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Spiritual Disciplines

This semester I have intentionally taken time to practice nine different spiritual disciplines. Intentionally practicing these disciplines created a framework for me to grow deeper in intimacy with the Lord. These disciplines have the power to transform my personal relationship with God and my ministry. In *Celebration of Discipline*, Foster presents twelve spiritual disciplines as follows: (1) The Discipline of Meditation, (2) Discipline of Prayer, (3) Discipline of Fasting, (4) Discipline of Study, (5) Discipline of Simplicity, (6) Discipline of Solitude, (7) Discipline of Submission, (8) Discipline of Service, (9) Discipline of Confession, (10) Discipline of Worship, (11) Discipline of Guidance, and (12) Discipline of Celebration. The inward disciplines facilitated my personal development and change, and they are meditation, prayer, fasting, and study. The outward disciplines helped to equip me to impact the world positively and they consist of simplicity, solitude, submission, and service. The corporate disciplines helped me grow closer to God and other people and they consist of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.

The Discipline of Meditation

I began to practice the discipline of meditation during my first silent retreat. The Book of Ephesians, and chapter one, in particular was on my heart that day. I took extra time to clear my mind and calm my heart. Then I slowly read each word in each verse. I was struck by several things, including the generosity of God in showering spiritual blessings on his children through Christ; I felt such gratitude that as a believer I am adopted by God as His child, into His family.

Before my time of meditation during my second retreat, I spent a few hours reflecting on and journaling about Biel's book, *Why You Do What You Do*. More specifically, I reflected on my tendencies toward selective perfectionism, fear of failure, and why do I have such a difficult time relating to my parents even though I love them a lot. I was very uncomfortable as I reflected on the childhood traumas that were at the root of my current behaviors and coping mechanisms. At times during my meditation, I

sat in a corner and cried. It was the only way I could express my feelings of brokenness. I needed to mourn for the deep pain I felt as a little brown girl that was simply traumatized. My tears during the retreat felt cathartic. After my crying I felt like there was a release. So, I repositioned myself on the floor and prepared to meditate. The verse that came to me was “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” Hebrews 13:5. I sat there and just chewed on that scripture. As I meditated on that verse the truth of it began to sink in deeply. My Heavenly Father truly will never ever leave me alone nor forsake or desert me. As a result of meditating on this verse I felt that I am loved and cherished by God.

I also incorporated meditation into my devotional life during the semester. There are a few key verses that I memorized and so during this semester, on Saturday mornings when I practiced the discipline of meditation, I meditated on one of the key verses that I previously memorized. Meditation helped to increase my faith in God.

The Discipline of Prayer

I practiced the discipline of prayer throughout the semester more than the other disciplines. Before this course, I usually prayed in tongues more than I interceded in English. However, as a result of *Celebration of Disciplines*, I began to intercede in prayer more often. For example, I created a list of prayer points for salvation. This list is my template for interceding for the salvation of a lost person, with blank spaces for the name to be added. I started praying this prayer almost every day as a way to intercede for the salvation of people in my life. One aspect of prayer that I still need to grow in is praying specific prayers. Other than specific prayers for salvation of others, there aren't too many specific prayers that I pray on a regular basis. I am starting to keep a list of my specific prayers so that I can have a record of those specific prayer requests when God answers them.

The Discipline of Fasting

On both retreats, I practiced the discipline of fasting. I did not eat a meal or drink anything except water during my fast. When my usual time for breakfast arrived, my stomach was throbbing and I felt very hungry. But I just drank warm water to sooth my stomach every time I felt hungry and that seemed to help. During my fast I turned my gaze onto Jesus and remembered how much he loves me.

Fasting was very difficult but I reminded myself that the physical hunger was an expression of my spiritual hunger and I needed to persevere to surrender all of my mind, will, and emotions to God in devotion. I focused on spiritual food that I was getting on the fast and I focused on my desire to have spiritual intimacy with God. The fast helped me to be more sensitive to hearing the voice of God.

I also incorporated the discipline of fasting in my life this semester. I usually eat breakfast and lunch at my desk during the workday. However, as a result of this course I decided to fast during the day at work at least twice a month. During these fasts I listen to worship music in my earphones and quietly worship as I do my work at my desk. These half-day fasts help me to be more sensitive to God.

The Discipline of Simplicity

Another discipline that I practiced throughout the semester is simplicity. I focused on the outward lifestyle of simplicity by making my possessions available to others. In March, on a biweekly basis, I packed up small bags of clothes that I haven't worn in over ten years. Then I carried one bag at a time to the Goodwill store near my job. This process is helping to free me from attachment to physical things. It has also had the practical benefit of decluttering my closet while helping those in need. My natural tendency is to hold onto everything that I have, however the discipline of simplicity helped me to rely on God to meet my material needs. Through the practice of simplicity, I have also gained a new appreciation for opportunities to open my home to others as a place to fellowship and study God's Word.

The Discipline of Solitude

This semester, I also practiced the discipline of solitude, which is one that I am very familiar with. I live alone and I have done so for over ten years. For me, solitude allows me to refresh myself and to get rest and spend quality time with the Holy Spirit. Most days when I am alone, I speak to the Lord and worship as I do the activities of the day. This helps me feel connected to God as my Friend. I practiced the discipline of solitude during my two silent retreats this semester. The solitude on the retreats was different from my usual isolation. On the retreats I felt that I was alone *with* God because I did not have the ability to connect with others through social media, texts, and phone calls. I felt God's presence

more keenly during my times of deliberate solitude on the silent retreats. I gained a new appreciation for solitude and as a result, I am more intentional about being alone *with* God, rather than simply alone.

