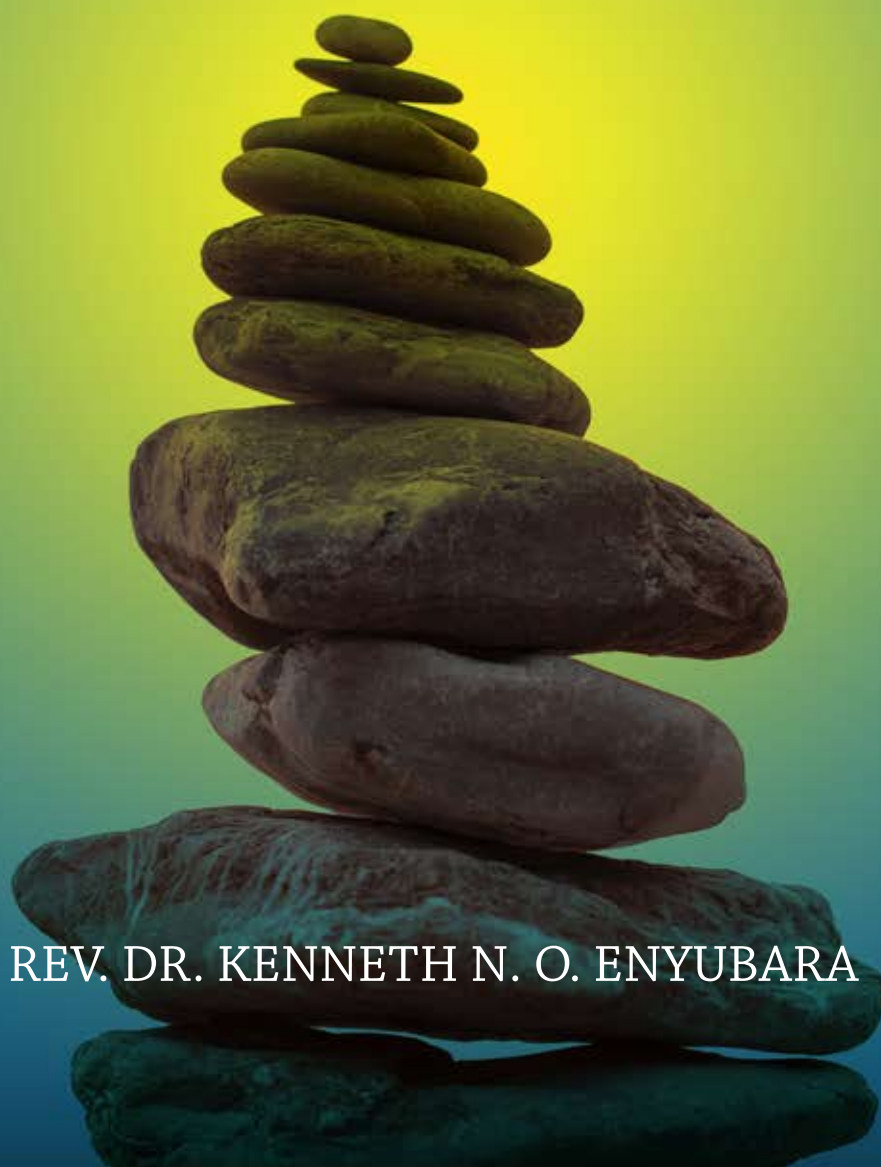




SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

A Life Journey in Union with Christ



REV. DR. KENNETH N. O. ENYUBARA

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Exceller Open



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Dedication

In loving memory of Late Rev. Dr. Clifford Token T. George and Family

Endorsements

Knowing and doing the will of God is very important in the life of every Christian, and without being conscious of the spiritual state makes it difficult for one to achieve meaningful growth. Hence, the essence of spiritual formation which is required for students in theological institutions and all Christians in general who desire to have a closer walk with God in terms of knowing and doing His will, is very necessary.

This book written by a seasoned preacher, facilitator and counselor is very enriching as it reveals the spiritual worksheet for proper evaluation and always looking forward to God, the Author and Finisher of our faith. It covers Christian Devotional classics which stand as motivations for anyone; discovering spiritual maturity which has the benefit of enabling one to have habits that will grow him effectively; five personal factors that determine one's ministry called S-H-A-P-E; analysis of spiritual discipline; among others. Indeed, the book is revealing.

Therefore, I urge everyone to stay focused and walk in the will of God by getting a copy, prayerfully study and apply its content and make positive impact in growth and behaviour.

Rev. Mrs. Patricia T. Miller

Director of Students' Affairs

Baptist College of Theology, Obinze, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

With the way of contemplation there can be danger of imbalance. Spiritual feet need to be kept on the ground by regular liturgical prayer and a continuing sacramental life, together with the meditative use of the Bible provided in such a book like this. It may be a lonely calling, but it helps to remember that the people who undertake it are members of the body of Christ and have their fellowship with others in Him. This book provides readers with the guide to spiritual discipline needed to grow and therein develop in Christ-likeness. I encourage all Christians to get a copy; read it, study it, and faithfully do the practice as suggested.

Rev. Prof. Peter Ball

Saint Paul's Cathedral, U.K

Reflecting on wide experiences, Kenneth N.O. Enyubara offers humanity a book full of practical wisdom. It will serve as a fine practical guide to spiritual discipline and also be read with profit by those of long experience. Clearly written, it is profound in its teaching and implications.

Rev. Dr. Gabriel A. Obinna

Flaming Sword Ministry, Abuja, Nigeria

This eminent practical book shows us the practice of spiritual discipline involving a consistent growing relationship, which usually works gently and gradually, but which, at times, can open the way into new discoveries in the life of the seeker in prayer, walk and faith. I recommend

this book to you.

Rev. Dr. Brian Haymes
Minister of Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, U.K

A practical and profound guide for anyone interested in the ministry of spiritual accompaniment and in the nurture of his/her soul's talk. I commend the author for such great work, and, therefore, recommend that you get a copy; read, study, and live.

Mrs. Ebi Kenneth Enyubara
President, WMU
Bayelsa Baptist Conference, Nigeria

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I express my deep appreciation to all whose experiences have guided my spiritual life and have provided me with the necessary background to write this book. In particular, I acknowledge my indebtedness to the following: Late Rev. B.J. Omah, Late Rev. Gunn Dimogu, Late Rev. R. Mark Ade, Rev. Dan Scott Lee, PhD; Dr. Olusola Owolabi, Late Rev. F.K.Babalola, PhD; Rev. B.U.Enyioha, PhD; Rev. Dr. F.O.C. Anthony, Late Mrs. Sarah Orlu Enyubara, Mrs. Sarah Saturday Amunye and Dn. and Mrs. Felix Orlu Enyubara. They are all sources of my challenge. May the gracious Lord greatly replenish them?

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Foreword

It is possible, perhaps, even likely, that you have never heard the phrase, “Spiritual Discipline” before, or most likely, you have heard but are confused of its meaning. It is the kind of terminology that is often sequestered in academic circles. But in recent years, the concepts and practices of spiritual formation have gained popularity in the church and have brought related issues to the forefront for many believers.

The comments of students and most members in churches where this author had personally taught and facilitated seminars on discipleship and spiritual formation, show that the popularity of spiritual formation has exploded in the recent years, and thus, this book was written to complement efforts in this direction. Men and women are quick to ask questions about how they are to wrestle with difficulties of the disciplines and practices of spiritual direction. They often struggle to reconcile what they read and hear with how to practically apply the Word of God.

Forming a basic definition of spiritual discipline is no single feat. It is a fluid concept, with a wide range of accepted meanings and applications. In broad terms, spiritual discipline or formation is the process of spiritual shaping and growth. Sending one’s children to, or attending a Christian school, would fall under the wide canopy of engaging in spiritual discipline, but certainly, not a complete aspect about it. The same could be said of any education tied to a specific religion: Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, or Muslim schools; they all contribute to the spiritual formation of their students, but not a complete requirement for spiritual discipline.

However, in Christian circles, spiritual discipline refers to more than merely giving or receiving academic instructions; often, it is a reference to the dynamic means of sanctification. It deals with the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit and the various methods He uses to bring about spiritual growth (maturation) in peoples’ lives. It is at this point that things can become confusing. On one hand, there are the time-tested, practical Christian disciplines which Christians are familiar with, such as personal and corporate Bible study, worship, prayer, discipleship, and service.

On the other hand, many of the leading voices in the art of spiritual formation movement stress the need for more intuitive interpretations of spirituality. They encourage believers to incorporate a wide variety of extra-biblical spiritual practices, such as contemplative prayer, silence, meditation, and creative expression. In fact, some of the most popular methods of spiritual formation have been lifted from Catholicism, New-Age Mysticism or other religions and rebranded with biblical-sounding terminology.

It must be noted that any kind of subjectivity in spirituality that draws believers’ focus away from the Lord and His truth can have disastrous results; thereby, derailing believers’ spiritual growth and cutting him/her off from God’s plan for sanctification. All true spiritual growth starts with the preeminent role of God’s Word in the lives of his people. But, is the Scripture alone enough for spiritual maturity? Yes, it is enough. Scripture replicates itself in many forms and writings; for the assertion, “All truth is God’s truth” is correct.

Active, expressible spirituality is one characteristic that sets humanity apart from the rest of living beings. Humans are innately spiritual, and this unique awareness of spirituality marks humanity as being distinct. Discussions on the subject of spirituality have certainly increased in

recent years; history records a variety of spiritual journeys and religious activities stretching over many millennia. Consequently, a holistic understanding of humanity should include spirituality; not just the physical and intellectual make-ups.

If one explores the history of religion, it is easy to find examples of different paths designed for growing spiritually. Leading voices in contemporary mainstream of spirituality promote methods for obtaining spiritual growth through higher consciousness, self-improvement, and study or ritual. Generally speaking, most of these methods are aimed at achieving self-knowledge, fulfillment, and control over the troubles of everyday life. While there are many different spiritual “paths”, one of the purposes of this book is to look at what the Christian Bible has to say about spiritual growth.

The Bible outlines a unique path for spiritual growth; in fact, it is not so much about a path as about a person: Jesus Christ. Christianity, as a whole, is centered on a relationship with him. If one wants to understand spiritual growth from a Christian perspective, then, the Bible must be consulted as the primary witness to Jesus’ life and teachings (Psa. 18: 30; 2 Tim. 3:16).

The writers of the Bible make it clear that the gospel is the foundation for spiritual growth. As with any human structure, the foundation is not only about the starting point, but also, the primary support of the structure itself. When individuals come to faith in Jesus Christ, they recognize their sinfulness, repent of their sins, and trust in Jesus as their Saviour and Lord. This is how people participate in the good news- or the gospel of Jesus Christ; the gospel as clearly laid out in I Cor. 15: 1-5; cf. Acts. 3:18-19; 10:39-43; Rom. 1:4 thus:

Now brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you, otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received, I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then, to the Twelve (I Cor. 15: 1-5).

Goldsworthy (2003:73) considered the biblical teachings of the gospel as “the word about Jesus Christ and what he did for us in order to restore us to a right relationship with God.” Similarly, Keller (2013) remarks that “the gospel is the good news through Christ the power of God’s kingdom has entered history to renew the whole world. When we believe and rely on Jesus’ work and record (rather than ours) for our relationship with God, that kingdom power comes to us and begins to work through us.”

For many Christians, Greear (2011: 21) is correct when he writes, “The gospel has functioned primarily as the entry rite into Christianity; it is the prayer we pray to begin our relationship with Jesus Christ, the diving board of which we jump into the pool of Christianity.” According to the Bible, true spiritual growth flows from a relationship with Jesus Christ. But in reality, the gospel is not only important for beginning one’s spiritual journey, but throughout all of the Christian life. Spiritual growth finds its genesis and continuation in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Pecker (1998: 44) observes that “the good news of Jesus is information that issues an invitation to trust and belief for all of life.” Throughout the New Testament, the Apostle Paul regularly describes the life of a Christian as “in Christ” to emphasize the union a believer enjoys

with Jesus. Out of this union flows dynamic spiritual growth. In such experiences, the saints underline:

- **"O that I was as in months past" (Job 29:2)**

Some Christians look back on their past experiences with displeasure and regard the present with pleasure. This is because they lived in the past without Christ, but now, they live with Christ. But the text, before you, presents a Christian who looked back on the past with pleasure but regards the present with displeasure and dissatisfaction. Once, he lived near to Jesus, but now, he feels he has wandered from Him. He says, "O that I was as in months past!" He complains that he does not have peace of mind or that he has no enjoyment in the means of grace or that his conscience is not so tender or that he has not so much a zeal for God's glory. The causes of this mournful state of things are manifold. It may arise through:

A neglect of prayer---for a neglected prayer closet is the beginning of all spiritual declines.

A result of idolatry--- when the heart has been occupied with something else more than with God, it results to idolatry. The affections have been set on the things of the world instead of on the things of heaven. A jealous God will not welcome a divided heart. He must be loved first, best and most. He will withdraw the sunshine of His presence from a cold, wandering heart.

The cause may also be found in the third place; in self-confidence and self-righteousness. When pride is busy in the heart and self is exalted instead of lying low at the foot of the cross, it may result to such regret.

Dear child of God, if you are not now as you "were in months past", do not rest satisfied with wishing for a return of former happiness; instead, go at once to seek your Maker and tell Him your sad state. Ask of His grace and strength to help you walk more closely with Him. Humble yourself before Him, and He will lift you up. Do not sit down to sigh and lament. While the beloved physician lives, their hope and certainty of recovery for the worst cases.

- **We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18).**

The word "beholding" is a strong word; it is not just about taking a look but is about fixing one's gaze. That is what the New Testament means by beholding, behold. We all should fix our gaze upon Christ, as we seek to radiate His own Person the glory of God, the satisfaction of God, the mind of God in perfection. The point is that believers must contemplate the Lord Jesus in Spirit, and be much occupied with Him. Believers must have their Holy of Holies where they retire with Him. They must have a secret place where they spend time with Him; and not only in certain special seasons. Instead, they must seek, as they move about; even to keep Him before them. Looking at the Lord Jesus Christ, contemplating Him, we shall be changed into the same image. The Holy Spirit will operate upon their occupation.

One becomes like that which obsesses him/her, and occupies him. Is that not true? One sees what people are occupied with, and one can see their character changing by their obsessions. They are becoming like the thing which is obsessing them, they are changing and are becoming different. Something has got a grip on them; they can never think about anything else, talk about anything else, and it is changing their character. Hence, Paul said, "for me to live is Christ ..." (Phi. 1:21) – being occupied with Him. That means, it is good if Christ becomes one's obsessions, and one's

continuous occupation. As one steadfastly fixes gaze upon Him, the Spirit changes one into the same image.

Lord, may my contemplation be entirely on you. Amen!

- **But the natural (soulical) man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God (1Cor. 2:14)**

A closer look at the book of First Corinthians, one will discover lots of soulicalism: this wisdom of words, and this wisdom of the world, the likes and dislikes, preferences and partialities, antipathies and jealousies. That, of course, is contrary to the very foundation of the Christian life. The Christian's own soul-life is not required to be brought into his/her relationship with Christ. It will not fall, it will not go through, and it will go up in smoke. These make Christianity a matter of how one feels and, thus, have a composite kind of Christianity of so many varieties, nothing consistent at all, a perfect patch-work. When they think they have arrived at a very good logical conclusion about a matter, something first came around and upset the whole thing.

Soulical people never get through in life. Their souls are always in the realm of its mental exercises and conflicts, and will never tally with Christ's. When they willed never to be on the wrong track again to demonstrate weakness, never to show cowardice again, it is not long before they found themselves in such a life again. Oh, how ashamed their souls make them! How ashamed they have been because of the instability of their feelings, wills and thoughts. Their souls make fools of them all the time. Remember the promise of the Lord, he that believes in Jesus Christ shall not be put to shame.

Paul counseled that the soul-life business must not come to Christ. It is a contradiction.

Lord, deliver me from the power of the soulical, Amen!

- **We were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself (1 Cor. 1: 8).**

The Lord Jesus said about himself, "...I am the true vine..." and it was prophesied of Him that "...they would tread the wine press alone...." The cross was his winepress. How he was pressed in the cross! He was crushed and broken, but out of that brokenness has come the life which you and I have, and which so many in all the nations have received. That is true, in a measure, of his Church. It was out of the breaking and crushing of the Church that the life came to the world. And that is true of every member, the branches of the vine. If believers are to fulfill this truth in loving ministry, it will only be through suffering; through the winepress, through pressure and through breaking. Paul wrote: we were pressed out of measure, above our strength (2Cor. 1:8), but what life has come out of that man's pressure!

A preacher or a teacher who has never suffered (been broken) will never minister life. The best doctors and nurses are those who know something about suffering themselves. Some are just professionals in treating people's cases, but there are others who treat people as human beings; the latter have a background of suffering themselves. The letter to the Hebrews reads: "...We have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are ... He is able to succor them that are tempted" (Heb. 4:15; 2:18). He

has been in the way of the winepress and we have received the benefits.

Lord, help me to graciously and patiently go through the breaking process as a branch of the vine. Amen!

- **The fires will test the quality of each person's work (1Corinthians 3:13 NIV).**

There is no doubt that you love the Lord. This is not raising questions about your love for the Lord but to say that believers are involved in a great system which is a very complicated thing and a great deal of it is not of the Lord. It is what humans have brought in therefore, a great deal has come which is not of the Lord (see also Matthew 13:31-35- the small seed was made by humans to become an economic-yielding venture which was not meant to be). By this, we are not only thinking of Christianity in general; rather, we are thinking of ourselves. We have all taken something from Christianity, and there may be a great deal that we have to get rid of and come back to the simple fundamental realities of the presence of God. We have got to know that the Lord is with us in all that we do and this did not originate in our mind. Like Jesus Christ, every detail has to come to us from God.

The above assertion ought to send us back to our knees – it may be necessary for us, from time to time, to stand back and ask some questions about all that we are doing: Is this coming from God or from us? Is this the way approved by God or by humans? Is the Lord in support of this or not? Make no mistake about the fact that everything that is only of human origin is going to perish because sooner or later, every man's work shall be tried in the fire.

Lord, help me not to do your ministry by my very self-will, thought, emotion and strength, Amen!

- **The Lord disciplines the one He loves, and He chastens everyone he accepts as son (Heb. 12.6, NIV).**

The purpose of sonship is to bring humans into a point of spiritual responsibility. God has never put responsibilities upon all people but upon His sons and daughters. Therefore, He has to train His own children in order to develop them as sons and daughters thereby, bringing them to the point where they can take responsibilities for Him. He seeks to bring them to a state of spiritual maturity and full growth. This cannot be done only by attending Bible schools, or by putting people into the ministry. God never works only from an official side. God does take His children into His school as a training institute, and it is a blessed thing He does.

But God's school is very different from merely engaging in scholarly activities. His word says: "my son (daughter), regard not lightly the chastening of the Lord, do not faint when thou art reprov'd of Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son (daughter) whom He receives" (Heb. 12:5-6). Note the phrase, "whom he receives". The exact meaning in the Greek text is not "who He receives", but 'whom He positions or places'; it is a matter of positioning. God is seeking to develop His children to a state where He can trust them. When God is dealing with His children, there is a wonderful assurance that He is going to trust them hoping to bring them into a position of trust. He detests having them to be servants or bits of a machine, but as sons and daughters to whom He can entrust spiritual responsibilities. When we truly recognize this, we

begin to understand the reasons why God is dealing with us as the way He does. But because God is in it, we know that the end is sure, for He will help His children through.

God, chastise and reprove me so that You may find me fit to position me with Your inheritance, Amen!

I recommend this Book to all theological institutions in Africa and to the Body of Christ; for the equipping of the saints. Mrs. Ebi K. Enyubara.

