ Thus, Confession is good for the soul. It is a corporate discipline because we must confess our sins (Romans 3:23). Finally, Foster reminds us that “God gives grace to the Church to the cover our sins through mutual confession with our Christian brothers and sisters,”³⁰

Secondly, the corporate discipline of Worship is very important. Richard J. Foster emphasizes the importance of the Worship Leader during a church service.³¹ Foster states “There is one leader during worship who is Jesus Christ.”³² Foster further states Jesus Christ is alive and present as prophet, king, shepherd, bishop, and priest during worship.³³ The author recommends a Jesus Christ centered worship that incorporates the may include the ability to preach, prophesy, sing, or pray. Foster admonishes the worship leader to know that Jesus alone is “Holy.”³⁴ The author reminds us that “Ephesians 4:11 lists the five-fold ministries which Christ gave the church; the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and teachers.”³⁵ Thus, the five-fold ministries should be demonstrated in worship to make the church experience more vibrant and empowering. Furthermore, Foster emphasizes the fact that the Worship Leader should usher in the presence of the “Holy Spirit” because the congregants need to be led into

²⁷ Ibid., p. 152.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 157.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 157

³⁰ Richard J. Foster. *The Celebration of Disciplines*, p. 157.

³¹ Ibid., p. 161.

³² Ibid., p. 162.

³³ Ibid., p. 163.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 165.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 165.

worship.”³⁶ The Worship leader sets the tone and the flow of the worship experience. Foster clearly defines the corporate discipline of Worship as “ the way of acting that sets us before God and transforms us in his presence. Moreover, Foster and I agree regarding the use of Habakkuk 2:20 prior to the commence of the worship service which states “ For the Lord is in his Holy Temple, “Let all the earth keep silence before him.”³⁷ I also agreed with Foster regarding “reverential silence” being a important component of the worship experience.”³⁸ This concept may vary contingent upon denomination.

Foster does an excellent comparative analysis using the dichotomy of Silence versus Praise.³⁹ There are various denominational viewpoints regarding whether worship should be reserved or charismatic. Foster does a superb job of using scriptural references to justify but “reverential silence” and “charismatic praise in worship.”⁴⁰ For example, at prayer conferences Habakkuk 2:20 is used so congregants can practice reverence before the Lord. On the other hand, scriptures that promote charismatic worship are Psalm 150 which admonishes everything that has breath to Praise The Lord.! Another scripture is Acts 16:25 which states “ Paul and Silas were in prison singing hymns and praying.”⁴¹ I would encourage both styles of worship recommended by Foster. I believe balance is important. Therefore we should practice both silence and praise when using the corporate discipline of worship.

Thirdly, the corporate discipline of Guidance is very important. Foster defines Guidance as “Spirit-Led, Spirit-Intoxicated, and Spirit-Empowered.”⁴² The author further states the church needs to be an Apostolic Church of the Spirit.⁴³ Furthermore, Foster emphasizes the

³⁶ Ibid., p. 166.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 166.

³⁸ Richard J, Foster. The Celebration of Disciplines.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 166.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.167,

⁴¹ Holy Bible.

⁴² Richard J. Foster. The Celebration of Disciplines.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 176.

importance of making a paradigm shift from Individual Guidance to Corporate Guidance.⁴⁴

Corporate Guidance entails Communal Guidance as per Foster. This primarily means instruction through group experience. Foster cites the scriptural reference Exodus 20:19 which states “And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let God no speak with us, lest we die. This is an example of Corporate Guidance being given to a group or tribe of people.

Another scriptural reference citing Corporate Guidance is Matthew 18:19-20 which states

“Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them.”⁴⁵

A third example is Acts 4:32-33 which states all believers were of one mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.⁴⁶

(Communal). Corporate Guidance is also displayed when Jesus gave the disciples authority, and assurance as per Foster.⁴⁷ Moreover, other scriptural references use in Corporate Guidance are Acts 13:1-3 and Acts 15:12. Lastly, Corporate Guidance entails the spiritual direction to create the all-inclusive “Beloved Community” envisioned by Jesus. (e. g. Roman Catholic monastery)

Fourthly, Foster states the corporate discipline of Celebration is not limited to the practices of singing, dance, shouting, praise, and adoration but may also be visceral.⁴⁸ Foster also cites Philippians 4:4 which states “Rejoice In the Lord Always” is cited as a scripture reference supporting the corporate discipline of “Celebration.” Foster also cites Exodus 15:20 (Prophetess Miriam led women in timbrel and dancing).⁴⁹ This is an example of Celebration in the Old Testament. Furthermore, Foster states creative gifts, imagination, festivals and culture

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 176.

⁴⁵ Richard J, Foster. The Celebration of Disciplines.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 176.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 176.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 198.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 194.

are prevalent in the Bible as means of Corporate Celebration.⁵⁰ Two scripture that epitomize the corporate discipline of Celebration are Psalms 100 and 150. Both psalms exhibit joy and celebration. My favorite scriptural reference regarding the corporate discipline of celebration is Psalm 100:1-2 which states “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord. all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness; come before his presence with singing.”⁵¹ We come into the outer courts and inner courts of God’s temple with joy. Therefore, we should confess our sins mutually, worship together in the tabernacle, use spiritual guidance to usher in the presence of the Holy Spirit, and make a joyful noise of celebration through song and dance. This demonstrates the collective use of the corporate disciplines. Thus, the corporate disciplines of Confession, Worship, Guidance, and Celebration are the ultimate culmination of building the “Beloved Community”

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 194.

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