The Discipline of Submission

I have been practicing this discipline as I deliberately submit myself to God. James Chapter 4 verse 7 states “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” This verse has taken on new significance in my life during this semester as I’ve been struggling with trying to do things my way instead of God’s way. I didn’t trust God to address an ongoing issue and so I started using my own efforts to solve the problem. However, I actually made the situation worse. So, after I exhausted all my own abilities to fix the problem I had no option except to trust God. Now I have started to submit to God in this area and I am actually seeing that God is working on my behalf. This is building my faith to trust God and submit to His will in my life. Another way that I am practicing the discipline of submission is by submitting to my manager at work. Ordinarily I sometimes complain in my heart during the workday. However, in order to practice submission, I decided in my heart that I would not complain – instead I would have an attitude of gratitude. Throughout the semester, while at work, I made an effort to focus on the positives around me rather than dwell on the negatives. This attitude is helping me to be more of a team player at work.

The Discipline of Service

The Bible Character in the New Testament that I identify with most readily is Martha. I am a servant and worker. So, when I see a need, I often feel the responsibility to do something to solve the problem. At my church I regularly serve on the intercessory team, worship team, and lead a small group. This semester I also practiced service outside of church activities by volunteering to serve dinner to homeless adults at the Bowery soup kitchen. As I filled the plates with food and served them, I felt that I was doing “God’s work” and serving the “least of these” (Matt 25:31-46). The passage in Matthew teaches that I wasn’t just serving someone in need; I was figuratively serving Jesus Christ. This discipline of service also reminded me that I have a lot in my life to be grateful for. It also helped me to feel humbled because I realized that God loves each of the homeless adults that I served as he loves me.

The Discipline of Confession

Confession does not come naturally to me because I am a very private person. However, I learned that confession is a discipline that brings healing. The Epistle that I studied this semester is the Book of James. In James chapter 5 verse 16, it states “Confess your sins one to another so that you may be healed.” Before this semester, I read that passage and interpreted it in the context of confessing to God in prayer. I was afraid to share my sins with a person who I assumed would judge me and shame me. However, I decided to take the mentoring times as an opportunity to talk about my sin habits in a safe space. My mentor was very supportive and I felt like a weight lifted off me after I spoke openly about my sin struggles. My mentor did not condemn me – in fact, she said that my sin struggles were actually common. I feel that I received some healing as a result of confessing to my mentor because she shared some resources and tools to help me to deal with the sin habit, such as deep breathing exercises, which have been helpful. I truly experienced release and more freedom through the discipline of confession.

The Discipline of Worship

The ninth discipline that I practiced during the semester was worship. I have always enjoyed worshipping God through singing, listening to music, and playing musical instruments. This semester I continued to worship the Lord during my devotional times. During the activities of the day, I also sometimes sang spontaneous songs that came on my heart. God is so worthy of all of our praise and worship. Often while working from home, I listen to worship music on my earphones and quietly worship as I do my work at my desk. Ongoing worship has helped me to be more sensitive to God. I enjoy worshipping God because it helps me to feel the presence of God and it shifts my focus off of the mundane issues of life onto the sovereignty of our wonderful Savior.

In conclusion, as I reflect on the breakthroughs that I experienced as a result of practicing nine of the spiritual disciplines, I am inspired to experience all twelve of them. I am grateful to God for the way that He is using this class in my life. As a result of incorporating the spiritual disciplines into my life, I experienced very special moments with the Lord this semester that were deeper than my usual devotional times. Thanks be to God.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES LOG REPORT FORM			ATS SF.503 Initiation in Spiritual Formation
Date	Spiritual Discipline	How you Practiced This Discipline	Results
2/20 and weekly afterwards	Meditation	Meditation on Scripture such as on Heb. 13:5, Matt 28:20; with “palms up and palms down”	<i>Helps me gain a greater awareness to hear God</i>
2 times or more per week	Prayer	I intercede for salvation of specific people. Say ‘flash prayers’ that provide a quick moment of intercession	<i>Helps me to be more disciplined in my intercession as a way for me to love others</i>
2/20 & 3/9	Fasting	Don’t eat any food, only drink water and replace meal times with extended time of prayer and reading Bible	<i>Helps focus on God. I also felt that my spiritual sensitivity increased.</i>
2/17, 3/3 & 3/24	Confession	Confide in mentor and accountability partner about regular sin habits in my life	<i>Improves my ability to keep my promises to God and myself. Gave me a sense of community as I was able to share openly</i>
Biweekly in March	Simplicity	Donate clothes to Goodwill, open home to others	<i>Helps me love others in a tangible way. Showed me that God can meet my needs.</i>
2/20 & 3/9	Solitude	Separate myself from others during two silent retreats.	<i>Greater intimacy with God. I felt that God was drawing near as I drew near to Him.</i>
3/7 and weekly afterwards	Submission	Being a doer of the Word and not a hearer only (James 1:22); Stop complaining about work	<i>Helps me love those in authority over me instead of being resentful.</i>
3/7 and bi-monthly	Service	Volunteer at Bowery soup kitchen	<i>Helps me love others in practical ways</i>
1/24 and several times per week afterwards	Worship	Sing songs; playing instruments in worship to God	<i>Helps me to express my devotion and love for God, also helps me feel God near</i>

References

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Biehl, Bobb. *Why You Do What You Do: Answers to Your Most Puzzling Emotional Mysteries*. Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville. 1993.

Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. Harper & Row, San Francisco. 1988.