Table of Contents

Introduction	16
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Part I

SESSION 1: A Theoretical & Conceptual Framework of Spiritual Discipline: Biblical Perspectives on Spiritual Discipline	19
SESSION 2: Characteristics of Spirituality & Its Relationship to Religion	31
SESSION 3: Fostering Student Pastors' Spiritual Development	36
SESSION 4: Fostering Spiritual Discipline in Group Dynamics	40
SESSION 5: Personal Evaluation	43
SESSION 6: Christian Devotional Classics	54
SESSION 7: Devotional Theology	57
SESSION 8: Discovering Spiritual Maturity	62
SESSION 9: The Ministers' Spiritual Development	66
SESSION 10: Challenges Confronting Christian Ministers Today	68
SESSION 11: Discovering How God Has Shaped You for Ministry	72
SESSION 12: Discipleship	78

Part II

SESSION 1: Spiritual Discipline through Listening, Reading and Studying	82
SESSION 2: Spiritual Formation through Confession	85
SESSION 3: Spiritual Discipline through Prayer	89
SESSION 4: Spiritual Discipline through Fasting	93
SESSION 5: Spiritual Discipline through Meditation	97
SESSION 6: Spiritual Discipline through Solitude and Silence	101
SESSION 7: Spiritual Discipline through Submission	107
SESSION 8: Spiritual Discipline through Simplicity	110
SESSION 9: Spiritual Discipline through the Holy Spirit (Guidance)	113
SESSION 10: Spiritual Discipline through the Church Community	116
SESSION 11: Spiritual Discipline through Holiness	119
SESSION 12: Spiritual Discipline through Worship	126

SESSION 13: Spiritual Discipline through Service	134
Glossary	144
My Spiritual Development	144
Compilation of Personal Thoughts, Ideas and Feelings	149
Meditation	151
References	181

Introduction

Every Christian recognizes the need for a change. The number and prominence of self-help books, steps and plans betray society's obsession with the desire for personal progress. Although their definitions of the ideal might vary, everyone longs for perfection. The apostle Paul writes to the Colossians that he works, "So that we may present everyone perfect in Christ." What would it mean to pursue transformation in the Christian life? After all, have not the sins of Christian sins already been forgiven? How does he change? Scripture speaks of the whole of the Christian life as a race in which the finishing line is a quality of life that reflects the holiness of Christ. Getting the prize involves a lifetime of growth and change. The purpose of this book is to guide students and Christians alike to examine the foundation for growth which they have through gospel transformation.

Transformation is the process by which God works in the believer to make him more like Christ. God initiates this life-long process by grace and calls them to actively pursue change through spiritual disciplines offered as a 'thank you' gift to God. Understanding the gospel as the motivation and foundation for growth should lead the believer to take off his old ways of life through confession, be renewed in Christ through prayer and put on a new self through spiritual disciplines.

The believer should have confidence that "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Though he might be freed from sin's penalty, he must also triumph over sin's power. Gaining freedom from the on-going presence of sin is a life-long process in which he grows in holiness. This process is called sanctification. Through it, the believer continues to experience the saving power of the Gospel as his heart is transformed and he grows in maturity. In constructing a foundation for growth, he must make every effort to discard counterfeit models of transformation and pursue a biblical model instead.

False Foundation for Growth

Legalism:

Just try harder. If you work hard enough, they say, at your spiritual disciplines like prayer or reading the Bible, transformation will come. This is wrong. Read Philippians 1:6-11.

How is believers' transformation dependent upon God?

Nominalism:

It is human to commit sin; hence, do not worry about it because God has already forgiven you and spiritual growth is optional. This view is also wrong. Read Philippians 2:12-16.

What does this passage have to say about your attitude towards sin?

Passivism:

Just let go and let God handle it because God empowers the believer to be free from sins; hence, he can sit back and wait for holiness to arrive. This is, indeed, wrong. Read Philippians 3:12-14.

Was Paul passive in his pursuit of holiness?

Biblical Foundations for Spiritual Growth

Read Ephesians 4:17-24

From verses 17-19, why is transformation desperately needed?

Introduction

What should be the believer's motivation for a change? - (vv. 20-21).

What are the three aspects of his transformation? - (vv. 22-24).

Putting on the new self is described to be the last step in the transformation process. Though sanctification is based on grace, God invites the believer to put on a new self by pursuing spiritual disciplines such as prayer, reading/studying the scriptures and fellowship. Through these activities, the believer finds himself/ herself re-created in the "Likeness of Christ in true righteousness and holiness" (v. 24) as he fights the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:13) and trains himself/herself in the pursuit of godliness.

How should the believer's approach to spiritual disciplines be similar to, or different from, his training in sports or academic study?

The Role and Purpose of Spiritual Disciplines

Prayer, studying/reading of scripture and having fellowship are important spiritual disciplines. But they do not earn the believer any merit or favour with God because his/her salvation and transformation are based on grace.

Read Galatians 3:1-3

Like the Galatians, what mistake must the believer avoid?

Read Isaiah 64:6 and Romans 4:1-8

Do even your best works earn you merit with God?

Our 'Thank-you performance' for God

One way to see spiritual disciplines is as 'thank-you performances: When the believer pursues prayer, Bible study, fellowship, among others, he is expressing his thanks to God for His grace by spending time with him, learning about him and enjoying fellowship Him with others. God is glorified as the believer delights in pursuing His desires. Imagine a child who is given a valuable gift by his parents. She cannot repay them and they would not want her to. Instead, she runs to his parent's arms, embraces them and cries, "thank you!" So, the believer shouts "thank you" to God whenever he talks with Him, study him and worships Him in private and in public with others.

Lovelace (2002:18-19) aptly observes that "self-knowledge and self-fulfillment are considered to be the core of human achievement" when it comes to spiritual growth in contemporary religious and mainstream spirituality. He adds, "The search for these goals has produced a lot of people who are, at best, self-preoccupied and, at worst, obnoxiously self-assertive." That is, many routes to spiritual growth generate nervous self-concern or over-abundant spiritual pride. But this needs not to be so. An honest assessment of one's spiritual state, and an attempt at spiritual growth will lead to an awareness of one's limits. While there may be many paths to different spiritual growth today, only the Christian gospel offers a uniquely satisfying road to achieving it.

As Christian spiritual growth is focused and dependent on God's grace through Jesus Christ, the gospel allows one to avoid self-preoccupation and inexcusable self-assertion. Christians may avoid nervousness and pride in spiritual growth by returning to the good news of Jesus- namely, that they are secured in their spiritual status before God based on Jesus' work alone, not theirs. The gospel is the true foundation of spiritual growth. Rooted firmly in the gospel is the concept that spiritual growth proceeds through the power of the Holy Spirit, studying God's word, confession, prayer, fasting, meditation, solitude and silence, submission to the church community and holiness, among others.

Spiritual Discipline

This study is designed for group and or personal guide. The target audience are student Pastors, Christian leaders and Christians in general. A session of the study is designed to cover a week of faithful longing for the LORD. Part one has fifteen (15) weeks while Part Two has thirteen (13) weeks.

SESSION 1 | *A Theoretical & Conceptual Framework of Spiritual Discipline:*

Biblical Perspectives on Spiritual Discipline

An effort to delve into the biblical foundations of spiritual formation is, in the thought of this author, a rewarding one since this work is primarily written for students undergoing Seminary training and, of course, for all believers. It is equally true that such an investigation might not be an easy one, basically because over the years, many have tried to define and describe the essential components of spiritual formation and have ended up espousing process of growth that mirrors the lifestyle of a monastic monk living in isolated existence deep in a deserted cave. Others prescribed a more simplistic step-by-step formula. A biblical basis of spiritual formation is thus needful for an appropriate understanding.

Taylor (2001:91) argues that spiritual formation is more than transferring knowledge from a teacher to a learner. He further stressed that it is concerned with the holistic growth and development of the individual as a process. Whereas the goal of education is learning but the goal of spiritual formation is maturity. The Greek word *teleios* is used to mean “mature, perfect, complete,” which Matthew’s Gospel used (in Matthew 5:48) as, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Barclay (1976:26) observes that “the basic meaning of *teleios* in the New Testament is always that the thing or person so described fully carries out the purpose for which it was designed.”

“Formation” comes from the root word *Morphe* from which metamorphosis is derived cf. Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18. It expresses both outward change and crucial development from one form to another. Taylor (2001:91) contends that one of the scriptural references of it is “being transformed into his likeness.” Taylor further observes that in the traditional schooling model, a pedagogical learning method is often used exclusively. He describes this as a teacher-directed process, wherein the student is passively engaged and becomes dependent upon the instruction for learning external truths. The formational approach, on the other hand- the andragogical method is also applied. That is, the self-directed learning wherein students are actively engaged in their own process and become equipped from within to grow and develop spirituality.

It must be noted that spiritual formation is not a “post-conversion maintenance” but an ongoing path of developmental learning and experience that gives structure and form to the maturity process. While spiritual growth can, in no way, be standardized and forced, it can be given direction. As people grow physically from infancy to adulthood, they must go through predictable phases of learning. Therefore, the spiritual formation must be through similar phases of growth, healing, and renewal. It guides and equips disciples toward **being** as well as **doing**. Its ultimate end is to produce an authentic maturity in Christ- the true goal of the Christian faith.

A few passages are examined from the Old and New Testaments to show the biblical basis of spiritual formation.

Spiritual Discipline

From the Old Testament are:

➤ Deuteronomy 6:6-9:

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit, in your house and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (ESV).

From the inception of giving the Law to Moses, God had encouraged His people to know Him, not as an intellectual exercise but as a lifestyle. Their learning was not intended to take place in formal settings or only during certain hours of the day. Instead, God's people were expected to make their understanding of him something of a process that never ends in their homes, on the road, in the morning, and at night. Taylor (2001:92) asserts that "this principle of formation remains...What may or may not begin in a schooled environment is fleshed out in the everyday situations of home life." Every moment of the day and night fits for spiritual formation.

➤ 2. Isaiah 29:13:

And the Lord said: Because this people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men (ESV).

In the Old Testament, God made it clear to His people that he was not interested in the religious activities of rule-keeping when they were not springing from a changed heart. He explained that it was possible for his children to be far from him even when their external actions did not indicate so. He spoke in a relational language, not an academic one.

Spiritual formation, therefore, must begin first in the changes of the heart, where the **being** begins. These changes primarily bring about relational depth with God and other humans. The by-products, not the goal, are secondary changes in behaviours and attitudes. Rules cannot create worship but relationship can. While the law provides the necessary form, it takes a heart connection to provide a meaningful encounter with God in worship.

From the New Testament:

➤ Matthew 28:18-20:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (ESV).

The above instruction, of course, was Jesus Christ's last words spoken to his disciples before his ascension into heaven, and has been generally referred to as the Great Commission. The mandate for spiritual formation resounds strongly in this statement of the Lord. It must be noted that the disciples are not born, they are made. It is, thus, the "making" that entails the art and action of formation. Galatians 4:19:

A Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of Spiritual Discipline

“My little children for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you” (ESV).

Paul introduced spiritual formation based on his experience after his conversion and described his ministry as a calling to bring men and women to full completion and maturity in Christ. This text records one of the strongest images he used- that of a pregnant woman in the pain of giving birth. He wrote to those who were already believers because he saw their spiritual lives as an ongoing process.

➤ Colossians 1:28:

“Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (ESV).

Paul illustrates the Christian life as an ongoing process of calling and design that requires in depth growth.

Other passages are:

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18)

Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14) But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith (Jude, 20).

The above passages and a host of others echo the principles of continual growth that leads to faith and holiness.

➤ Romans 12:2:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is- his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Paul speaks of the dual experiences in the direction of spiritual formation which are **being** and **doing**. The process involves both a disciplined action (do not conform) and an inner point of change (be transformed in your mind). This, as he asserts, leads to a relational insight with God-knowing his good, perfect, and pleasing will.

➤ Ephesians 4:13-14:

We all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of Son of God, to mature manhood (full grown man), to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the wavers and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes (ESV).

The above text reveals one of the New Testament goals and directions of spiritual formation. Here, Paul talks about all Christians using the grace they have been given as Christ apportioned it “until we all reach in the faith and in the knowledge of the son of God...” Also, this text contains the blessing of Christian maturity. It leads them to the fullness of Christ in their own lives. Additionally, it serves as a safeguard against the confusion and spiritual deceit, which the Christians, often, encounter in the religious world. By being conformed to Christ’s image, they are

Spiritual Discipline

made stable and sound in contrast to spiritual infants who cannot steady themselves when blown about by Satanic schemes and heresies.

1.1. Psycho-Social Perspective of Spiritual Formation

Paul wrote, in second Timothy 3:14-15 that “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which can make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”

The process of Christian discipleship has never been restricted to adults. The Old Testament admonished parents to teach their children about their knowledge of God from an early age. When Jesus began his public ministry, he included children both as his audience and example. The church has long embraced its challenge to educate children. However, it has been pointed out that there is often a large difference between traditional education and spiritual formation.

Clark (1994:234) argues that spiritual formation about children is carried out in “a step by step and stage by stage process through which a child is guided, encouraged, nurtured, admonished and disciplined” purposely given to enable children to embrace Christ as “savior” and thereafter, to be disciplined to develop as a follower of Jesus Christ through the word and power of the Holy Spirit. This description of Clark is germane to spiritual formation in children.

Balswick and Balswick (1989:110) examined the contributions of child development theorists and their theories, and they pointed out that each perceives the child’s activity in accordance with a set of predetermined assumptions about human behaviour. For instance, the cognitive development theorist is aware of the particular stage to which the child has developed; the Freudian theorists are particular about the unconscious motivations in overt behaviour, the symbolic interactionism concentrates on the child’s self-concept, and the proponent of the social learning theory pays special attention to what the child has learned from observing others.

These developmental theories present a bias that indeed explains behavior on the basis of environmental conditioning. However, the Bible presents the view that human beings are choice-making creatures who are responsible for their own behaviour. While all of the major theories have differed upon whether children are passive or active in their development, all do agree that human input is necessary if children are to take a human characteristic.

Balswick and Balswick (1989:136) liken “being a teenager in our society” to being “alike in wonderland – not knowing what the rules and expectations are.” Adolescents make several attempts to negotiate the twists and curves and are faced with the momentous task of growing up in a world that, sometimes, makes no sense to them. They have outgrown the last steps of childhood and are not yet entered fully into the adult world, that is, they are in the midst of an often-confusing life-developmental stage.

Those guiding adolescents, and, or are adolescents themselves, must do so with grace and truth, especially while reading Galatians 2:20; “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, which loved me and gave himself for me.” Smith (1994:249) explains this text to mean that Christian spiritual formation is arriving at this awareness of the true Christians identity and letting Christ live his life in and through Christians. Taylor (2001:94) observes that this awareness is integral at every age; however, adolescence is the time when that cry is first heard. Teenage disciples are ready to seek

A Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of Spiritual Discipline

out this understanding with a unique edge of fervor and desire that comes from a natural fire within.

The adolescents' self emerges through two primary ways: imitation and integration. Smith (1994:251) explains them as:

Imitation is the process of adapting to one's surrounding by patching together the beliefs and behaviours of others. Adolescents try to develop a sense of which they are by attempting to look, act, think, and sound like someone else. On the other hand, integration is the process of testing, separating, and discriminating between several types of beliefs and behaviours until one discovers that which is genuine and real. It involves interaction with others, personal reflection, and the freedom to explore.

Imitation begins with parental models because home-life deeply shapes identity. Balswick and Balswicks (1989:142) researches reveal that adolescents' rebellion is highest in very restrictive and very permissive homes. In extremely restrictive homes, parents do not allow for the gradual development of independence in the child. Without the opportunity to experience individual freedom, a child's frustration may lead to outward aggression toward parents or society. Others may exhibit more subtle controlling techniques, such as developing eating disorders.

Teenagers may reject 'institutional religion' but be quite open to spirituality in a general sense. They often choose to break away from their parents' views and beliefs, and strike out on their own paths of discovery. For many, this is the beginning of their spiritual formation process. Adolescents are at an age wherein they may come to see religion as a very personal friendship with God. He is the one who gives protection, guidance, and purpose in a time when those things are solely needed.

Fowler (1981:151) states that adolescents desire both wants and need a mirror. Forming spirituality in teenagers is partly a process of showing them mirrors they can trust. The scripture talks about them as those they are, but only if it is taught in a way that captures their hearts as well as their minds. They need models and mentors of adults who will give them both grace and truth, people who will love them unconditionally while showing them the reality about themselves. These kinds of human mirrors are crucial in helping adolescents see not only themselves but also God. Spiritual formation with adolescents also has much to do with empowering them with the ability to integrate Christianity into their everyday lives. This empowering process may have already begun at home. Ideal parents will have moved beyond merely telling and teaching about delegation of responsibility toward actual delegation of responsibility. This enables teenagers to learn how to take control over their own lives.

The second half of the empowering process is offering opportunities for teens to exercise responsibility. Cognitive learning is important, but until it is translated into active experience, it will not finish its work of formation. The Balswick (1989:146) state;

This is no less necessary in the church than in any other social institutions. Youth programmes of many churches do a great job of entertaining the young people and keeping them busy, but do little in the way to bring them into responsible positions within the church community.

The formation process offers unconditional love and an atmosphere of grace. Where there

Spiritual Discipline

is grace, there is safety to fail without the threat of guilt or condemnation. Spiritual formation depends upon a place of safety and acceptance. Simultaneously, as adolescents are looking for direction and identity, the church offers to be a place of truth. As teens are loved, they are brought to understand the reality about themselves, about others, and about God.

Gorman (1984:6-10), once in her reflection some many years ago, posed a question about why so many Sunday Bible teaching had not produced much spiritually mature adults? For all the work that the church has done toward educating adults, not much is there to show. In terms of measuring the success of the churches' efforts, much attention has been paid to assessing weekly attendance, membership roles, giving records, or adult class participation, but one of these is enough to provide a clear measurement of genuine maturity.

To be spiritually formed is to be brought to an ever-deepening maturity in Christ. This process is continuous for adults, children and adolescents. For children of all ages, churches tend to offer an incredible array of learning tools and opportunities through which they can discover Christ. Retreats, trips and events for spiritual growth abound. Meetings are often designed to be interactive and application-oriented. Current issues are addressed, and cultural relevance is given to all aspects of youth ministry.

Unfortunately, much of the church's adult education ministry had not continued in the same way of creative-learning. By adulthood, much, if not all of the educational processes, has narrowed toward the schooling educational model alone. Discipleship instruction becomes an offering of classes and the Sunday sermon. There is no guidance developmentally, no growth in intentional relationships, and no spiritual goals to press toward. Spiritual maturity is measured by church attendance and moral behaviour, while the condition of the heart and conscience remain unchecked. Sin is viewed as a list of bad things to avoid rather than an internal nature to be reckoned with.

Scripture, however, does not applaud the result of this paradigm. Jesus spoke to this issue in Matthew 23:15 thus:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices (mint, dill and cumin). But you have neglected the more important matters of the law (justice, mercy and Faithfulness). You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.

The writer of the Book of Hebrews voiced a similar concern thus: In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food...! Therefore, let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity (Heb. 5:12; 6:1).

If external actions and elementary teachings are not enough to bring disciples to maturity, then, what else is missing? How should Christian Educators direct adults toward a more holistic Christian faith? Taylor (2001:95) and Knowles (1970:127) are of the view that a revising of the education model, often used by default, will be necessary. According to them, rather than following the typical schooling process, an expansion of the view and practice of adult formation is needful in areas such as:

The leaders of the formation process need to see their role as facilitators who help to bring about learning. This type of leader encourages participation from the students and demonstrates

A Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of Spiritual Discipline

caring and acceptance. On the contrary, a lecturer will assume the role of being the only one who determines what the students should learn, do, and be. All power and authority rest in his or her hands.

The setting in which a person learns must be expanded from a formal classroom in an official building or institution to anywhere and everywhere life provides. As Jesus taught in both the synagogue and on the sea, adults must see that learning is related to all of life, no matter when or where it is found.

The formational approach also goes beyond content-orientation toward a concern with the development process. It does not rely extensively on organized, highly planned curriculum to transfer information. Spiritual formation is mostly concerned with the needs of the learner, not the teacher, and the learning does not end when the course is over. It is a lifelong process.

In most traditional schooling situations, the only teaching method used is lecture, or storytelling. The students are given what the teacher has learned and only experienced the information indirectly. However, transformation occurs when more methods are added to the process. When students listen and practice doing and reflecting, they are much more likely to integrate what they are learning into their own direct experience.

There is also the view of knowledge held by formational approach. Under the schooling model, knowledge is a product that is transferred from teacher to learner. The student's goal is simply to acquire as much of it as possible. This is usually done by using memorization skills, and often, the knowledge gained does not become a permanent part of the learner's life or philosophy. Within the formational model, however, knowledge is a mutually discovered process between the teacher and the learner. The goal is not only to acquire but also to practice what is learned. The integration of ideas into life is a crucial element of spiritual formation.

1.2. African Perspective of Spiritual Formation

The primary goal of spiritual formation, in most seminaries in Africa, can be summed up as to produce, mould or train men and women who will be intellectually, socially, emotionally and spiritually equipped to be effective instruments of evangelization. The seminaries are expected to train capable and competent men and women of God, who, in response to God's grace, can collaborate with their various groups of faith affiliations in serving God's people throughout the world.

The importance of this formation has also been stressed by His Holiness, John Paul II, in his, Post-Synod-apostolic exhortation to the Bishops, Clergy and faithful as:

... the 'seminary' in its different forms, and analogously is the 'house' of formation for religious priests, more than a place, a material space, should be a spiritual place, a way of life, an atmosphere that fosters and ensures a process of formation, so that the person who is called to the priesthood by God may become, with the sacrament of orders, a living image of Jesus Christ, head and shepherd of the church.

The by-product (end-products) of priestly formation ought to be men and women who, in every way, will be "a living image of Jesus Christ, head and shepherd..." Jesus Christ, the Formator of all will forever" (Heb. 7:24). Seminary formation in any age has to reflect on this image of Christ. To do this, there are bound to be changes based on this basic question: How have the seminaries in

Spiritual Discipline

Africa, in general and Nigeria in particular, faced the challenges and adjusted to the inevitable changes in the formation of their pastors/ministers? Before answering this question, it is necessary to reflect briefly on how Jesus maintained these two elements while forming the Apostles.

From the four Gospels, the following characteristics can be identified in the way he did it:

*Great intimacy with the group,
Acquaintance with contemporary culture of the period,
Serious concern about their spiritual, religious, moral and economic welfares
Creation of team-spirit
and cooperation among them*

His attitude towards the Jewish laws, beliefs and customs is a perfect example to Seminary formators in Nigeria and other African countries on their attitude towards traditional African beliefs, practices, values and customs.

The Lord's words "do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish; but to complete them" (Matt 5:17) indicate that he moved from the known (cultural outlook) to the unknown (God's total outlook) cf. Matthew 5:21-48. By so doing, he was preparing his Apostles to be his ambassadors throughout the world (Matt. 28:18-20). The formation of his future ambassadors was culture-bound and pastorally oriented.

1.3. Integrative Formation in an African Context

For seminaries to do formation in an integrated African context, the following African values must be considered.

1.3.1. The Sense of the Sacred

In African traditional conception, the sacred is not so much a category that is opposed to the profane, as some scholars have argued, but a way of looking at reality in its wholeness. When viewed in its totality (invisible and visible), Traditional Africans regard the entire cosmos as sacred. The invisible penetrates the visible through a unique being, God, known in various African ethnic language as: *Chukwu, Osebuluwa, Chineke, Ezechitoke-Abiama* (Igbo), *Olodumare* (Yoruba), *Kwot (nuer), Soko(nupe), Onyame* (Ghana), *Mawu (Fon), Ngewo(Mende)*, and so on. All realities, invisible (divinities, ancestors, and spirits) and visible (man, animals and inanimate objects) become sacred when viewed in their total relationship to the unique wholeness. The individual in a society is sacred from the perspective of his/her relationship with the totality of beings around him/her.

Enyubara (2016, 3) stresses that the African family is also sacred because it reflects wholeness in the unity. Certain persons, objects and places are sacred because they manifest this wholeness either symbolically or in actuality. A masked figure is sacred on account of its relationship to the invisible sacred reality it is representing. Certain trees are sacred, either on account of their structure or their mode of existence, which reflects life in its totality. Human speech becomes sacred when viewed in its relationship to the speaker and the totality of human beings. Booth (1977, 7) observes rightly that "in Africa, the sacred is manifested not so much by separation as by unity." Places and things are sacred in so far as they reflect the unity of the beings which they symbolize.

For the Africans, according to Enyubara (2017, 4, 7), the sacred is not only associated with power, but it is also affiliated with the highest values in human life such as: honesty, justice,

A Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of Spiritual Discipline

gentleness, patience, endurance, perseverance, sincerity in one's word, among others. A sacred person is expected to mirror these values. For example, *Nyeukani* (as in Ekpeye culture) or *Onyishi* (the eldest man in the village or clan in Igboland) is such a person who wields spiritual power on account of his relationship with the invisible ancestors of the clan. As such, he is expected to reflect most of the ancestral virtues and values in his code of conduct. He lives apart in a house jointly built by the clan members and sustains himself with the fruits from the common ancestral land he cultivates till his death.

People's attitude towards the sacred is generally to keep a respectful distance without severing relationships completely. Otto (1923, 25) observes that "the relationship with the sacred implies the observance of a certain code of conduct on the part of humanity. In Igbo culture, for instance, as it is also with the Ekpeye people of Rivers State, this respectful distance is best translated by word *Nso* (taboo) while the sacred is translated as *Aso*. When a taboo is broken, it becomes *alu* (abomination or pollution). If this taboo is directed against the land divinity, it becomes *nsoalaorana* (pollution against the land divinity). Ritual-cleansing through confession of guilt with appropriate sacrifice is then made to restore the *Aso* of the culprit. Often, the diviner gives the guidelines on how to remove the abomination.

The emphasis on the African sense of the sacred has far-reaching effects in the formation of seminarians. It creates in them an attitude of deep respect for the things of God and anything associated with God like worship, the house of God, devotions, studies, to mention but a few. It also fosters in them a great appreciation for the value of the human person, the most sacred of all creatures. This explains why crimes like murder, abortion, calumny, disturbance of harmony, wanton destruction of neighbour's property, among others, are *Nso* (taboo). To be involved in any of these is to pollute the *Aso* (sacredness) of the society.

Humanity is sacred because of its vital link with transcendental realities of the world in its wholeness (*ASO*). Some of the ways through which Africans internalize the sense of the sacred and the sacredness of a human being include: worship, covenants with divinities, and others, oath-taking, sacrifices, prayer, initiation ceremonies and periodic festivals. Simulating the sense of the sacred in seminary formation will help pastors and clergies to respect the sacred of non-Christian religions in their apostolic and pastoral duties. This may lead to dialogue with non-Christians on the need for respecting Christian sacred values.

1.3.2. Corporate Existence (*Nwanne, Umunne, Umunna*)

The sense of the sacred is concretely manifested through the African concept of corporate existence. This can be translated in Igbo as *Nwanne or Umunne* where the term *Nwanne* has many connotations. In one sense, it means children of the same parents (*Umunne*). In another sense, it applies to half-brothers and sisters in a polygamous family. Yet, at another level, it stands for the extended families of a putative ancestor. By extension, it also applies to people from the same town, area and circumscription. Distant relations become *nwanne* by virtue of one covenant or common interests. But, here, the concept of *nwanne* is an abstract way of describing corporate relationship.

Mbiti (1969:108) seems to have exaggerated while subsuming the individual in the corporate existence of African society. He/she remains an autonomous person who acts responsibly although his/her actions are governed by what may be regarded as "census commune" aspirations, values and customs of the community to which he/she belongs by making a personal

Spiritual Discipline

decision. These are ultimately noted in transcendence or the sacred in its totality. Perhaps, it is in this sense that this affirmation of Taylor (1963,85) becomes meaningful:

The sense of the personal totality of all beings and humanity that embraces the living, the dead and the divinities, fill the background of the primeval world-view. This is the context in which an African learns to say, "I am because I participate." To him, the individual is always an abstraction; man in a family. Seminaries in Africa need to emphasize the sense of communal living and values to cut across ethnic boundaries. This has to be given a Christological interpretation on the concept of neighborliness as found in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37). Seminaries should be schools where the traditional African family and neighbouring spirit are nurtured and sustained. However, this sense of community cannot be fostered without a deep sense of justice.

1.3.3. A Sense of Justice

It is not an exaggeration to say that justice is at the hub of the human interactions in Africa. For Africans, justice is more than the Aristotelian idea of giving each one his/her due. The Igbos, as in the case of the Ekpeyeans of Rivers State, for instance, look at justice as *Ikwuba aka oto* (literally meaning "to keep the hand straight") in the society. The straight hand is a metaphoric way of expressing, or saying the truth without fear or favour; give to everyone what he/she is supposed to have; maintain fair relationships with your neighbor; never tilt the balance in ontological relationships, and so on. The Igbo *of* or ritual symbol is one of the ways through which social control is virtually affected and internalized. Traditional religious leaders like priests, diviners, elders of all shades, and so on used to prove their sincerity in discharging their duties. People will then respect them according to their truthfulness and sincerity. That is when they become the real fathers of the society.

A sense of justice has to be instilled in the formators and seminarians alike in the seminaries throughout Africa. The idea of "leave all judgments to God while an injustice is perpetrated fails to prepare future clergies who, according to his Holiness Pope John II, in his allocution to priests and seminaries of Nigeria in Enugu 1982, ought to bring about "justice and peace." For priests to fraternize with those in society overtly or covertly labeled men of dubious character in the guises of the dictum '*Chukwug'ekpe* (God will judge), is failing in the pursuit of justice. Peace cannot exist where justice is abused. Formators in African seminaries have duty to give their students a practical orientation to this African sense of justice during the seminary training.

1.3.4. Sincerity in One's Commitment to a Cause

Traditional African cultures attach great value to sincerity in one's words and pledges. It was an allied virtue of justice. The Igbos often say that *Oji Ofo na ogu* (he is with *ofo* and *ogu*-justice and truth and sincerity). *Ogu* is often symbolized by a knotted tender palm frond (*Omu*) (Nwoga, 1984:21).

Traditional African cultures cherish someone who is always truthful and who stands by his/her words no matter the odds. Such an individual is entrusted with community responsibility and leadership. People need him/her especially when the going is rough. He/she often addressed as: *Onye-Ezi Okwu'* (a truthful person); *Akwaa a kwulu'* (a person who perseveres in the face of

A Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of Spiritual Discipline

difficulties).

Seminary formators need to encourage seminarians to express their views sincerely without fear of expulsion. This can be done by challenging them to be true to themselves. An atmosphere of insecurity and fear, created through threats, will suffocate sincerity among seminarians. The Igbo idea of covenants (*IgbaNdu*) with either divinities or with others in the society is mainly based on this virtue of sincerity. Clergies and seminarians in Africa have to be living examples of this virtue to counteract the rampant cult of hypocrisy and cheating that is taking root throughout the continent with corruption as it is particularly known and called.

1.3.5. Good Leadership

The end-product of seminary formation in Africa ought to be an integrated mature servant of God; the equivalent of *Onyishi* in Igbo land *Eze Mmuo*, *Unukani* or *Nye esoushini* as it is called in Ekpeye land (This presupposes that he is quite conversant with traditional African values which make for good leadership).

In the light of the gospel message, the clergy has to visualize, internalize and practice these values. In doing so, he imitates Jesus Christ, the Good shepherd, who came not to destroy traditional resilient values, but to complete and fulfill them. An integrated African clergy has to be culturally, socially, psychologically, intellectually, spiritually and effectively matured to be relevant in modern African society.

There are many leadership qualities which could easily be identified. Ekwunife (1997), citing Francis Cardinal Arinze, points out six African values that make a leader as: sense of sacred, respect for life, sense of community, family spiritual vision of life, authority as sacred, and symbolism in religious worship.

Nolan (1982:7) is of the opinion that "spiritual life is the whole of one's life in as much as it is motivated and determined by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus." This is the kind of spirituality that shapes persons in such a way that they grow humanness. That is to say, an integrated spirituality is a spirituality in which people are, and what they do is intimately related. The process of an African spiritualist is also developed within the village. As Mbiti (1977:23) observes that "it takes a whole village to raise a child." In other words, relationship is part of development of African spirituality.

African spirituality is holistic and it imparts on the whole of life. It is not considered as an individual affair because it is expressed in all levels of society, socially, economically, politically as well as among people; hence, it contributes to the building of a nation. Pato, cited by Kourie and Knetzschmar (2000:3), identifies that African spirituality is identified as reflecting the wholeness of life and is important in harmonizing life in all its fullness.

African spirituality has to do with the concept of nation-building and the integrity of creation. In that life, everyone is involved in rebuilding, spirituality in the lives of others –ancestors are also involved in this process. As Kappen (1994:33) asserts that:

Contemporary spirituality impacts on the totality of life; it is non-dualistic, it does not posit a bifurcation between the secular and the sacred. It encourages the entire life of faith, which includes body, mind (and soul) as well as the social and political dimensions.

The concept of body, mind and soul also includes issues of ecology. This issue is an important part of life, especially in the way Africans relate to nature. The above highlights the

Spiritual Discipline

concepts of spirituality which is ecological manifesting, sensitivity towards and solidarity with the earth. Africans regard Mother Nature not as an object of subjugation, but as a mother and symbol of the divine. In the olden days, Africans would not cut a tree without certain rituals. People were connected to nature. The connection with the whole of nature was, therefore, an essential way of nurturing it, instead of dominating it. Therefore, life in an African society is connected to the entire God created part of life. That is to say, Africans are connected to God as much as creation is part of God.

Reflective Thinking

- How can parents / adults effectively mirror spirituality in the 21st Century?
- Why have so many teachings and preaching of the Bible not produced corresponding spiritually matured Christians to measure positive efforts?
- What is the truism that, a sacred person is expected to mirror honesty, justice, gentleness, patience, and sincerity values in Africa? To what extent is this reflected in church leadership in Africa today?

SESSION 2| *Characteristics of Spirituality & Its Relationship to Religion*

In the first instance, it is important to understand the make-up of spirituality and its relationship to religious faith. Given that spirituality has traditionally been extricably linked with religious faith, it would be helpful, for the sake of clarity, to begin this section of investigation by understanding the term “religiosity”. Most simply put, religiosity is understood as religious spirituality, as defined by Rossiter (2010:7a). According to him, it is ...a spirituality that is clearly referenced to religion; and also, Rossiter (2010b) puts it to be a “measure of religious behaviour such as attendance at church/synagogue among others, with frequency of prayer, and engagement in a local community of faith.”

There appears to be a widespread lack of consensus regarding a clearly articulated definition or description of spirituality (Eande, 2003; 2005; Harris, 2007; Hyde, 2007; Liddy, 2007; Roehlke, Partain, King, Wagener & Benson, 2006; Tacey, 2004). Some placed emphasis on people’s relationship with the divine or ultimate; others placed it on their relationship with themselves, others on nature, while others emphasized the notion of transcendence. Best (1995); Eande (2003), Hart (2003), McCreeny (1994), and Watson (2006) were all in agreement that spirituality cannot be explicitly defined as such, but rather, it tends to be described in terms of its attributes or characteristics.

One aspect of this lack of consensus is linked to the nature of the relationship between spirituality and religiosity, for the purpose of this section, perceives the many diverse descriptions and definitions for spirituality is to place them between two ends of a continuum. At one end, spirituality is described within humanist or secular phenomena that do not include a religious aspect, such as a belief in God or an ultimate. At the other end, spirituality is more closely aligned with, or wholly described within religion.

At the humanist or secular end of the continuum, spirituality is described inclusively, that is not synonymous with religion and understood to be able to find expression outside of, as well as within religion (Rossiter, 2010a;2016b;Ryan, 2006; Tacey,2000). Hay & Nye (2006); Nye & Hay (1996); and O’Murchu (1997) argue that within this space, all people are understood to be spiritual but not necessarily religious. The British Humanist Association (1993) and cited in White (1996:34) is an example of a humanist approach to describing spirituality as;

Religious believers and humanists, theists, on the one hand, agnostics and atheists on the other, agree on the importance of spirituality, but they interpret it differently. Despite these different interpretations, however, all can agree that the ‘spiritual’ dimension comes from our deepest humanist. It finds expression in aspirations, moral sensibility, creativity, love and friendship, response to natural and human beauty, scientific and artistic endeavour, appreciation and wonder at the natural world, intellectual achievement and physical activity, surmounting suffering and persecution, selfless love, the quest for meaning and for values by which to live.

Spiritual Discipline

Put in another perhaps, more succinct way, Meehan (2002:292) describes spirituality at this end of the continuum, as “secular spirituality seeks to find meaning and purpose in universal human experience rather than religious experience per se.” Also, Eade (2005); Hay and Nife (2006) and Tacey (2000) argue that within this space, spirituality is understood to be concerned with wholeness, connectedness or relationship with oneself, with others, with nature or the world, but not necessarily with God or an ultimate.

At the other end of the spectrum, spirituality is described more exclusively, that is, within a religious understanding. Within this space, spirituality includes all those characteristics associated with a humanist or secular description. At the heart of a person’s spirituality is his/her relationship with the divine or ultimate. Indeed, some scholars such as Carr (1996, as cited in Eade, 2005) suggest that spirituality is as intimately rooted in religion, and that to separate it from religion makes little or no sense.

This sentiment is also expressed by Thatcher (1996) who claims that spirituality can only be taught within a faith context. Others, such as Fisher (2007, 2010) argue that people cannot be said to be spiritual unless they have a relationship or connectedness with God. Within this understanding of spirituality, there are those such as Lambourin (1996, as cited in Eade, 2005; 240) who reject outrightly the more inclusive humanistic understanding of spirituality by arguing that such inclusive descriptions of spiritual development become so “vague that they really constitute no more than good personal and social education.”

Alexander & McLaughlin (2003), as cited in Best (2008), pointed out that these two understandings of spirituality, that is, religious and secular, have also been distinguished as either ‘religiously tethered’ or ‘religiosity untethered’, and when linked to education ‘from the inside’ meaning from within a specifically religious context, and education ‘from the outside’ which refers to spiritual education outside of an exclusivist religious context.

Sagberg (2008) suggests that within all accepted descriptions of spirituality, there are two common elements:

The first is the seeker’s ability to transcend and urge towards transcending the immediate, transcending the present time, and transcending the actual place in a search for meaning and coherence in life.

The second is a moral sense of what it is to be truly human. This sense may be expressed in religious as well as in humanistic terms. Tacey (2000) & Wong (2006) maintained that others also emphasise the aspect of transcendence within spirituality. Hay (1998:172) argues that spirituality by definition is always concerned with self-transcendence, which “requires adherents to go beyond egocentricity to take account of their relatedness to other people, the environment, and, for religious believers, and to God. Another significant characteristic is described as an eternal yearning for something more or beyond oneself (Tacey, 2000) or to be connected with something larger than one’s own egos (Palmer, 2003, as cited in Harries, 2007), which McCreeeny (1994: 96-97) refers to as “spirituality as something other.”

Adams (2009) and Tacey (2000) observed that the universal search for meaning and identity are also attributed to spirituality while Eade (2006) as cited in Adam (2009) argues that the spiritual aspect of identity pays attention, to which an individual reality is, and their place and purpose in the world.

Characteristics of Spirituality and Its Relationship to Religion

Fundamental to spirituality is the notion of relationship (Adams, Hyde & Woolley, 2008; Hay & Nye, 2006), which Nye (1998, 2006) refers to as “relational consciousness” while others used the term “connectedness” (Tacy, 2000). According to Hart (2003, as cited in Moriarty, 2009:48), contributing to this dimension of rationality (as well as to sensitivity) are five capacities of spirituality which he names as “listening to wisdom, wonder, wondering, between you and me, and seeing the invisible.” Whilst Bradford (1999:3) differentiates between secular and religious understandings, he adds a third facet of spirituality which he names “practical spirituality”. His three facets of spirituality include:

Human Spirituality: This is an aspect which related to the meeting of our human needs, that is, for love, security, reflection, praise and responsibility;

Devotional Spirituality: This refers to our propensity for religious response and involvements;

Practical Spirituality: This is a combination of human and devotional spirituality which represents the engagement of one’s combination of spirituality with day-to-day living and being, including his/her contribution to the society in which he/she lives.

Bradford links his first aspect, human spirituality to the United Nations convention on the rights of the child (United Nations, 1989) by summarizing the spiritual rights as set out as: love and affection; security and sincerity; new experiences and wonder; encouragement and support; and responsibility and participation. Of particular significance within Bradford’s (1999:6) three faceted description of spirituality is his explanation of the relationship between human spirituality and devotional spirituality which he displays in the following ways:

SS/N	SPIRITUAL	RELIGIOUS
1	Being loved becomes Feeling	Identify as a member
2	secured becomes	Nurtured in tradition
3	Responding in wonder	Framework for worship
4	becomes Being affirmed becomes	Empowerment for service
5	Symbolic sharing becomes	Experience of community

Table 1

Bradford (1999:6) sees the relationship between the religious and humanist understanding of spirituality as, “religion as transforming, giving order to and endorsing human spirituality”, and states that “the factors listed as spiritual (in the above table) are fundamental to religious identity of all kinds.” For Bradford, “a religion makes the invaluable contribution of providing a language, culture and tradition within which the significance of personal and ultimate issues can be articulated, shared and reflected upon.”

For Bradford (1999:15), spiritual development is:

The process by which our human spirituality is (i) established, (ii) grows in relationship with and concern for others, (iii) is extended into devotional spirituality, (iv) responds to questions and is supported by membership of a faith community, and (v) becomes integrated within a human-spirituality/devotional

Spiritual Discipline

spirituality profile of a practical spirituality- or day-by-day interpersonal engagement- in a world for which one is both thankful and committed to contribute towards the struggle for good.

This understanding is a significant insight with implications for the nurturing of young people's spirituality (most especially student Pastors who will midwife the spiritual birth and development of many) and religious development particularly in steps (i) and (ii) wherein spirituality is established and grows.

Reflective Thinking

- Delineate the essence of spiritual formation from the humanistic/ secular and the religious perspectives, noting key lessons.
- Build a bridge through the secular and the religious perspectives underlining their utilitarian values to the post-21st century Christian.
- Review Bradford's insight into spirituality and take inventory of your level of faithfulness to its practices.

WORK SHEET

List some items and issues you think that spiritual discipline should address in human life.

Where are you presently in your spiritual development level? Be candid – using the following keys:
Above average, average, below average, not sure:

- Prayer Life:
- Bible Study:
- Personal Relationships:
- Witnessing:
- Handling of Emotional challenges:

Describe what you desire to become and grow into in the cause of the process.

Prayerfully state some areas of struggles of life where you need help.

SESSION 3 | *Fostering Student Pastors'* *Spiritual Development*

Tacey (2000:28) describes the relationship between spirituality and religion as:

Religion and spirituality, thus, face each other as paradoxical twins: Without religion, we have no organized way of communicating or expressing truth, no sacred rituals to bind individuals into a living community. Yet, without spirituality, we have no truth to celebrate ongoing nature of divine revelation. We need both-form and substance- but each can attack and cancel out the other if the conditions are not propitious.

In understanding the relationship between spirituality and religion, Tacey seems to reflect the Latin origin of the two words. The word “spiritual” comes from the Latin word *spirare* meaning “to breathe” whilst the word “religious” comes from the Latin word *religare* meaning “to bind together”. Ryan (2006:68-69) explains that the connection between breathing and spirituality “is the idea of both being vital or essential aspects of life: breathing is the thing which gives life to the individual.” The notion or characteristics of spirituality being vital was emphasized by McCreeny (1994:97) linking the spiritual with “being active, energetic, vibrant, vigorous and vital.” Grey (2006:19) emphasizes the breathing notion of the Spirit by connecting it to the Hebrew word *Ruah* as used in Genesis 1:1. In Grey’s understanding, *ruah* brings the sense of the elemental, creative, formless energy; the energy of connecting breathing life into all creatures (Gen. 1:1). This breath of life energizes from chaos and formless void, the *tehom*, or watery chaos/ womb and the moist, watery depths.”

Grey (2006:19) connects this understanding with children’s play, arguing that “children need order and structures, but their need for messy, creative play, reawakens us to the often swept-aside creative potential of relating to nature.”

The Latin word *religare* meaning “to bind” connotes a more formalized or organized understanding than *spirare*. Ryan (2006:68) explains that the word came to refer to oaths made which would bind humans to the gods; hence, “to be religious” meant to bind oneself to a community of people by swearing oaths and making commitments.

It is important to distinguish between the two terms: spiritual and religious, and understand the nature of their relationship with each other. Ryan (2006:6) suggests that “whereas spirituality is a characteristic of all humans, religious means that the person’s spirituality has been defined by the language and practices of a particular religion.” Trousdale (2005) suggests that spiritual development can occur independently of religion, but many find religions a path towards developing spirituality. The understanding of the distinction and relationship between these two dimensions has implications for any framework that will inform religious education in settings.

The notion of spirituality has been shown in the literature to be innate to all humans, something that comes or arises from the seeker’s deepest humanity (Hay & Nye, 1998, 2006; Tacey, 2000). Further, although the literature shows a wide and varying range of descriptions for spirituality (Best, 1995; Euade, 2003; Grey 2006; Liddy, 2007; Sagberg, 2008; Tacey, 2000; White, 1996) and its relationship to religion or religious (Rossiter, 2010a, 2010b; Ryan 2007b; Tacey,

Fostering Student Pastors' Spiritual Development

2000; Trousdale, 2005), a number of key common characteristics or attributes are suggested (Adams et al., 2008; Bradford, 1999; Eade, 2009; Hart, 2003; Hay & Nye, 1998; 2006; McCreeny, 1994). These include, but not limited to: relationship or connectedness; wholeness or become whole; an appreciation of the wonder and beauty of nature as well as of human accomplishment, including creative, intellectual and physical achievement; moral sensitivity; quest for meaning and purpose; and transcendence.

Whilst spirituality is linked to religion or a person's religiosity, it can be said that the majority of descriptions of spirituality accept that spirituality is universal and that it needs not include religious aspect. It is important though, to understand the nature of the relationship between the two and, perhaps, this can be most succinctly understood in terms of how people express their spirituality and how they respond to life. Religious people express their spirituality in a community that is, in relationship with others of like-mind within a particular religious language and practices (Ryan, 2006). It can also be said that religious people respond to life in a way that reflects particular religious beliefs and values (Bradford 1999; Trousdale; 2005).

In concluding this discussion, Rossiter's (2010a:7) overview of the four terms or constructs: spiritual, religious, spirituality and religiosity help capture and crystallize both their distinctiveness as well as how they are related. These are:

3.1. Spiritual

The natural dimension to life that includes thinking and feelings about transcendence; ideas about the Creator or Creative Force in the cosmos; human values; sense of meaning and purpose in life; love and care for self and others; sense of stewardship for the earth and its flora and fauna; and the aesthetic.

3.2. Spirituality

This is the way in which a spiritual / moral dimension enters into, or is implied in, the thinking and behaviour of individuals.

3.3. Religious

Being religious means being spiritual in a particular way as involved by the beliefs, practices and traditions of a religious group. It usually includes a sense of personal relationship with God, belief in an after-life, and identification with, and participation in a local religious community. The religious is usually informed by a theology; and it participates in a ritual life and prayer, as well as relating to religious symbols, art and music.

3.4. Religiosity (or Religious Spirituality)

Religious spirituality with engagements to religious activities and thinking; personal and communal prayer and participation in religious rituals in a community of faith are prominent. Religiosity is a spirituality that is clearly referenced to religion.

Spiritual Discipline

Reflective Thinking

Make every effort to bind yourself to your calling by making specific vows in your spiritual disciplines.

WORKSHEET

Express your conception on the following:

The Supreme Being

The dignity of human value

The purpose of human existence

Environment and other living things

Why are you here in the Seminary/Bible College/Church?

List things you do in response to your calling/ obligation and relationship to the environment, other created things, and the Supreme Being.

Enumerate sources for your spiritual growth (noting books, fellowships, places of worship, and particular ministers you listen to.

SESSION 4| *Fostering Spiritual Discipline in Group Dynamics*

Over the past few decades, there has been a lot of efforts and attention given to the ministry of small groups in churches. Pastors and researchers have developed varying models for small group ministry that have impacted scores of churches around the world. The small group ministry has been very vital in both the recovery and nurturance of community in the churches. However, as in most things, people always run the risk of honoring the messenger above the message. Small groups are not ends in themselves; instead, they are a mean to bringing something about. They are a tool that can be used to accomplish a purpose. The real question in a healthy small group ministry is not; "How many groups do you have going on?" "But rather what is going on in the group(s)?"

Many forms of education and learning can take place in the lives of the believers, but for the purpose of doing intentional spiritual formation in an educational sense, it is vital to include four components in all that the church does. These are:

4.1. Information

Formation begins with receiving information, be it from a teacher, a book, a verse of the Scriptures, or a movie/story. So, spiritual formation starts with receiving something new.

4.2. Experience

At some points, people (believers) begin their search to understand and integrate what they have taken in. This is the stage of experience. People practice being or doing the new thing through experience. They try it on in daily life.

4.3. Reflection

After the experience, people reflect and examine what took place. What internal insights were gained? What behaviours were attempted? Where did they sense success or failure? What was learned about God? Reflection will, sometimes, begin alone but it is most effective in the shared company of other peoples or believers.

4.4. Community

When people are together with other learners who are being taught, practicing new attitudes and actions, and sharing each other's experiences, a mysterious bond is naturally developed. It is called "shared community" and is made up of shared history, mutual discovery, and group gains and losses. Community does not have to be forced, because it cannot help but occur under these circumstances.

Small groups are dynamic forms in which the spiritual formation process can take place. The key to their success, however, is not dependent on their structure, but rather, on the elements they contained for genuine growth and transformation.

Fostering Spiritual Discipline in Group Dynamics

Reflective Thinking

- Make positive efforts to choose, at least, two persons with whom you can study and pray together this week.
- Devote this week to reading about the dynamics of small group and community values.

Spiritual Discipline

WORKSHEET

Prayerfully select three or five persons and form a small group for the purpose of watching over one another

List the names of the persons you have chosen below:

Share your experiences in the group below:

What are your joys and fears?

What effort(s) will you make to ensure that the group remains authentic to fulfill the following: information, experience, reflection and community?

SESSION 5 | *Personal Evaluation*

Please Rate Yourself Accordingly

Spiritual Amour	Doing Great	Doing Well	Below Average	Little /None
Power over Sin				
Righteous Living				
Honesty, Steadfastness				
Faith				
Witnessing to Others				
Using God's Word				
Prayer				

Table 2

Specific Plans to help in Your Spiritual Growth

.....

.....

.....

How are you doing in fruit bearing?

	Doing Great	Doing Well	Below Average	Little/ None
Love				
Joy				
Peace				
Patience				
Gentleness				
Goodness				
Faith (fullness)				
Meekness				
Self-control				

Table 3

Suggest ways by which you can improve your Fruit Bearing

.....

.....

.....

WORKSHEET 1
AUGUSTINE'S CONFESSIONS
(BOOK I – III)

Something to Ponder:

BOOK I

What does it mean to confess?

What do you desire to confess?

Prayer, Praise, acknowledgement, which comes before the other, and why?

How do you pray?

What is sin?

What is your sin?

How have you been educated? What aspects have been the most beneficial thus far?

How does education relate to your life?

Personal Evaluation

What discipline has been effective for you? Why?

How do you pray and Work? How do you distinguish your play from your work? Of what value is play and work to you?

Whom do you imitate? How? Why?

Was there "innocence" in your childhood?

BOOK II

What are your sins? How do you feel about them?

How have you been acculturated?

What is a worthy life aim? What is (are) your life aim? Has your life aim(s) changed? How?

What warnings did your parents or guardian or guardians give you? Were they effective? Why or why not?

What warnings/advice will you give to your children? Why?

Spiritual Discipline

How do your friends affect you? Have you ever experienced an unfriendly situation? What happened?

BOOK III

What is love?

Whom do you love? Why? How do you express your love?

What first sparked your interest in the things of God?

What is wisdom? Who among your acquaintances is wise? Are you wise?

What is falsehood? What falsehoods have you believed? Have you believed something to be true and later discovered to be falsehood?

How do you know God?

Personal Evaluation

Something to Consider Doing

- Develop a "confessional" prayer, using all senses of the word "confess".
- Confess something in a public way (This time in writing).
- Write a letter of confession to someone you have imitated/offended.

WORKSHEET 2
AUGUSTINE'S CONFESSIONS
(BOOK IV-VI)

Something to Ponder:

BOOK VI

About what are you arrogant? Superstitious? Scrupulous?

How would you describe your way of life?

How have you shown faithfulness to something or someone?

What forms of 'traditional religion' do you practice? Why?

What is true friendship? What do you give/expect in friendship?

Who are your true friends?

What is death? Have you ever responded to death/loss?

Does time "heal all wounds"? How does time affect your pains?

Personal Evaluation

What attracts your attention? (What is beautiful to you?)

Who have you judged based on the opinions of others? Were your judgments true?

What "difficult" ideas have you been able to grasp quickly?

How do you feel about persons who seem 'simple'- minded?

BOOK V

Why should you confess what God already knows?

What makes you happy?

How do you act when you do not understand something?

How has God directed your movements throughout Nigeria (Africa, the world)?

How do you and your family deal with separation?

How has illness affected you?

Spiritual Discipline

What criticisms of the Church or Christianity have influenced you the most?

What did you believe about God before salvation? What do you believe now?

What experiences would you describe as "turning points" in your life?

BOOK VI

What life/faith crises have you faced?

How do you view and use the Bible?

What do you desire the most in life?

To whom are you responsible? How do you show this responsibility?

Something to Consider Doing

- Spend time developing a new friendship.
- From your own experiences, reading and dialogue with others, make a "bereavement list" of things to do/say that will truly bring comfort/encouragement to someone who has experienced a loss. Include things to avoid also.
- Write out your personal confession of faith - a series of statements of your own Christian beliefs. Compare/contrast your confession with other "creeds" and confessions.

WORKSHEETS 3
AUGUSTINE'S CONFESSIONS
(BOOK VII – IX)

Something to Ponder:

BOOKVII

How would you describe your youthful years?

When you think of God/Christ, what does your mind 'see'?

What is "evil"? What is the origin of evil? How do you reconcile God's good creation with the existence of evil?

What evils have you experienced/caused? How has the presence of evil affected your life?

Have you ever had a vision? What did you 'see'? What did it mean to you?

What portions of the Bible do you read the most, the least and Why?

What books, besides the Bible, have been of significant value to your spiritual growth?

BOOK VIII

Which is more important to you - being certain of God or standing firmly for God? Why?

Spiritual Discipline

What is repentance? Of what have you recently repented? What do you need to repent of? What happens to you when you repent?

Have you ever been surprised to find out that someone repented? Why were you surprised?

What is the relationship between your will(s) and your actions?
Did you struggle at becoming a Christian? How?

What gave you the difficulty? What helped you to overcome?

BOOK IX

What did you forsake when you became a Christian?

How do your physical and emotional health relate to your spiritual health?

What has your parents contributed to your life?

How do you express grief? Have you ever "grieved at your grief"? Is it appropriate to weep during grief?

What can you do for a dead loved one?

Personal Evaluation

Something to Consider Doing

- Write an “open letter” to Today's Youths - to warn, to encourage, to share, to “confess” or to guide.
- Begin an annotated bibliography of books that have been meaningful to you and that you would recommend to others. Categorize your list in some ways. Use the bibliography to provide “Bibliotherapy” for someone in need.
- Interview a Christian about the relationships he/she has discovered between physical, emotional and spiritual growth.

SESSION 6 | *Christian Devotional Classics*

Something that is of the highest quality and having a value or position which may be recognized and unquestioned can be described as devotional classics. Spiritual formation aims to help Christians have a quality of life that cannot be questioned in writing, living, interaction, to mention but a few. As the Christian have been with Jesus, this can be achieved when he began to live a holy life and a life of commitment as disciples.

There are two major types of classics - Biographical and Directives.

6.1. Biographical Classics

These talk about the private life of the saints. Their confessions, personal letters, spiritual diaries and interpretative biography or autobiography reveal who they are. By this, the author means an intimate glimpse into the lives of the saints: Moses, Paul, David, Daniel, Elijah, Elisha, the list is endless. This is the kind of life Christians are called to live.

6.2. Directive Classics

This deals with prescriptions for religious conduct and private worship. In other words, directive classics give directions for finding the light or ease in 'life desert'. In other words, the saints were faced with life's struggles and challenges, yet, they allowed God to lead them. The classics hold before the seeker mirror in which he may see himself both as he really is and as he ought to be.

6.3. How to Use the Classics

The best approach in using these classics is to make a kind of historical approach by:

- Making a choice of the classics to use
- Reconstruct the context
- Read critically and yet sympathetically
- Read leisurely and also retreat
- Expand the range of shared experience.

6.4. Major Areas God Uses for the Continuing Transformation

Classical Disciplines: Solitude and Fasting. This is because adherents have a relationship with God. He celebrates God by worshipping Him for who He is; His continual interaction with the moving of the Spirit of God. This is being distracted when he resists the Spirit, even when he knows His will.

The patient endurance of God develops in him by means of the various frustrations - trials and temptations he faces daily (Lk. 9:23). God uses these things to transform seekers to be like Jesus daily. The closer they are to God, the more sins they confess their sins and weaknesses. The more closely they go to Him, the more they see their ungodliness, and then, ask for His mercy, and the more He brings them to right relationship with Him.

Note: Do not be so quick to follow every good feeling, even as you will not be quick to avoid every

Christian Devotional Classics

bad feeling.

Reflective Thinking

Select a text-book in each of the classical areas this week, and scan through the major highlights.

Spiritual Discipline

WORKSHEET

Select two devotional classics; after reading, share your experiences below:

i. -----

ii. -----

SESSION 7| *Devotional Theology*

Devotional theology is that area of learning that offers guidance to the Christian growth and his encounter with God. It deals with his attitude, how the Holy Spirit may come and enlarge and or indwell in him. The aims of devotional theology are:

- To help people grow in their spiritual lives
- To guide people to grow in their personal relationship with God
- To guide individuals to grow in consciousness and a deeper knowledge about and of God

Spiritual Formation is a common pattern that involves the Christian's relationships with God, the attitude and discipline in which the Holy Spirit can enlarge and dwell in the Christian. Spiritual formation focuses on man's relationship with God. It involves:

- Learning how to read the Bible in a new way, and what the Bible says about humans.
- Paying closer attention to the heroes of faith; focusing the faith of the heroes to catch the Person of Jesus.
- True spirituality makes Christians strive to be like God, and not trying to play being God, but being like Him.
- Devotional literatures are literatures that seek to feed the soul.
- The discipline of the Christian life is not bondage or a legalism.
- Power can affect and even crumble the entire church if not used appropriately. For power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely.
- Spiritual formation or simply put, devotion simply means single- mindedness/purpose. It means that whatever one does, it must have the tone of single purpose.
- Spiritual formation then is an attempt to live a sanctified life. This is the idea of sanctification which is living a holy life as required by God. David puts it rightly when he stated, "My heart pants for Thee daily" Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness"

7.1. Spiritual Formation, What is It?

For clarity sake, let us adopt the definition offered by Stanger (1989:17) as "the intentional and systematic process of growing into the image of Christ through obedience to the Scripture by the power of the Holy Spirit in the believer's total personality." An analysis of this definition is necessary for adequate understanding.

7.1.1. "Intentional and systematic"

This conveys the idea and acts of the individual believer as that of deliberate and planned aspects of spiritual formation. Though God is the author and the main force in one's spiritual formation, the individual must take an active role through intentional and systematic means for his/her life. That is to say, the individual must assume responsibility in working towards God's

Spiritual Discipline

thought and purpose.

Also, intentional and systematic suggests that the individual must not allow him/herself to be compelled in obeying or receiving nurture that may result into spiritual growth, but he must willingly and obediently submit himself to disciplines that will result into spiritual growth. In this same vein, the individual must be aware that spiritual formation is a progress which demands properly planned-discipline or “precept by precept” little here and little there and this result into growth in God’s image.

7.1.2. “Growing into the Image of Christ”

This expresses the goal of spiritual formation. A closer examination of this reveals that the purpose hinges on this phrase, “growing into the image of Christ” which by implication means that spiritual formation is geared to assist individuals in what Stranger (1989:17) and Wilford (1991:587) called the life-long, dynamic process of becoming like Christ. Spiritual formation, Stranger argues is relationship-building between Jesus Christ and the individual. Although instruction, content, Scripture memory and spiritual discipline are the processes of spiritual formation, they are not the desired goal. Therefore, spiritual formation is life-long and continues; no one reaches the level of completion until he/she is fully united with Christ.

7.1.3. “Through Obedience to the Scripture”

This concerns itself with the place of God’s revelation. Spiritual formation is about being obedient to His word and commands. That is to say, spiritual formation stresses the depth of the authority of God’s word in the life of the individual believer. The way, level and extent a believer responds to and or commits himself to God’s word justifies the buoyancy of his spiritual height/formation.

7.1.4. “By the Power of the Holy Spirit”

This indicates the role of God in spiritual formation. It is His role that makes spiritual formation possible. All attempts to assist in guiding spiritual formation must recognize that the Holy Spirit is the enabling motivating force. He is the Creator and one who brings His children to Himself. He empowers and enables spiritual formation in ways and workings beyond human understanding; He is not limited to human patterns of natural, empirical stages. No one working on spiritual formation can predict or reduce God’s activity to a formula that can be reproduced in everyone else’s life. There are some apparent patterns and stages that seem common to many believers, but no guaranteed formula exists. This role of the Holy Spirit implies that He is the facilitator, teacher, leader, among others, who works with persons to see the need to be aware of and sensitive to what the Holy Spirit is doing in the life of each individual. The Holy Spirit’s work will not be identical in all persons. Believers and human instruments must then be prayerful to seek and assist the work that God is doing in the lives of each individual.

7.1.5. “In our total Personality”

This refers to the thoroughness of spiritual formation. Willford (1991:58) observes that the work and goal of spiritual formation is not the elimination of one’s humanness or the platonic denial of the body in order to elevate the Spirit. That is to say, spiritual formation is not about

Devotional Theology

making one less of human, a super being, an angel or a sub-human with heavenly organs like that of a spirit. Notwithstanding, spirits also have desires; assume human nature underline. Does this not negate the call of Paul to the brethren in Corinth, Colossae, and Galatia, and of course, to Christians today by extension to be dead (Col.3:5 ESV), and crucified (Gal.2:20)? That is to eliminate, kill, and render inactive the activities of the flesh? Willford (1991:587) further explains that spiritual formation is concerned with assisting persons to become fully human in the same sense that Jesus Christ was fully human. This he stresses, involves all that it means to be created in God's image and to be a human.

It would be appropriate to complement this definition by adding to the analysis of the definition that spiritual formation does not require compartmentalization. Spiritual formation, on the contrary, encourages the believer to embrace and participate in all that it means to be a child of God and, at the same time, is fully involved in God's Kingdom.

7.1.6. "The Role of Community"

Reading between the lines, one can deduce that the individual has a primary end in being obedient to God which this author believes refers to the immediate person in the environment where one lives. Spiritual formation does not take place in a vacuum; it is nurtured and assisted in a community. The community, as may be noted, is the church or the community of faith and Learning-Seminary. It is needful to assert also, that one cannot retreat from community or the world in order to mature spiritually. Growth is experienced in and within the community. The community, therefore, plays a key role for the individual to mature spiritually. In the setting of the student, the Seminary environment which comprises the Faculty, staff, fellow students, school policies, living conditions, student body government, among others. These must all aid the growth of the student spiritually.

There are thirteen (13) themes on devotional theology. These are: Charisma, holiness, healing, discipleship, ministry, simplicity, community, worship, confession, social action, retreat, prayer and meditation (see also Foster, 1985 and Haselbarth, 1976). This author has galvanized these and discussed them elaborately in part two of this book.

To any typical African, call into the ministry is a collective decision in sustaining the individual. Some are given early to the Lord by their parents. Some obtained personal conviction since their childhood and have offered themselves to the Lord. Some others are called through the guidance of a Priest/Seer, the Chief, the most elderly man/woman in the family and or are influenced by members of Age-Grade.

In the same way, Christians are called into ministry and guided by the priests who are faithful and humble men and women who, year after year, preached, taught and prayed in village churches, living among the people, calling them from the sanctuary, watching over their morals and preserving the tradition. The prophets are to sharpen the social conscience and call churches to assume new tasks. The prophets help the indigenous churches to be world-wide in outlook. They are more on the lookout for new promises, for what God is yet to do in history. The prophets proclaim judgment on the easy arrangements of religion with worldly powers. It can be summed up that:

Spiritual Discipline

The Prophets ministered to the public; social and religious needs of people. The ministry of the prophets stressed the need for a social expression of the congregation's interior faith in acts of truth, love, and justice. The prophets convict people of their sins, announce Judgment, and make the people dis comforted in the way they live.

The priests ministered to the private and spiritual needs. The ministry of the priests is to care for the temple worship, provide for the sacrifices, forgive sins, announce pardon and comfort the people (Hardes, 1985:422).

The concept of 'mid-man' as used by Sundkler means that the Pastor represents Christ, and not himself. Therefore, the Pastor must serve the functions of Christ, putting and demonstrating compassion, humility and making/living a Christ- practical life as a bringer of reconciliation.

"Cargo cult" is also a term used by Sundkler to mean the quality of religious activities and practices that are carried out daily. The spiritual problem of 'Cargo Cult' lies in the mind and in the ways people are devoted to their Lord.

In Genesis chapter 12:1-2, God said to Abram, "Get out of your country ... to a land that I (God) will show you. I will bless you." The call of God contains both truth and grace. Truth is the separating instrument-"Get thee out." Grace is the promise- "I will bless and make you a blessing." Humans often grasp at the grace, the "I will bless thee..." of God, and fails to comply with the demand thereof..." Get thee out." Now, this does not only apply to the matter of man's salvation in its first step, but it comes as a new revelation and calls at different times in the Christian life. The call of God to some people means a fuller and higher acceptance of truth and ministry; of testimony and witness; of surrender and experience, which undoubtedly, comes by one or another of the Divine forms of visitation to such as the Lord wishes to lead in grace. This will be timed, definite, and challenging. A messenger may come out from nowhere; the nowhere of reputation, reorganization, worldly fame or honour. He will deliver a message, only staying long enough to leave its essential implications with those who hear. Then, having passed on, things can never be the same for them again.

The "Call" has sounded. The crisis has been precipitated. The issue is between the life which has been with its limitations known or unrecognized, and that which God offers. But, as usually is the case, this truth is going to call for a "getting out." Getting out, it may be, of certain popularity, a loss of prestige, dis-favour among men, being labeled a 'singular, and 'peculiar,' 'extreme,' 'unsafe.' It may mean a head-on impact of all the prejudice, tradition, and disfavor of the religious world. It may involve exclusion, ostracism, and suspicion. These are the accompaniments of all calls of God to advance with Him beyond accepted standards. This is the cost of path-finding for souls. This is the price to be paid for higher serviceableness to God and men (www.austin-sperts.net/english/0027883.html accessed 31/05/2015).

WORKSHEET

Describe how persons are called in your traditional religious society.

Share how you were called to the ministry.

Give highlight of a theology of spiritual discipline for your church.

SESSION 8| *Discovering Spiritual Maturity*

The Scriptures cited in Ephesians 4:13 and Romans 8:29, when studied closely, will help to explain spiritual maturity as:

- A continuous effort made to ensure a steady growth in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18).
- The time and trouble one takes to keep him/herself spiritually fit (1 Tim. 4:7)
- A discipline embarked upon for the purpose of training in godliness –(1 Tim. 4:7)

Four Habits of Spiritual Maturity

8.1. *The Habit of Having Time Daily with God-James 1:25*

- Gen. 1:27; 2:7; 3:8; Rev. 3:20
- 1 Cor. 1:9
- Mark 1:35; Luke 22:39; 5:16 1,
- Matt. 4:4; Job 23:12; Ps. 119:9

How to start

- Select a time that can become a personal quiet time
- Choose a good place (Luke 22:39; Mk. 1:35)
- Gather the materials you will need
- Begin with the right mind and spirit.
- Reverence - Ps. 46:10
- * Expectancy- Ps. 119:18
- Obedience-Jn.7:17
- Follow a plan set out

8.2. *The Habit of Bible Reading - Exploring God's love letter (2 Tim.3: 16-17)*

- Learn to hear God's Word –(Rom. 10:17)
- Be ready and willing to hear God –(Lk. 8:8; Jam. 1:19)
- Deal with attitudes that hinder hearing God –(Lk. 8:4:15:18)
- Confess any known sin –(Jam. 1:21)
- Pay careful attention to what you hear –(Heb. 2:1)
- Act upon what you hear–(Jam. 1:22,25)
- Read God's Word –(Rev. 1:3; Deut. 17:19)
- Study God's Word.

Ask /answer the following questions:

- Who are the people involved in the passage?
- What are the events which take place?

Discovering Spiritual Maturity

- Where is this passage located within the Bible (context)
- Why did God put this in the Bible for you to read?
- When (in history) did this passage take place?
- How did God work in this passage?–(Acts 17:11;2 Tim. 2:15)

8.3. Memorize God's word– (Prov. 7:2-3) and Its Relevance

- Knowing God's word helps believers to overcome temptation –(Ps. 119:11)
- Knowing God's word helps one to make good decisions – (Ps. 119:105)
- Knowing God's word strengthens one while undergoing troubles –(Ps. 119:49)
- * Knowing God's word sustains when one is sad –(Jer. 15:16)
- Knowing God's word helps one to respond appropriately to unbelievers –(1 Pet. 3:15)

8.4. Meditate on God's word – (Ps. 1:2-3)

Reasons are:

- It is the key to sharpen your thought like that of Christ –(Prov.4:23; Rom. 12:2)
- It is the key to live a life of prayer – (Jn. 15:7).
- It is the key to a successful and prosperous life – (Josh. 1:8)

Ways to meditate:

- Picture - Visualize the scene in your mind
- Pronounce it aloud
- Paraphrase it in your own words
- Personalize it - replace the pronouns
- Pray it - say it back to God

8.5. Apply God's Word–(Jam. 1:22; Matt. 5:19)

- What did it mean to the original hearers?
- What are the underlying timeless principles?
- Where or how could you practice that principle? – (Jn. 13:17)

8.6. The Habit of Prayer---Talking with God –(Rom. 12:12)

Ways of revitalizing your prayer life:

- Approach prayer with the right attitude –(Matt. 6:5-8)
- Be yourself-v.5
- Get down to the secret place - v. 6
- Be articulate and precise - v. 7-8

8.7. Develop the Habit of Fellowship - Participating in God's Family– (Heb. 10:25)

You need God's family to grow spiritually – (Heb. 10:24; Eccl. 4:9-10, 12; Prov. 27:17; Heb. 3:13)

How to Start:

You must start with a strong desire. Be internally motivated. External motivation does not

Spiritual Discipline

last, internal or intrinsic does.

Begin right now–(Eccl. 11:14). Do not procrastinate.

Announce your intentions publicly to friends, family members and boss. The power of vow is awesome – (Ps. 76:11).

Never allow an exception until the new habit is securely rooted in your life. Each lapse will be fatal. Try again and again. It takes 7 to 21 repetitions to learn something well.

Whenever you feel the slightest urge or prompting to practice this new habit - DO IT THEN! Do not wait for a more convenient time and place.

Get a partner who will support and encourage you. Find someone who is willing to hold you accountable and check on you, especially in the early days, before the habit is firmly rooted in your life –(Heb, 1:25; Eccl. 4:9-10)

Rely on God's power to help you establish the habit. Remember, Satan does not want you to develop habits that will help you to grow spiritually and make you like Christ. Therefore, Satan will do all he can to tempt, cause you to slip, or discourage you. Therefore, pray! – (2 Tim. 1:7; Phil. 2:13).

Discovering Spiritual Maturity

WORKSHEET

Share with a friend or group, the success you are making in your spiritual development; noting each expected habit areas.

Write down the difficulties you encountered in discovering your spiritual maturity.

SESSION 9 | *The Ministers' Spiritual Development*

The spiritual development of a minister can be enhanced in the following ways:

- Maintaining an attitude/lifestyle of quiet time
- A regular reading of devotional classics
- A constant fellowship with other brethren/ministers
- A conscious and disciplined attitude to study and meditate on God's word
- A regular moment of spiritual retreat
- A habit of listening to inspirational songs and messages
- A willingness to be mentored
- Submission to the word of God
- An attitude of effective regular worship experiences
- A regular participation in evangelism and missions
- Develop a personal spiritual development plan
- Attend refresher courses and seminars

The Ministers' Spiritual Development

WORKSHEET

Rate or rank the 12 areas of enhancing your spiritual maturity below:

- i.-----
- ii.-----
- iii.-----
- iv.-----
- v.-----
- vi.-----
- vii.-----
- viii.-----
- ix.-----
- x.-----
- xi.-----
- xii.-----

Underscore why you have not achieved reasonable spiritual maturity yet (if the rating is below average or average)

Describe plans you will take to achieving positive growth development

SESSION 10 | *Challenges Confronting Christian Ministers Today*

Pastors are being confronted by many challenges today. These problems range from spiritual, emotional, marital, social, educational and economical. A few are pointed out below:

- Family problems
- Financial related problems
- Leadership crisis in the churches
- Inadequate administrative/ management knowledge and skills
- Moral issues
- Identity crisis
- Inadequate preparation for old age
- Lack of money for training and materials
- Poor remuneration after training
- Lack of or inadequate mentoring and modeling within the ministry.
- Rebound of the old life

10.1. Family Problems

Majority of pastors come from homes and families bedeviled by crisis. The crisis can be separation, divorce, intra-family conflicts, poor or lack of parental figure head, and so on. Hence, when they are called into the ministry, they keep lingering and possessing poor inter-personal relationship.

10.2. Financial Related Problems

Most clergies find it difficult to provide for their immediate families - clothing, food, shelter; except such that are directly given to them by churches or individuals.

Today, there are churches that cannot adequately cater for pastor(s); hence, they frustrate them. This has led to the refusal of most persons to answer call to the pastorate, while some others who summon the courage to answer the call to opt for additional vocation for 'security reasons'. Most pastors take other jobs because the church where they serve cannot financially pay them. Some others are preparing themselves by seeking admissions into secular institutions in the bid to getting financial and social security.

10.3. Inadequate Administrative/ Management Knowledge and Skills

Majority of pastors have little or no knowledge about administrative management. Some of the courses studied and offered in the seminary seem not to be adequate for human management. And, some pastors believed that courses on behavioral and humanities are not necessary for their pastoral discipline. They over-spiritualize things.

Challenges Confronting Christian Ministers Today

10.4. Leadership Crisis in the Churches

Today, there are pastors who would not want to get involved in any sort of 'church politics.' According to them, "it is evil". Some of the crises in the churches today have made most pastors take some measures that are not good for the health of the church. These crises also have marred the relationship between pastors and congregations.

In some cases, the pastor is confronted with the problem of ensuring that peace reigns in the church. This search for peace throws the pastor into a crisis in his life, family and ministry, such that can lead to pastoral burn-out.

10.5. Moral Issues

One of the most lamented heart-cry of God and, of course, congregations are when the pastor finds himself in sins of an immoral act. How can the pastor be free from immoral act? Can the pastor be able to control himself even when young ladies and women come knocking at his doors; some with open threat and some with wonderful gifts!

The desire not to fail God since he is a human being is an issue that the pastor is daily confronted with. Also, today, most pastors are very young. They have little or no experience about challenges in life. The immature state of these pastors concerning marital matters makes them so prone to immoral sins.

10.6. Identity Crisis

The pastoral ministry is a call issued by God Himself to individuals. Those who have accepted this call are expected to set themselves apart for God's use only. Today, the concept of setting oneself apart for only God's use seems to be lost. Some clergies want to be good preachers and, at the same time, engage in any career conflicting with their sense of the divine calling.

There is the struggle for pastors to actually be who God wanted them to be. Some try to be what others wanted them to be and, at the same time, wanting to be God's faithful servants. They ended living the life of another person in them.

10.7. Inadequate Preparation for Old Age

Today, some pastors do not make adequate preparation for tomorrow. They are not too sure of what tomorrow will be; hence, they compromise here and there little by little. Some pastors are confronted with seeking for greener pastures, even though it will require them to bend the gospel.

It is interesting to notice, especially in Baptist churches, that when a pastor leaves a pastorate, and is without any pastorate for about a year or two, that pastor will not be able to cater for his pension premium. It is equally true that most churches in remote villages have not enrolled their pastors in the pension scheme, or mildly put, does not have any social security for their clergies.

10.8. Lack of Money for Further Training and Materials

Most pastors do not have the needed finance to support them for periodic training after an initial training at Seminary or Bible College. There are pastors who have graduated since 1990 but have not had any other formal training till date. It will be difficult for such ministers to be relevant

Spiritual Discipline

in today's ministry. Also, there are little or no money for most pastors to buy themselves books, magazines, electronics and Microsoft wares that will enhance their effectiveness in the ministries.

10.9. Poor Remuneration after Training

Majority of pastors are paid very low wages compared to the status of their qualification. What they are paid monthly cannot be compared with their counterparts in other professions. Also, the theological training is far more costly than any other educational training, yet, its remuneration seems to be very low. One will think that, having spent so much for the training, the pay will be enhancing.

10.10. Lack of, or Inadequate Mentoring and Modeling within the Pastoral Ministry

Today's ministers are faced with the problem of modeling. Today, unlike yester-years, when there are some great levels of mentoring within the ministry, there is virtually none today. The spirit and values in modeling a younger minister seem to have diminished. One very important reason could be the problem of generational gap and pride. The values and orientations of yesterdays' ministers seem to be different from today's ministers. Pride, as a stronghold, seems to have very tight rein on today's ministers who seemed to believe that they have better training, better qualifications and, of course, well privileged, opportunities and exposure to the workings and power of the Holy Spirit than those of yester-years.

10.11. Rebound of the Old Life

Most pastors find it difficult to completely leave their old ways of life; hence, they often struggle with it. In fact, a pastor once said, "it is difficult for a leopard to change its colour" when confronted with an abnormal behaviour. The statement, if taken seriously, will mean that there are pastors who are yet to allow the power of the gospel dealt with their past; or have allowed the gospel to deal with them, have gone back to their vomit.

Reflective Thinking

Describe the challenges you are encountering in your Christian living and calling. What aspect do you struggle with the most, and what considerations are you focusing to overcome them?

WORKSHEET

Identify the challenge(s) you are being confronted with in becoming what God desires you should be, and suggest plans toward handling them:

i). Challenges: -----

ii). Plans: -----

SESSION 11| *Discovering How God Has Shaped You for Ministry*

“Your hands formed and shaped me ...”Job 10:8.What God intends you to be determines what He will make you to do. You will only discover the purpose for which you were created when you understand the kind of person you are. This is the secret of knowing God's will for one's life. God is consistent in His plan for each life. He would not give to his children those inborn talents and temperaments, spiritual gifts, and all sorts of life experiences without enabling them to be used. He has created all humans on purpose.

Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! It is amazing to think about. Your workmanship is marvelous ... You were there while I was being formed.... You saw me before I was born and scheduled each day of my life before I began to breathe (Ps. 139:14-16).

What right do you have, a human being, to cross examine God? The pot has no right to say to the potter "why did you make me this shape? A potter can do what he likes with the clay (Rom. 9:20-21).

Every gospel ministry is determined by five personal factors that can be described in one word, SHAPE.

11.1. S = SPIRITUAL GIFT

How has God gifted you? Here is an overview of your spiritual gifts. A spiritual gift is a special ability, given by the Holy Spirit to a believer at the point of his/her conversion with which to minister and, therefore, contribute to building up the Body of Christ. A person, who is not spiritual, does not receive the gifts that come from the Spirit of God. That person cannot understand the value of Spiritual gifts (I Cor. 2:14).

Spiritual gifts are: wise counsel, clear understanding of knowledge, faith, healing the sick, miraculous acts, prophecy, distinguishing between good and evil spirits, tongues, interpretations of tongues, apostles, prophets, miracle workers, helpers, leaders, evangelist, pastor-teachers, hospitality, service (I Cor. 12:4-11; 28-3; Eph. 4:7,8,11,12; I Pet. 4:9-11).

Spiritual gifts come from the Holy Spirit (God). All these gifts have a common origin, but they are handed out, one by one, by the one Spirit (God). He decides who gets what and when (I Cor. 12:6; I Pet.4-.10; Eph. 4:7).

11.1.1. Reminder: Do not Confuse Gifts with Natural Talents

Do not confuse gifts with the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) - Fruit shows how mature you are in Christ while gifts show the ministry God has given you with which to profit His kingdom.

Beware of the gift-projection-tendency (expecting others to serve the way you do and have similar results).

Do not think that your gift makes you superior to others (I Cor. 12:21).

Realize that using your gifts without love is worthless (I Cor.13:1-3).

Discovering How God Has Shaped You for Ministry

11.1.2. Note

Gifts that communicate God's word to both believers and unbelievers are: *Preaching* (prophecy) (I Cor. 14:3); that is, the ability to publicly communicate God's word in ways that both convict or challenge unbelievers and comfort the believers. The ability is given to persuasively declare God's wills. *Evangelism* (Acts 8:26-40) is the ability to communicate the Good News of Jesus Christ to unbelievers in a positive, non-threatening way. This is the ability to sense opportunities to share Christ and lead people to respond with faith. *Discernment* (I Jn. 4:1; Acts 16:16-22) is the ability to distinguish between the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error or falsehood. *Apostleship* (Rom. 15:20) is the ability to start new churches and oversee their development.

Gifts that Educate God's People:–*Pastor-Teaching* (Eph. 4:12-13). This is the ability to educate God's people by clearly explaining and applying the Bible in a way that causes them to learn. This ability helps leaders to equip and train other believers for ministry (see Matt. 28: 20). *Encouragement* (Acts 14:22) (also called exhortation) is the ability to motivate God's people to apply and act on biblical principles, especially when they are discouraged or wavering in their faith; hence, this ability is to bring out the best in others and challenge them to develop their potentials.

Wisdom (1Cor. 2:1; 6-16) is the ability to understand God's perspective in life situations and share those insights in a simple, understandable way and the ability to explain what to do and how to do them. The use of this gift also enhances the teaching ministry. *Missions* (1Cor. 9:19-23; Acts 13:2-3) is the ability to adapt to a different culture in order to reach unbelievers and help believers to grow in that culture.

Gifts that Demonstrate God's Love: *Service* (Acts 6:1-7; I Cor. 12:28) is the ability to recognize unmet needs in the church family, and take the initiative to provide practical assistance quickly, cheerfully, and without a desire for human recognition. *Mercy* (Rom. 12:8) is the ability to manifest practical, compassionate, cheerful love toward suffering members of the body of Christ. *Hospitality* (I Peter 4:9-10) is the ability to make others, especially strangers, feel warmly welcomed, accepted, and comfortable in the church family. The ability to properly coordinate the use of this gift is one of the factors that promote Christian fellowship. *Pastoring* (I Pet. 5:2-4) (also called shepherding) is the ability to care for the physical, moral and spiritual needs of a group of believers and equip them for ministry. This is the ability to nurture a small group toward spiritual growth and assume responsibility for their welfare. *Giving* (2 Cor. 8:1-7) is the ability to generously contribute material resources and, or money, beyond the 10 percent tithe so that the Body of Christ (Church) may grow and be strengthened. This ability is to earn and manage money so that it may be given to support the ministry of others.

Gifts that Celebrate God's Presence (worship or prayer-related gifts): *Intercession* (Col. 1:9-12) is the ability to pray for the needs of others in the church family over extended periods of time on regular basis. This ability is given to help believers persist in prayer and not be discouraged until the answer arrives. *Arts & Crafts* (Ex. 31:3-11): This ability is to build, maintain, or beautify the place of worship for God's glory. *Music* (Ps. 150) is the ability to celebrate God's presence through music, either vocal or instrumental, and to lead the church family in worship. *Healing* (Jam. 5:14-16) is the ability to pray in faith, especially for people who need physical, emotional or spiritual healings and see God's answer. *Miracles* (Mk. 11:23-24) is the ability to pray in faith, especially for God's supernatural intervention into an impossible situation, and see God's answer. This ability helps believers sense when God is prompting one to pray this kind of prayer.

Spiritual Discipline

Tongues/Interpretation (1Cor. 14:13-15) is the ability to pray in a language understood only by God or one who has been given the gift of interpretation.

Gifts that Support all Purposes: *Leadership* (Heb. 13:7, 17) is the ability to clarify and communicate the purpose and direction (vision) of a ministry in a way that will attract others to get involved. This is the ability to motivate others by example to work in accomplishing a ministry goal. *Administration* (I Cor. 14.40) (also called organization): This ability helps the leaders recognize the gifts of others and recruit them to engage in Christian ministry. Also, this is the ability to organize and manage people, resources, and time for effective ministry. *Faith* (Rom. 4:18-21) is the ability to trust God for what cannot be seen and to act on God's promise, regardless of what the circumstances indicate. The gift propels the willingness to risk failure in pursuit of a vision by expecting God to handle the obstacles.

11.2. H - HEARTBEAT (*Monitoring my Heartbeat*)

Each child of God has a unique heartbeat. Each person alive has a slightly different pattern. Likewise, God has given each of his children a unique emotional 'heartbeat' that races when he encounters activities subjects, or circumstances that interest him. He instinctively feels deeply about something and not so deeply about others. The Bible uses the term 'heart' to represent the centre of one's motivation, desires, and inclinations thus. "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart" (Ps. 37:4).

Your heart determines:

- Why you say the things you said-(Matt. 12:34)
- Why you think the way you do -(Heb. 4:12)
- Why you live the way you do-(Prov. 4:23)

Action plans:

- List and describe those things you have done well and enjoyed since childhood.

They should include:

- Accomplishments at home, school, work, sports, among others.
- Things you enjoy doing

Give specific details about what you do. Forget about what other people might think about your answers. Discover the love of your heart. What you love to organize. Do you love to bring order out of chaos? What are you passionate of, or about?

11.3. A - ABILITIES (*Applying my Abilities*)

One main problem people have in the churches today is matching abilities with the right ministry. People find it so difficult in being at the right ministry they are gifted with. Below are 28 specialized abilities, circle the ones that match you. Act upon them and see what God has blessed you with.

- Entertaining ability: To perform, act, dance, and speak,
- Recruiting ability: To enlist and motivate people to get involved.
- Interviewing ability: To discover what others are really like.
- Research ability: To read, gather information, collect data.
- Artistic ability: To conceptualize, picture, draw, paint, or photograph.
- Graphics ability: To layout, design, create visual displays, or banners.

Discovering How God Has Shaped You for Ministry

- Evaluating ability: To analyze data and draw conclusions.
- Planning ability: To strategize, design and organize programmes and events.
- Managing ability: To supervise people, to accomplish a task or event and coordinate the details involved.
- Counseling ability: To listen, encourage, and guide with sensitivity.
- Teaching ability: To explain, train, demonstrate, tutor and facilitate.
- Writing ability: To write articles, letters, books, tracts, among others.
- Editing ability: To proofread or rewrite.
- Promoting ability: To advertise or promote events and activities.
- Repairing ability: To fix, restore, maintain.
- Feeding ability: To create meals for large or small groups.
- Recall ability: To remember or recall names of faces or places.
- Mechanical operating ability: To operate equipment, tools or machinery.
- Resourceful ability: To search out and find inexpensive materials or resources needed.
- Counting ability: To work with numbers, data, or money.
- Classifying ability: A systematized way of filing books, data, records and materials so they can be retrieved easily.
- Public Relations ability: To handle complaints and unhappy customers with care and courtesy.
- Welcoming ability: To convey warmth, develop rapport with others easily, making others feel comfortable.
- Composing ability: To write music or lyrics.
- Landscaping ability: To do gardening and work with plants.
- Arts and crafts or Decorating ability: To beautify a setting for a special event.
- Musical ability: To lead the church family either vocally or instrumentally.

11.4. P – PERSONALITIES (*plugging in my personality*)

A little exercise is provided below. In the space provided, write your name, using your opposite hand (Repeat it over and over).

.....
.....
.....

What happened? Did you enjoy your experience? The same is true when you try to minister in areas that are not suited to your personality. God has wired your temperament in a unique way. This factor is very important in matching you with the right ministry.

A personality is difficult to change, but attitudes can be changed over time. God has wired you in a unique way. For example, imagine you have a lion's personality; people could try to change you by pulling your fangs out (attitude) with the hope that you will become a cat. It will not work; you will not become a cat, and you will become a fangless lion. When you become a Christian, your attitude would change but your personality remains the same.

Spiritual Discipline

11.5. E - EXPERIENCIES (Examining your experiences)

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). “Now I want you to know brothers (and sisters), that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel” (Phi. 1:12).

One of the most overlooked factors in determining the ministry God has for you is your past experiences, especially the hurts and problems you have overcome with God's help. This is because the believer's greatest life messages come out of his/her weakness, and not from his /her own strengths. He/she should then pay close attention to what he/she has learned during tough times.

God uses people's experiences (good/bad) to help others (Prov.20:36; Phil. 1:12-13; Rom. 1:12; Phi.1:21; 2 Cor. 5:17; 2 Cor.1:3-4)

11.6. Exercise

- Record experiences of your ministry profile under the following:
- Your spiritual experiences
- How you came to know Christ
- Meaningful decisions you have made
- Times spent with God
- Your painful experiences
- Problems and challenges encountered
- Hurts or trials that you have learned lessons from
- Your past experiences
- Areas of challenges from your past (positive and negative) that have added to your growth

WORKSHEET

Prayerfully work through your ministerial and ministry giftedness and underline your calling (noting your ministry gifts and ministerial gift) below.

i. Ministerial Gift: -----

ii. Ministry Gifts-----

How does your response (1) above agree or reject your current track of ministry/service?

SESSION 12| *Discipleship*

The matured life is that which gives up self-determination and surrender all to Christ by love for discipleship. A disciplined life will willingly serve God by using those abilities given to him for ministry. The nature of Jesus' call to discipleship embraces obedience: drop everything, leave the past, make the break, give up all and follow. Its response is risky, reckless, and almost wild in its Joy and abandonment. Its sheer giving of self, for the future, is unknown.

Surrender in relation to discipleship is difficult but easy through God. It is only difficult because of the seeker's lack of readiness to let go of him/her, some things and ideas. It must include but, not be limited to, burning down the bridges behind him. His life must be transparent to let God's love to be seen or shine through him/her.

Discipleship as grace means something simple, and a great fulfillment that actually brings about liberation to the seeker, for others and from the demands of time. Liberation in discipleship is the certainty of the Christian's freedom and victory over any obstacle that may appear on his/her way, for Christ has overcome it for him/her. It means complete dependence upon Christ which is about recovery, loving attention and purity in the life marked by calmness instead of distraction. It is a state of life that needs to bring back the will to the loving attention of God. Its aim is to unite all the being; mind, heart, and soul (cf. Deut. 6:5). Continual loving attention helps the Christian to sanctify his time and make his spiritual life acquire deep roots. The cost of discipleship is to die with Christ. To face persecution, its reward lies in this life by the hundredfold, and in the age to come-eternal life.

Discipleship is a process of making someone who has believed in Jesus Christ to manifest Christ-like character, which is a sign of Christian maturity.

Its aim is to:

- Establish Christians in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus and His word,
- Help build quality and mature workers in God's vineyard,
- Wage war against wrong doctrines and heretical teachings, and
- Disciple souls as God provides opportunity for building relationships

Discipleship

WORKSHEET

Outline courses on discipleship you have participated in.-----

Describe what each of the courses entails and the benefits you had personally derived. -----

PART II

This part consists of the analysis of thirteen (13) themes of devotional theology. In the search for the modern church to stay on the cutting edge of development and discovery, many have overlooked the 'ancient' (fundamental) insights and practices that fuelled the faith of a multitude of believers before now. While seekers' answers have become increasingly complex, the questions have remained: How does one become mature? What action may lead to one more foundationally to the throne of God than others? How does one guide others towards the process of sanctification and spiritual formation?

Fortunately, there are well-known paths that Christians may walk to nurture their relationship with God. Ancient practices known as spiritual disciplines have served generations in their quest for depth and renewal. They are simple to learn, yet, not easy to exercise or practice. They serve to take people away from what is comfortable and distracting, and lead them to new realities found in the kingdom of God that are 'not of this world.'

In helping others to become spiritually formed, the spiritual disciplines are crucial. Adherents may wish to avoid the work that it takes to enjoy these practices, but as Soren Kierkegaard reminds us in *For Self-Examination* that "it costs a man just as much, or even more, to go to hell than to come to heaven."

Willard (1988:20) explains the co-working of God's grace and Man's action as:

True character transformation begins in the purer grace of God and is continually assisted by it very well. But action is also indispensable by making the Christian truly a different kind of person - one having a new life in which, as 2 Corinthian 5:17 states, "old things have passed away and behold, all things become new." Failure to act in certain definite ways will guarantee that this transformation does not come to pass.

Foster (1988) in his book *Celebration of Discipline* explores thirteen areas of discipline that have been utilized by Christians throughout the century, and thus, answers the questions, what are the spiritual disciplines people seek to apply in the process of spiritual formation? These are subdivided into three categories of:

The Inward Disciplines of:

- Meditation
- Prayer
- Fasting
- Study
- Holiness

The Outward Disciplines of:

- Simplicity
- Solitude
- Submission
- Service

Discipleship

The Corporate Disciplines of:

- Confession
- Worship
- Guidance
- Celebration

Taylor (2001:97) maintains that leading people in the practice of these disciplines will sometimes be difficult. For many, spirituality has long been an exercise in belief, not in inner or outer discipline. For some others, discipline has been attached to meritorious works rather than relational intimacy with God. Christian educators have the opportunity to turn the tide of understanding and practice.

Reviving the spiritual disciplines in the lives of disciples will be a life-changing process. The disciplines, however, will assist Christians to grow relationally with God, overcome sin, gain spiritual insight and direction, and love their neighbours as themselves. This is the fuel of spiritual formation.

SESSION 1 | *Spiritual Discipline through Listening, Reading and Studying*

Spiritual growth occurs due to God's guidance and the believer's gospel-driven efforts (1 Thess. 4:12; 5:23). For this reason, Christians turn to scripture to discern patterns that promote maturing in their faith. The Bible gives direction to Christians in the pursuit of spiritual transformation. For individual practice, the most important things one can do are to read scripture and pray. Combining the two, one might find it helpful to read the Bible prayerfully, as George Whitefield (1986:60) explains:

I began to read the Holy Scriptures upon my knees, laying aside all other books, and praying over, if possible, every line and word. This proved meat indeed, and dink to my soul. I daily received fresh life, light, and power from above. I found it profitable for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, every way sufficient to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good word and work.

If one accepts the Bible as God's authoritative decree for all of life, there is much that helps to direct spiritual progress. Several recent books have identified dozens of beneficial practices; however, it seems wise to begin with engagement in Bible-prescribed activities (Whitney, 1997; foster, 2002; and Willard, 1999). As Jesus himself said, God's word is truth" (Jn. 17:17). The Bible's key role is in helping the believer mature in the faith.

There are several ways that the Bible offers guidance as to how to grow spiritually. First, the Bible reveals the believer's sinfulness. The Bible is like a mirror in which believers apply God's Word; their thoughts and intentions are laid bare before them. Chester (2010:153) writes, "The Bible, by its very nature, is heart-revealing. For that reason, scripture must be the central tool in personal growth." As one prayerfully reads the Bible, sin is revealed, and the Spirit convicts the believer, comforts, and leads him/her to thankfulness for the good news of Jesus.

For this reason, the Bible also encourages Christians to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 3:17). In other words, the Bible calls for a continuous attitude of prayer, fullness, and personal fellowship with God. Christians are to live their lives with the consciousness of the fact that they are in the presence of God all the day, every day. According to Miller (2009:20), "prayer is simply the medium through which the believer experiences and connects to God." This type of prayer life requires that Christians devote themselves to prayers.

Prayer relates to Bible-reading in that "Prayer is our response to God as he speaks to us" (God's worthy 2003:36). This pattern of prayer-of God speaking and the believer responding - is found throughout the Bible. When one reads the scriptures, he/she is reading God's word to the church and to self. Scripture is an ongoing conversation between God and his people; one joins him/ herself to God in that conversation through prayer.

This takes the believer back to the good news of Jesus Christ. The greatest problem in every situation is sin. The believer's greatest needs in any situation are a pure heart and God-honoring conduct. And as First John chapter 5:14 confirms, "If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us." God's will is that his children should grow spiritually to be confirmed to the likeness of Jesus.

Spiritual Discipline through Listening, Reading and Studying

So, they must practice these disciplines with Jesus as the focus-pursuing intimacy with Christ. There are four components of the discipline of study as: repetition, concentration, comprehension, and reflection.

Spiritual Discipline

WORKSHEET

A. Read John 8:31-32 and respond to what to 'know' and be 'made free' by the truth means.

B. Select a Bible passage of Scripture this week and read through seven different translations. Then study the passage prayerfully, noting your observations.

i) Passage:-----

ii) Observations:-----

C. Write down how the passage spoke to your motives, attitudes, or behaviour in a particular task or relational mode this week. Apply the discipline of study as a way of allowing the Holy Spirit to give you increased self-awareness.

SESSION 2 | *Spiritual Formation through Confession*

The foundation for growth begins with taking off the old self, that is, a matter of life apart from Christ. This old way of life is noted in a hardness of heart and a darkened understanding (Eph. 4:18), and it makes the believer get corrupted through deceitful desires (v 22). One of the ways Scripture talks about this turning away from the old self is through confession. What is Confession?

Although the believer's relationship with God is secured, his fellowship with Him can be broken. Confession is acknowledging one's sin before God and taking steps towards an inward change of mind, heart and conviction. It is also the acknowledgement of God's sovereign rule, power, and presence in all things and situations. Read 1John 1:7-9. Knowing that you are already forgiven, why must you confess your sins? Confession aids in restoring one to harmonious fellowship with God.

God referred to David as a "man after his own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14); yet, even David struggled with sin. He committed adultery with Bathsheba and killed her husband. However, in Psalm 51, one reads about David's confession of his sins. Like David, your godliness rests on your response to sin (cf. 2 Samuel 11-12-:19).

Read Psalm 51: On what basis does David seek forgiveness? (vv. 1-2)

What sin is David talking about? Who has he sinned against?

What verses show David acknowledging his sin? Wanting to change?

What does God really want from you when you commit sin? (Vv. 16-17).

By acknowledging his sins, David takes off the burden and guilt of his old self and joyfully claims God's forgiveness.

Examining Yourself Like David, you must regularly examine yourself and confess your sins as your foundation for growth. Try using Galatians 5:15-23 as a guide. Ask yourself: How have I pursued the desires of the flesh (vv. 16-21)? How have I not pursued the fruit of the Spirit (vv. 22-23)?

Confession Brings Great Grace!

Many Christians are unthinkably horrified when a real sinner is suddenly discovered among the righteous. So, they remained alone with their sin, living in lies and hypocrisy. In the Christian community, whenever the call to brotherly confession and forgiveness goes forth, it is a call to the great grace of God in the church. This great grace, in the view of Bonhoeffer (1989:112-122), brings with it breakthroughs.

2.1. To the Community

In confession, the breakthrough takes place in the community. Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him/her, and the deeply he/she becomes involved in it,

Spiritual Discipline

the more disastrous is his/her isolation. Sin insists on being unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed, it poisons the whole being of a person. This can occur even in the midst of a community. In confession, the light of the Gospel breaks into the darkness and seclusion of the heart. The sin must be brought into the light. The unexpressed must be openly spoken and acknowledged. All that are secret and hidden are made manifest. It is a hard struggle until the sin is openly admitted; but God breaks gates of brass and iron (Ps. 107:16).

When confession of sin is made in the presence of a Christian Brother or sister, the last stronghold of self-justification is abandoned. The sinner surrenders; he/she gives up all the evil. He/she gives the heart to God, and finds the forgiveness of all sins in the fellowship of Jesus Christ and the brethren.

Should a brother/sister be 'disciplined' after open confession?

2.2. To the Cross

Again, in confession occurs the breakthrough to the Cross. The root of all sins is pride, *superbia*. This is a force that exerts itself – “I want to be my own law”; “I have a right to myself, my hatred, my desires, my life and my death.” The mind and flesh of humans are set on fire by pride; for it is precisely in his wickedness that man (Adam) wants to be as God. Confession in the presence of a brother is the profoundest kind of humiliation. It hurts, it puts a man down, and it is a dreadful blow to pride. To stand before a brother as a sinner is an ignominy that is almost unbearable. In the confession of concrete sins, the old man dies a painful, shameful death before the eyes of a brother/sister. As this humiliation is so hard, most people continually scheme to evade confessing to a brother. Their eyes are so blinded that they no longer see the promise and the glory in such a debasement.

It was none rather than Jesus Christ himself who suffered the scandalous, public death of a sinner in the sinner's place. He was not ashamed to be crucified for men as an evildoer. It is nothing else than their fellowship with Jesus Christ that leads them to the ignominious dying that comes in confession, in order that Christians may in truth share with Christ in his Cross. The Cross of Jesus Christ destroys all pride. Christians cannot find the Cross of Jesus Christ if they shrink from going to the place where it is to be found, namely, ‘the public death of the sinner.’ The Christian refuse to bear their Cross when they are ashamed to take upon themselves the shameful death of the sinner in confession. In confession, he breaks through to the true fellowship of the Cross of Jesus Christ, and in confession, he affirms and accepts the Cross.

2.3. To New Life

In confession, the breakthrough to new life occurs. Where sin is hated, admitted, and forgiven, then, the break with the past is made. As the Holy Scripture admonishes, “Old things are passed away.” But where there is a break away with sin, there is conversion. Confession leads to conversion thus, – “Behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). Christ has made a new beginning with Christians.

As the first disciples of Jesus Christ left all and followed when he called, so, in confession, the Christian gives all to Christ and follows. Confession is discipleship. Life with Jesus Christ and his community has begun. The Scripture asserts that, “he that covers his sin shall not prosper: but he

Spiritual Formation Through Confession

who confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy (Prov. 28:13). In confession, then, the Christian forsakes all his/her sins. Their dominion is broken. From then on, he/she wins victory after victory.

What it is to the Christian at baptism is bestowed upon her/him anew in confession!

Confession is the renewal of the joy of baptism

2.4. To Certainty

In confession, a human breaks through to certainty. Why is it that it is often easier to confess one's sins to God than to fellow brother? God is holy and sinless; he is just a judge of evil and the enemy of all disobedience. But a brother is as sinful as any confessant. He knows from his own experience the dark night of secret sin. **Why should Christians not find it easier to go to their brothers than to the holy God?** But, if they do, they must ask themselves whether or not they have often been deceiving themselves with their own confession of sin to God; and whether or not they have rather been confessing their sins to themselves and also granting themselves absolution. And, is not this the reason, perhaps, for their countless relapses and the feebleness of their Christian obedience to be found precisely in the fact that they are living on self-forgiveness and not real forgiveness. Self-forgiveness can never lead to a break away from sinning; this can be accomplished only by the judging and pardoning Word of God.

Spiritual Discipline

WORKSHEET

Have you ever had a powerful experience of the cleansing healing effects of confession? If so, describe how it affected your understanding of yourself in relation to others and to God.

Reflect on the following passages – 1 John 1:5-10 and James 5:16; and, write what you had learnt about the importance and practice of confession.

This week, locate God and someone, and then:
Confess your sins, wrongs, weaknesses, mistakes, etc.
Pray prayer of confession – of God’s goodness.
Write your experiences below

SESSION 3| *Spiritual Discipline through Prayer*

In addition to taking off the old self, the heart, mind and action must be made new and shaped in godliness. The passive voice of the verb “renew” in Ephesians 4:23 suggests that spiritual formation is not something one can accomplish through one’s efforts. He/she needs God’s daily renewal. One powerful way by which God has provided renewal for his children is through prayer. People need renewed minds (perspectives) in order to experience spiritual growth.

3.1. What is Prayer?

Prayer is simply communicating with God by expressing one’s dependence on him. As in English and the Greek verbs, prayer can be in the active voice (“I counsel”) or the passive voice (“I was counseled”). The Greek also has a middle voice, which is used when the subject participates in an action initiated by another (“I take counsel”). So, it is in prayer. God initiates all prayers and, so, his children or the prayer take counsel. His/her attitudes and, of course, actions must reveal one who actually takes counsel-listening, responding, listening and responding appropriately. How then does the concept of the middle voice help you to understand prayer?

3.2. How Prayer Can Renew the Child of God

Read Matthew 26:36-46. Why does Jesus turn to prayer? What change do you see in Jesus’ attitude from verses 38 to 46?

When God’s children come to God in prayer, he reminds them of His will, power, and love, and he can, as well, give them wisdom (Eph. 2:17), strength and peace (Phil. 4:7) to follow him.

*Prayer Must Change Our Attitude
From And Toward Something*

3.3. How should God’s Children Pray?

God’s children have freedom to honestly communicate with God through many types of prayer. Read, Psalm 4:4-5 and Matthew 14:23. Why would solitude and silence be important during some times of prayer? Read Matthew 6:7-13. What can they learn about how to pray from the Lord’s Prayer?

Prayer is an intimate personal relationship with God. It brings with it an experience of God in response to His desire and initiative. Prayer is a relationship that begins with God as the initiator, inviting His children into His will and purpose (Hunt and King, 1994:6). Prayer is having fellowship with God. A self-discipline which comes as a result of discovering God’s will and, then, making the necessary adjustments within one’s thought, feelings, and acts (Allen, 1965:5, 6).

Prayer must be governed by God’s interest as its sole motive. The Lord Jesus prayed, “Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). The prayer life of a child of God should bring

Spiritual Discipline

him ever closer to his/her heavenly Father and transform him into the image of His dear Son.

There are six types of prayer, which Hunt and King (1994:10) argued would enhance personal and corporate lives of church members (1994:10). They are:

- Confession: Responding to God's holiness – Ps. 51: 1 – 4; 10, 12; Isaiah 6: 1 – 3, 5.
- Praise: Responding to God's attitude - Ps. 145:3-7; Luke. 1:46:51; Ps. 9:1-2; 22:22; 48:10; 57:9-10
- Worship: Responding to God's glory-Ps. 42:1-2; I Chron. 29:11-12; Ps. 86:9-10; Ps. 29:1-2; 95:6; 100; Rev, 5:12; 4:11.
- Thanksgiving: Responding to God's riches - Eph. 5:20;Ps. 136:1; 29:12-13; Ps. 30:11-24; 75:1
- Petition: Asking that is led by the Heavenly Father - Ps. 25:1-2,4-5, Acts 4:24, 27:30; Matt. 6:9-133.
- Intercession: Asking that is led by the Master, Jesus Christ -Eph. 3:16-19; 2 Kgs. 6:17; I Chron. 29:23; Jn. 17:11-15; Col. 1:9-12; Rom. 10:1

Hunt and King pointed out that these types of prayers can be classified into two:

3.3.1. Responding Prayer

Here, the child of God, who prays, seeks to become more like God. These types of prayers are: confession, praise, thanksgiving and worship.

3.3.2. Asking Prayer

These types of prayers bring the child of God closer to be involved in His work. These are prayers of petition and intercession.

A good understanding of prayer as a love relationship between God, the Creator and ruler of the whole world and humans will clarify the purposes of prayer. On the other hand, prayer as a relationship that begins with God will certainly lend itself to the question: what is the purpose in prayer? The purpose in prayer is fundamentally two: First, to enable the child of God to identify him/herself with God by becoming like Him. Second, participating with God to walk and work with Him (Hunt and King, 1994:11).

Prayer is both individual and corporate. Individual prayer is responding and asking that involves only the person praying and God. As Sagler (1967: 116) points out, individual prayer is the drill ground for effective corporate prayer. Sagler emphasizes the importance of individual or private prayer life of members. Hunt and King (1994:27) suggested that the individual must live his/her life blameless before God. This, they opined, is because he/she constantly talks to God anytime.

Corporate prayer, on the other hand, is by the church as an entity; a corporate entity which expresses the solid organic oneness and spiritual unity of the members. It is the prayer of members who have been brought to the ground of identification with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection, and has agreed to live identical life and "fellowship". According to Sparks (2000:87), corporate prayer is that prayer by people that "have gone through a similar experience which has deeply affected their inward life; they have a mutuality of understanding, and can speak with one

Spiritual Discipline through Prayer

voice."

Prayer is not what one does out of a heart of obligation or duty, but of deep privilege. One of life's opportunities designed by God for man is to enter into prayer thankfully (Psalm 63:1, 5, 8).

Although prayer should be an authentic expression of the believer's heart, he/she has much to learn from the prayers that are written in scripture. Praying through scripture is one way that can enrich the believer's prayers and learn from the community of believers that has preceded him.

Biblical examples: Praying through the scriptures are:

- Ephesians 3:16 – Strengthen me in the inner man
- Ephesians 3:17 – That I may be rooted deeply in love and founded securely on love
- Ephesians 3:18 – Let me grasp God's love – the breadth and length and height and depth of it.
- Ephesians 3:19 – That I might be filled through all my being with the fullness of God.
- Ephesians 3:19 – That I might become a body wholly filled and flooded with God himself.
- Philippians 3:10 – That I may "know" Him and the power of his resurrection.
- Ephesians 1:17 – That he might grant me a spirit of wisdom and revelation.
- Ephesians 1:18 – That the eyes of my heart be flooded with light.
- Ephesians 1:19 – That I might know the greatness of his power in me.
- Philippians 1:10 – That I may learn to sense what is vital and of real value.
- Philippians 1:11 – That I may abound and be filled with the fruits of righteousness.
- John 17:12 – That he will keep and protect me from the evil one.
- Colossians 1:9 – That I may know God's will.
- Colossians 1:11-12 – That I may be strengthened with all power (to exercise) every kind of endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks (2008, Joyce Meyer Ministries).

Try out praying on the following Scriptures by contextualizing them to your life:

- Ephesians 3:14-21
- Psalm 8
- Psalm 25
- Psalm 96
- Ephesians 1:17-21
- Philippians 1:3-11

Your prayer life has a significant impact on your spiritual growth. Prayer submits your will to the Lord's; it aligns your desires with his purpose, and it cements his truth in your heart. In the end, it is much more than simply bringing your requests and concerns before the Lord.

Spiritual Discipline

WORKSHEET

Choose a prayer partner and practice the six types of prayers throughout this week (write down your praying partner(s) name(s))

What were your experiences of prayer this week? What would you like to reinforce? What would you like to change?

Write out 10 Scriptures and pray back God's word

SESSION 4| *Spiritual Discipline through Fasting*

Jesus had great expectation of fasting for his disciples. He told them:

When you fast, do not look sober as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your father, who is unseen; and your father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (Matt. 6:16-18 NIV).

Notice that Jesus said “when”, not “if”. Later, he defended their abstaining from fasting for a reason, but he indicated that they would resume this discipline after he had died (Matt. 9:15). Jesus himself often fasted as part of his ongoing life of prayer. Throughout history, men and women, whose lives have displayed the power and provision of God, had made fasting a part of their spiritual arsenal. And this is the reason the believer must continue to engage in it; to tap into God.

4.1. The Nature of Fasting

The literal meaning of the Hebrew word “fast” is “to cover the mouth” (Kennedy, www.prayinglife.org.19/05/2015). This may mean abstaining from food. One may as well choose to abstain from other physical activities during fasting, but a true fasting, by definition, involves abstaining from food; and in another sense, from any activity that the body takes pleasure in. Food for one’s physical body sustains and nourishes it. When a believer eats food, he literally takes the earth and makes it part of him/herself.

God has designed the body to be nourished and fuelled in a way that humans would have a picture of true nourishment- the eternal nourishment of the spirit. Jesus made this clear when he told the devil in the wilderness, “It is written: man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). God has represented his word as food that nourishes the spiritual life in the same way that physical food nourishes the physical life (Ps. 119:103; Jer. 15:16; Ezek. 3:1-3). Just as food strengthens and maintains the body, the word of God nourishes, fuels and strengthens the spirit.

During fasting, the believer deliberately lets go of that which binds him to this physical world, food, for example, in order to receive all his sustenance from the spiritual world. He determines that, for a period of time, he will deny his physical cravings to focus on his spiritual desires for some time. In doing this, he allows his spiritual hunger to become stronger and more focused. He feeds his spirit with the same enthusiasm with which he feeds his body. Spiritual hunger takes priority over physical hunger.

Fasting is not a way to influence, impress or manipulate God. It does not prove anything to him as to indicate whether or not you are serious. In fact, God knows the human heart better than one does anything. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and lay bare before the eye of Him to whom we must give account (Heb. 4:13). A fasting is not the same

Spiritual Discipline

as hunger-strike designed to convince God to release what he has, up till then, held back. Fasting is not a last-ditch effort to get through to God. Instead, it is a means of sharpening one's spiritual senses so that God can get through to us.

4.2. Fasting Helps Humans to Hear God Rightly

In 2 Chronicles chapter 20:1-3, the accounts show that King Jehoshaphat called for a national fasting for this very reason. He had received a report that his enemy nations were allied against him and were nearly at his borders, intent on making war against Israel thus: "After this, the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Moabites came to make war on Jehoshaphat. Some men came and told Jehoshaphat: A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the sea. It is already in Hazazon Tamar' (that is, EnGedi)."

The report given to Jehoshaphat was an accurate description of the situation as it appears from the human point of view. The men, who made the report, had given the facts as they saw them, but Jehoshaphat was not willing to limit himself to human point of view. He was not satisfied as to settle for what he could see. He knew there was more to the picture than the facts that presented themselves.

What situation confronts you today? Do the facts of your situation overwhelm you and cause you fear and anxiety? Do your circumstances look hopeless to you? Then, let the Spirit of the Lord show you the bigger picture- the point of view of heaven. Listen to his voice speaking to you through the story of Jehoshaphat.

What did Jehoshaphat do when he was confronted with circumstances that threatened to defeat him? Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the Lord; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him (2 Chron. 20:3-4).

First, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord. He determined that he would fix his eyes, not on what he could see, but on what he could not see (2 Cor. 4:18). He was certain that the Lord had an answer and a plan that was more than he could ask or imagine (cf. Eph. 3:20). He could not entertain the lie that presented itself to his earthly-sight; hence, he resolved to inquire of the Lord.

Second, Jehoshaphat proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. What was the purpose of this fast? What did Jehoshaphat expect the fast to accomplish? His confession through prayer reads: "For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us, we do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you" (2 Chron. 20:12). Can you echo Jehoshaphat's declaration as you look at the situation that confronts you? Are you saying: "I have no power to face this situation. I do not know what to do."? Then, follow Jehoshaphat's example: Take your eyes off the circumstances and fix them on the ruler of heaven and earth.

How did Jehoshaphat do that? How did he create an atmosphere in which God could give him his vision and his plan for overcoming the enemy? How did he put all his spiritual senses on red-alert so that God could get through to him? He proclaimed a fast.

The Lord had an answer. He had a plan in place. When the people fastened their hearts on him, opening them to him through fasting, he was able to tell them exactly what actions to take. Their obedience to his living, present-tense voice released his power and provision (cf. 2 Chron. 20:1-30).

Spiritual Discipline Through Fasting

4.3. Eating Spiritual Food

There are a few things you can expect to experience while engaging on fasting. First, you can expect hunger. Your physical body needs food and it is trained to expect it. You will probably experience both a physical and psychological craving for food. If you do, turn your hunger into prayer: "Father, as my body craves for food, I crave for your presence." 'My food is to do your will' (cf. John 4:34). Let your hunger be a positive feeling because it will turn your heart to God thus: "I have treasured Thy words of (your) mouth more than my daily bread" (Job 23:12). Hunger and cravings for food will give you the opportunity to present an offering to the Lord. Each time you deny your bodily cravings for the sake of fasting, you are placing a sacrifice on the altar. The offering is your obedience (cf. 1 Sam. 15:22).

The believer can also expect to experience an increasing desire for the things of God. Just as your body has come to expect food, so your spirit will begin to create in you a spiritual craving that only God can satisfy.

Fasting is more than abstaining from food. It is replacing physical food with spiritual food. If you are fasting by skipping a certain meal, make that meal-time a time of prayer and study of the word of God. If you are fasting for a period of time, fill that time as much as possible with concentrated, focused listening prayer. Let the Lord set your fast. Do not impose upon yourself a fast to which the Lord has not called you. He is likely to call you into fasting for a few hours or days in the beginning and later train you for longer periods or days of fasting.

Do not set yourself up for failure by fasting in the power of your own flesh. Whenever God calls you to any task, He also provides the power for you to accomplish it. The fasts to which He calls you will be the prime training-ground for learning to submit your flesh to the spirit. Fasting confirms the Christians' utter dependence upon God by finding in Him a source of sustenance beyond food. Through it, Christians learn by experience that God's word to them is a life substance; that it is not food (bread) alone that gives life, but also the words that proceed from the mouth of God (Matt.4:4). Also, the Christian learns that he too have meat to eat that the world does not know about (Jn. 4:32, 34). Fasting unto the Lord is, therefore, feasting – a feasting on him and on doing His will.

Spiritual Discipline

WORKSHEET

Read Matthew chapter 4:1-4 prayerfully and delineate your insights about fasting.

Schedule three days of fasting for the following focus:

i). to enable you study 2 Timothy 2. State what you denied yourself of

ii). to enable you to deal with a particular attitude/behaviour. State what you denied yourself of and experiences:

iii). to enable you to pray that the Holy Spirit would convert a soul to the Kingdom. State the name of a person and the experience:

SESSION 5| *Spiritual Discipline through Meditation*

Ecclesiastes chapter 3:7 reads: “There is time to be silent and a time to speak.” This is true in the believer’s relationship with others, and in his relationship with God. Silence and solitude, for the purpose of meditation, are ways believers can position themselves to become more sensitive to the presence of God and to hear His voice. The exercising of these disciplines or rhythms is vital to the process of spiritual formation. Two Hebrew words- *haga* and *siah* -are used some fifty-eight times in the Old Testament to convey the concept of Meditation, and they bear various meanings such as: listening to, and reflecting on the Word of God; rehearsing God’s actions; and “ruminating” on the law of God (Foster, 1988:15-18). It could also mean to brood over a particular issue as the hen would brood over its eggs in order to give life to it.

In the case of the hen (Traditional Hen Model), it spends about 96% of its day brooding over the eggs and about 4% outside; to pass out waste and take very light food. It withdraws from social activities and active search for food. Its brooding period is usually between 21 and 23 days. It is a season of birthing of life/lives, ideas; of charting a new cause of action and receiving divine direction and mandate. As Funder Burk (1976:104) puts it, meditation is an act of worship, divine communion, and spiritual renewal.

A few instances of meditation in the Old Testament includes: Isaac taking time out to hearing the voice of God as he “went out to the field one evening to meditate” (Gen. 24:63). The Psalms are replete with meditations of the people of God, and the entire Psalter is introduced with the encouragement to follow the example of the blessed man whose “delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law, he meditates day and night (Ps. 1:2). The Psalmist’s words in Psalm 46 are instructive here, regarding solitude and meditation thus: “Be still, and know that I am God...” (Psa. 46:10). Elijah was told to go up to a mountain and stand in the presence of the Lord. When he obeyed, he experienced God through a “gentle whisper.” It was after this incident that he received a word from the Lord (1 Kgs 19:11-13).

A familiar biblical reference to meditation that reaches to the heart is found in Psalm 19:14, “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight.” Psalm 119 contains eight references to meditation that provides a foundation upon which pastors and ministry leaders can base their personal meditation. They include, but not limited to: meditating upon God’s precepts, ways, decrees, wonders, and statutes (Psa. 119:15; d 23, 27, 45, 78, 97, 99, and 148). Psalm 62:5 (NASB) provides wise instruction for this experience: “My soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is from him.” In the New Testament, the example of Jesus, who knows these scriptures well, and solitude very early in the morning, is provided for our encouragement (Mk 1:35).

Meditation helps the believers to be present before God who is always present to them. As a spiritual rhythm of life, it also helps the believer to be aware of the disciplines of the present moment, and acknowledge the voice of God. Prayer and meditation often go together. Foster (1992:142) described how meditative prayer works. He states that “The truth being meditated

Spiritual Discipline

upon passes from the mouth into the mind and down into the heart, where through quiet rumination—regurgitation, it would then produce in the person praying a loving, faith-filled response.” Times of meditation in solitude and in silence allows the believer the freedom to re-orient his/her heart and mind in order to focus upon that which is most important—the reality of God and his/her relationship with Him.

Haselbarth (1976: 63 -64) identifies the values of silence in meditation as: expressing inner alertness, helping to find the right word, and helping to close the outward doors that the inner doors might be opened to the Lord. Haselbarth argues that meditation is not about what one can achieve but it is about being with Christ. That is to say, the goal in meditation is not simply detachment from the world but a richer attachment to God and to the other human beings. As Christians unite themselves with Christ, they seek power and boldness for service in his kingdom. Calvin argues that through meditation on divine things, the Christian may refresh his/her languishing spirit with new vigour.

It might be asked: Why is a special time needed for this, since Christians meditate already during the common period of devotion? The period of personal meditation should be devoted to the Scriptures, private prayer, and intercession, and it has no other purpose. These three things require one’s time as God demands. The time of meditation does not let one down into the void and abyss of loneliness; rather, it lets one to be alone with the Word. And, in so doing, it gives the believer a solid ground on which to stand and clear directions as to the steps to take.

Whereas during time of devotion as a family, one may read long verses of Bible passage, during personal meditation one is confined to a brief selected text which, possibly, may not be changed for the whole week. If during personal reading of the Scriptures, one is led into the whole length and breadth of the Bible, where you go into the unfathomable depths of a particular sentence and word, Then, both are necessary, as the Scripture asserts; “that you may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height...” (Eph. 3:18).

During meditation, one should ponder upon the chosen text on the strength of the promise that it has something utterly personal for that particular issue. It is God’s word not only for the church and one’s Christian life, but also for the individual. One exposes self to the specific word until it addresses the individual personally. That way, one is doing no more than the simplest, untutored Christian does every day; thereby, reading God’s Word as the Word for the moment Believer should not ask about what the text has to say to other people. And for the preacher, this means that he/she is not going to ask about how to preach or teach the text, but what it is saying directly to him/her. It is true that to do this, one must have understood the contents of the verse, but one is not doing it like expounding or preparing a sermon or conducting a Bible study of any kind; rather, he/she is waiting specifically for God’s Word. It is not a meaningless waiting, but a waiting on the basis of receiving a clear promise. Often, people are so burdened and overwhelmed with other thoughts, images, and concerns that it may take a long time before God’s Word has swept all else aside and come through. But it will surely come, just as surely as God himself has come to men and He comes again. This is the very reason why Christians should begin their meditations with the prayer that God may send his Holy Spirit to them through his Word and reveal his Word to enlighten them.

It is not necessary that one should get through the entire passage during one meditation. One could stop with reading one sentence or even one word, because he/she has been gripped and

Spiritual Discipline Through Meditation

arrested and cannot evade it any longer. Also, during meditation, it is not necessary that one should be concerned with expressing his/her thoughts and prayer in words. Un-phrased thought and prayer, which issues only from attentive listening, may often be more beneficial.

Again, it is not necessary that one must discover new ideas during meditation. Often this only diverts people and feeds their vanity. It is sufficient if the Word, as one reads and understands it, penetrates and indwells with individual. Above all, it is not necessary that someone should have any unexpected, extraordinary experiences during meditation. This can happen, but if it does not, it is not a sign that the meditation period has been useless. Not only at the beginning, but repeatedly, there will be times when one feels a great spiritual dryness and apathy, an aversion, even an inability to meditate. Do not be backed by such experiences; at the same time, do not allow them to keep you from adhering to your meditation period with great patience and fidelity.

Furthermore, it is not advisable to take too seriously the many untoward experiences you have in meditation; because they lay their hands on your old vanity and illicit claims upon God and then creep in by a pious detour, as if it were your right to have nothing but elevating experiences, and as if the discovering of your own inner poverty were quite below your dignity. With such attitude one is bound from making progress. Impatience and self-reproach will only foster your complacency and entangle you deeply in the net of self-centered introspection.

There are some aspects in the Christian meditation that seemed not to have been underlined and this author believes that those are very vital. Every day brings to the believer many hours in which he will be alone in an unchristian environment. These are the times of testing. This is called the test of true meditation and true Christian community. Has the fellowship served to make the individual free, strong, and mature, or has it made him weak and dependent? Has it taken him by the hand for a whole in order that he may learn again to walk by himself, or has it made him uneasy and unsure?

Furthermore, this is the place where one finds out whether the believer's meditation has led him into the unreal, from which he awakens in terror when he returns to the work-day world, or whether it has led him into real contact with God, from which he emerges strengthened and purified. Has it transported him for a moment into a spiritual ecstasy that vanishes when everyday life returns, or has it lodged the Word of God so securely and deeply in his heart that it holds and fortifies him, impelling him to active love, to obedience, and to good works? Only the day can decide.

Is the invisible presence of the Christian fellowship a reality and a help to the individual? Do the intercessions of others carry him through the day? Is the Word of God close to him as a comfort and strength? Or does he misuse his loneliness contrary to the fellowship, the Word, and the prayer? The individual must realize that his hours of loneliness react upon the community. In his solitude he can sunder and besmirch (bring shame, reproach and dirty) to the fellowship, or he can strengthen and hallow it. Every act of self-control is a service to the fellowship.

On the other hand, there is no sin in word, thought, or deed, no matter how personal or secret, that does not inflict injury upon the whole fellowship. One, who returns to the Christian family fellowship after fighting the battle of the day, brings with him the blessings of loneliness, but he himself receives anew the blessings of the fellowship.

Spiritual Discipline

WORKSHEET

In light of the study, choose a day for meditation, noting the following:

Locate a spacious arena,

Sit, lie or take any comfortable posture

Brood upon a particular challenge, issue or passage of the Scripture write your experiences

Select two days in the week to be in the midst of people who are in active discussion and debate, and make every effort to shut them all out of existence; not letting their presence, voices, among others, distract your gaze. Write down your experiences:

SESSION 6| *Spiritual Discipline through Solitude and Silence*

In a world filled with noise, most Christians long to “unplug” and find a quiet spot far from the hum of technology, the demands of work, the cries of children, the ubiquitous call of advertisement, the hype of politicians, and the bombardment of world news. To escape, even for a few minutes, and find rest for their souls is an almost universal longing in modern times, especially in Africa. When this rest is accompanied with time alone with God, it provides the refreshment and strength that they need to face the pressures of everyday living in a fast-paced age. For these reasons, when spiritual leaders start talking about silence and solitudes, their ears perk up and they yearn to adopt the teachings and techniques they recommend. For most of this author’s lifetime, he had heard people refer to their habit of regular prayer and Bible study as a “quiet time.” And while the term “quiet time” does not completely describe this valuable occasion alone with God, it does depict one aspect of it—a time set apart to quietly mediate on the Word and pour their hearts out to God. All these are to say that the author treasures quiet and solitude as much or more than most Christians. This author constantly recommends it to every church pastor and believers. He would not be able to function spiritually without time alone daily with the Lord and he suspects the same is true for all pastors and students.

But when the leaders of the spiritual formation movement speak of quiet and solitude, they are referencing something very different from a “quiet time” comprised Bible reading and prayer.

Foster (1988:98) explains that solitude and silence closely relate so much that, without silence, there can be no true solitude. In solitude and silence one stand alone before God without external supports of people, places and things. Because of this, it may be quite difficult for some to intentionally take the time to experience the benefit of this practice. Calhoun (2005:111) quotes Dietrich Bonhoeffer as saying that “we are so afraid of silence that we chase ourselves from one event to the next in order not to have to spend a moment alone with ourselves, and in order not to have to look at ourselves in the mirror.”

The cultivation of the spiritual rhythms of an inner solitude through silence, however, can provide a deep sense of fulfillment and peace. Foster (1988:96-97) speaks of an inward solitude that is a state of the mind and of the heart, which can manifest itself in an outward solitude of being alone and spending time with God. In speaking specifically of silence, he relates that far from simply being still, it represents a deep inner reversal of the believers’ cultural tendencies of gasping, controlling and possessing—an internal act of intentionally “letting it go.” In the classical tradition of spiritual disciplines, it represents a releasing of one’s self to be who he is really to one’s self and to God. It is a facing up to the inner dynamics of one’s being and allowing one to be honest with what he sees.

Calhoun (2005:108) observes that solitude gives the Spirit of God time and space to go deep within the adherent’s soul and, similar to Mulholland, states that believers are often brought face to face with unhealthy motives and compulsions. He may notice things that he would rather notice, such as pockets of sadness, anger, and loneliness. At other times, there may be moments of

Spiritual Discipline

profound affirmation of the love and embrace of God. Driskill (1999:79-80) provides a good metaphor for showing how silence enables believers to see and hear things of which they would not normally be aware thus:

You may have gone outside on a night that was especially still. Perhaps, starlight filled the sky. Suddenly, you noticed or could hear things from far away that you normally would not have noticed. There may have been a certain quality about the evening. Perhaps, the air was calm or there was a gentle breeze, and although you were in a familiar place, the atmosphere and sounds seemed different. Your threshold of attention may also have been transformed... If God is an active agent in our daily lives, our call as people of faith is to discern where God's creative, transforming work of love is being embodied. Occasionally, God does appear to get our attention by dramatic means (The wind and fire method), but more than not the subtlety of the 'still small voice', tries to break into our lives. If one is unable to stop, listen and hear because of the noise that surrounds us, we miss opportunities to work in concert with God's gentle, guiding Spirit.

On some occasions, in the experience of solitude, one may find him/herself struggling with the feeling that he/she is wasting time since nothing seems to be happening. Calhoun (2005:109) submits that the good news, however, is that everything one begins to notice at such moment becomes an invitation to prayer and an opportunity to experience a deeper communion with God that can lead to moments of inspiration, insight, and healing, in the inner person. Foster (1988:108-109) contends that the fruits of solitudes and silence may include, not only a deepened introspection and a more intimate experience of the love and peace of God, but also a heightened compassion for others, and an attentive sensitivity to their needs.

Calhoun (2005:112, 109) compares the spiritual experience of solitude with falling in love—a time where little else matters in the world, at large; only being together and showing that the other person truly matters. She likens silence to a can-opener that allows for a deeper access to God that one normally experiences on other occasions. As the inner noise and internal chaos begin to settle, one finds a greater capacity to open him/herself up to God and allow access to places one may not have known even existed.

How would you help a young man/woman who is in love to deepen their relationships (supposing one of them is living with you)?

Kempis (1989:49) shows that the disciplines of silence and solitude are a way to hear and be instructed by God's voice through scripture. He wrote that "in silence and peace, a devout soul makes progress and learns the secrets of the Scriptures." In the midst of the instruction regarding a Sabbath rest available to the people of God, in Hebrews chapter 4, the believer is told in verse 12 that the word of God is both living and active, and in second Timothy chapter 3:16, one reads that all scripture is God-breathed and living; thus, it is the foundation to all aspects of renewed and spiritual formation in Christ. Peterson (2006:24) argues that exercising the spiritual rhythm of silence in the study of the word of God opens up new avenues of thinking, believing, and perceiving. Scripture is not meant to be primarily informational by instructing in things about God and man. That is only part of the picture, argues Peterson. Its ultimate purpose is formational, in order that the reader is shaped by it into his or her true being in Christ. There is, therefore, a dynamic quality to God's revealed Word – it does something to the adherent; it penetrates deep into his soul (Morris, 1990). The rhythms of solitude, silence, and meditation often provide the best environment for this to take place.

Spiritual Discipline Through Solitude and Silence

Bryant (2001:68-70) describes the ancient Christian practice of *Lectio-divina* (Latin for Divine or Sacred reading) as an effective way of reading scripture prayerfully and meditatively. It is being 'realize covered' in this contemporary time as an effective tool for hearing and responding to the voice of God through scripture. Some have compared it to reading in the sense that one bites off a small piece of text (reading), chews it (meditation), swallows it (prayer), and then, savors the good taste (contemplation). The practice of *lectio-divina* utilizes the rhythm of silent meditation and contemplation to experience the presence of God through His word.

Pierce (2004:42-43) addresses the importance of waiting in silence in contemplation prayer. He relates how the disciples were told to wait in Jerusalem, devoted to prayer in the upper room, before the Pentecost experience; and how Elijah, faithfully waiting alone on the mountain, encountered the presence of the Lord in the midst of the sound of sheer silence. This, according to Pierce, gave Elijah the confidence that he needed to return to his calling ministry. This need for ministry enhancement through contemplative practice in the life of pastors and ministry leaders is well addressed by Martin (1994: vii-ix). According to Martin, pastors' experiences often-times lead to a sense of overwhelming responsibility and helplessness in striving to fulfill the demands of congregants. He correctly submits that in modern society, professional approach to the pastorate has often erred on the side of 'Martha', and is in need of cultivating the quietness and openness of Mary in the Lord's presence. Martin stresses that since this grace of God is sometimes forgotten, it is taken in order to assure that the living word of God refreshes the heart of the pastor, "as the flowing stream refreshes the land, so the written words of Scripture may once again come to life."

From a missional perspective, Jesus is viewed as beginning his ministry in solitude for forty spiritually formation days as he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. Jesus did not battle with the intoxicating human desires to achieve 'his' kingdom and his identity in the power of a false self. In place of the self, however, he closes his true identity as the chosen Son of God. During his three years of ministry, he returned over and over again to solitude where his identity, life, and mission could all be put into proper perspective (Calhoun, 2005:112). Silence and solitude help the believer live as Jesus had lived, and join him in his perfect rhythm of a grace-filled, well-placed life. Smith (2009:181-182) notes that Jesus lived his life all times in the proper tempo; he never rushed, never did anything in haste. It is when the believer spends time in quiet rest and contemplation, sitting at the feet of Jesus as it were, that he/she can acquire strength to respond to this world's frenetic hustle and bustle.

Barton (2010:16) states that the invitation to solitude and silence is precisely an invitation to enter more deeply into the intimacy of the relationship that God desires to have with the believer away from the business of his life. He is also invited to enter into a spiritual odyssey of authentic transformation "in the deepest places of her/his being; an adventure that will result in greater freedom and authenticity and surrender to God than she/he have got the experience" (Barton, 2010:16). Freedom, authenticity, and surrender to God open the way for believers to effectively bear fruit in Christ's services (Jn. 15:5).

May all believers, who are privileged to serve in the ministry of Jesus Christ, learn to appropriate the spiritual rhythms of solitude, silence, and meditation. In this way they can give up the control of themselves and ministries to the one who loves them, and in whom they can fully trust (Graybar and Roller, 2006:70). As Nouwen (1978:22) so insightfully describes the experience: "By leaving behind from time to time our many self-affirming actions and becoming "useless" in the

Spiritual Discipline

presence of God, we transcend our inner fears and apprehensions, and affirm our God as the one in whose love we find our strength and security.”

Through prophet Jeremiah the biblical accounts that when Christians seek God with all of their hearts, He would be found by them (Jer. 29:12-13). In times of solitude, silence and meditation, Christians can position themselves to find and to be found by the incarnate Christ who delights in their simply being still and knowing that He is God (Ps. 46:10). This encounter with the Lord may well lead them to depend less upon their own human efforts in ministry, and to experience a greater empowerment through his Spirit to participate with him the mission to make disciples of all nations. Fenelon (1992:54) says:

Listen to the voice of God in silence. Be willing to accept what he wants to show you. God will show you everything you need to know. Be faithful to come before Him in silence. When you hear the still, small voice within, it is time to be silent. This voice is not a stranger to your spirit. It is God’s voice within your spirit. This is not something mystical but something practical. Deep within, you will learn to yield to God and to trust your Lord.

Below are brief lists of silence and/or solitude as an expression of being in close association with:

- Deference to God, especially in His role as Judge and sovereign Lord -(Job 6:24; Heb. 2:20; Zeph. 1:7; Rom. 3:19)
- Avoidance of sinful speeches – (Prov. 11:12; Jam. 1:19)
- A time to focus on prayer– (Matt. 6:6; Mark 1:35; Luke 4:42; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18)
- Physical refreshment– (Mk 6:31)
- Grief– (1 Sam. 1:13)
- Ignorance– (Matt. 22:12).
- Trust– (Ps. 131:2; Isa. 30:15; Lam. 3:26).
- Punishment– (Lk. 1:20)
- Humility and creatureliness–(Eccl 5:2)
- Recognition of life’s varied experiences – (Eccl. 3:7)
- Demonized despair– (Lk. 8:29)

The mark of solitude is silence, as speech is the mark of community. Silence and speech have the same inner correspondence and difference as to solitude and community; one does not exist without the other. Right speech comes out of silence, and right silence comes out of speech.

Silence does not mean dumbness, as speech does not mean chattering. Bonhoeffer’s (1954:76-80) thought is that dumbness does not create solitude and chattering does not create fellowship. Silence, stresses Bonhoeffer, is the “excess, the inebriation, the victim of speech. But dumbness is unholy, like a thing only maimed, not cleanly sacrificed.... Zacharias was speechless, instead of being silent. Had he accepted the revelation, he may, perhaps, have come out of the temple not dumb but silent.” The speech, the Word which establishes and binds together the fellowship, is accompanied by silence. The Holy Bible records that “There is a time to keep silent and a time to speak” (Eccl. 3:7). As there are definite hours in the Christian’s day for the Word, particularly the time of common worship and prayer, the day also needs definite times of silence; silence under the Word and silence that come out of the Word. These will be especially the times before and after hearing the Word. The Word comes, not to the chatterer, but to him who holds his

Spiritual Discipline Through Solitude and Silence

tongue. The stillness of the temple is the sign of the holy presence of God in His Word.

There is an indifference, or even negative, attitude toward silence which sees in its disparagement of God's revelation in the Word. This is the view which misinterprets silence as a ceremonial gesture, and, as a mystical desire to get beyond the Word. This is to miss the essential relationship of silence to the Word. Silence is the simple stillness of the individual under the Word of God. Christians are silent before hearing the Word because their thoughts are already directed to the Word, as a child is quiet when he/she enters the father's room. Christians are silent after hearing the Word because the Word is still speaking and dwelling within him. Christians are silent at the beginning of the day because God should have the first word, and his children ought to be silent before going to sleep because the last word also belongs to God. Christians, everywhere, keep silence solely for the sake of the Word, and, therefore, not show disregard for the Word but, to rather honour and receive it.

Silence is nothing but waiting for the fulfillment of God's Word and enjoying the promised blessings coming from God's Word. However, everybody knows that this is something that needs to be practiced and learned, especially these days when talkativeness prevails. Real silence, real stillness, holding of one's tongue comes only as the sober consequences of spiritual stillness.

Also, remember that this stillness during meditation on God's Word will exert its influence upon the committed believer the whole day. If you had learnt to be silent before the Word, you must also learn to manage your silence and your speeches during the day. Strive to avoid the forbidden, self-indulgent silence or a proud, offensive silence because the silence of a Christian is listening silence; a humble stillness that may be interrupted at any time for the sake of humility. Thomas A Kempis alluded to this as "None speaketh surely but he that would gladly keep silent if he might" (1989:96). There is a wonderful power of clarification, purification, and concentration upon the essential thing in being quiet. Silence over meditation on God's Word leads to right hearing and right speaking of the Word of God at the right time. Much that is unnecessary remains unsaid. But the essential and the helpful thing can be said in a few words.

Spiritual Discipline

WORKSHEET

Look for 'little solitude' among the ordinary experiences of your day. Write down in a journal entry when and where you found the opportunities, how you spent the day, and what difference they made in your day. Be sure you put off all electronics, phones, and the like:

Spend a day, or part of the day, without discussing with people and share your experiences:

Be on the alert for any longings of solitude that you may have to experience during the week. Write down the circumstances surrounding those longings and consider what prompted them.

Observe a 30 minute silent prayer-walk around a garden or field (preferably in the evening). Do this for at least three consecutive days.

SESSION 7| *Spiritual Discipline through Submission*

Submission or passivity (also called Deference) is the condition of submitting to the espoused, legitimate influence of one's superior or superiors (Kirby, 1970: 808-810). Deference implies a yielding or submitting to the judgment of a recognized superior out of respect or reverence. Deference has been studied extensively by political scientists, sociologists, and psychologists.

Political scientists like Smolenski (2005:253-285) examine deference in colonial Pennsylvania, to see how claims to political authority were justified, and accepted or reflected. He focuses on the "colonial speech economy" that is, the implicit rules that determined who was allowed to address whom and under what conditions, and describes how the qualities that inspired deference changed in the province from 1691 to 1764. The Quaker elite initially established a monopoly on political leadership based on their religious and social class. By 1760, this view had been discredited and replaced with the general consensus that civic virtue was an achieved, not an inherent attribute, and that it should be determined by the display of appropriate manliness and the valour of men who were willing to take up arms for the common defense of the colony. Further, Pennsylvanians came to believe that all white men, not just wealthy property owners, were equally capable of achieving political voice. Martial Masculinity, therefore, became the defining characteristic of the ideal citizen and marked a significant transformation in the way individuals justified their right to represent the public interest.

Sociologically, Goffman (1967) explores the relationship between deference and demeanor. According to him, a person with a poor demeanor will be held in lower esteem in the society. The same is true of people who behave in a good demeanor; however, the society will hold them in a higher esteem. An example of this situation can be seen through the way a person acts in a social setting, e.g. a man pulling out a chair for a woman at a restaurant. On the other end of the spectrum, a person, who does not take his/her bath before going to a fancy dinner party, will experience a poor demeanor. These examples can be defined as presentational deference. Demeanor does not only limit itself to the actions of an individual, but also the appearance of such an individual. A person offers himself to a social gathering through a good appearance or a well demeanored appearance; hence, when an individual has a well demeanored appearance, it makes interaction between people easier. After a person is socially accepted to a group, it is expected that he/she will conform to interactional norms. Through acting on those norms, people receive deference.

Psychologically, deference in a relationship is determined by a person's innate personality-type or the result of a person's experiences and conditioning. In interpersonal relationships, a partner can assume a submissive role to fit in or to make him or herself acceptable to the other partner (Gross, 2006), and can be a benign aspect for a relationship. On the other hand, it may be an indication of an interpersonal problem, such as partner's abuse. If one or both of the persons are experiencing chronic, pervasive emotional distress, then, the sex-partners or the individuals may require psychological evaluation.

Spiritual Discipline

In interpersonal relationships, some people preferred or are willing to adopt a submissive role in sexual activities or on personal matters. The level and type of submission can vary from person to person and from one context to another; and also, it is dependent on the other partner being willing to assume control in those situations. Some people can include occasional acts of submission in an otherwise conventional sex-life, or adopt a submissive lifestyle (see Telles, 1980; Soper, 2002; and Zuckerman, 2005).

Goffman (1967); Gross (2006); Telles (1980); Soper (2002), Zuckerman (2005); Foster (1981) and Foster (1989) explained submission as the ability to lay down the terrible burden of always needing to get your own way.

Spiritual Discipline Through Submission

WORKSHEET

Read Philippians 2:3-8 and take note of insights into submission you can find in it.

Make a list of opportunities you have in the course of daily living to give up your own rights for the good of others,

and choose one opportunity on which to act this week.

What are your greatest difficulties in submitting to God and what efforts have you made to over it ?

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SESSION 8| *Spiritual Discipline through Simplicity*

Foster (1981) believes that simplicity is a gift of God, as well as a practice that can be incorporated into daily life. He maintains that it brings sanity to the compulsive extravagance, and peace to the frantic spirit. It liberates the believer from what William Penn called “cumber.”

Simplicity, in the argument of Foster, is rooted in the Old Testament through the themes of radical dependence, radical obedience, the generosity of God, the joy of giving, the call of Justice, and the challenge to live in compassion and wholeness. The practice of simplicity in the New Covenant, states Foster, is spelled out through faith in Christ as the centre, identification with the poor, awareness of the dangers of wealth, the incendiary fellowship, ability to surrender one’s rights for the good of others, and unconditional generosity.

- Foster (1989) presents six models of Christian simplicity:
- Exuberant sharing and caring (the period following the Apostle Age);
- The power of renunciation (the Desert Fathers and Mothers);
- The joy of simplicity (Francis of Assisi);
- Theology in the cause of simplicity (the Protestant Reformation);
- Hearing and obeying (Seventeenth-century Quakers); and
- Simplicity in action (John Wesley and the Early Methodists).

In chapters on the practice of simplicity, Foster emphasizes the inward virtues of holy obedience, joy and humility. He covers many topics in his treatment of outward simplicity, including voluntary poverty, unplugging from consumer society, the gift of giving services especially to the poor, and sacrifice. The hope of Foster is that the church will do more teaching about the inner and outward aspects of simplicity with an emphasis on the biblical and theological foundations for justice and the relationship between simplicity and peace.

The life of the servant God is characterized by simplicity. A simple and humble life is that which can be lived in a community; that which accommodates others for fellowship. A lifestyle of simplicity aids the ministry which is required for the furtherance of the ministry. It simplifies the way from some sins that might bring one down.

A simple life in essence safeguards the child of God from care and anxiety, from greed and from becoming a dreamer, to becoming one with a concentrated and prioritized life-style (Haselbarth, 1976:26–29). A simple life requires a child of God to live within his/her earnings. It forbids him/her from desiring to covet other people’s lifestyle, such as engaging in borrowing to foot bills which he/she knows exactly is above his/her income or means. Also, it calls the Christian to allow his/her ethical, social, emotional, spiritual life, among others, to weigh proportionately in the balance. An illustration is needful to drive home the point.

Jones Owei was a servant of God whom God placed in one of the cities in Nigeria. He was married with three children (two boys and a girl aged twelve (12years), ten (10years) and six (6years) respectively). Pastor Owei chose to send his children to a private school with the reason of giving them “good education.” Also, Mrs. Owe because of challenges had to continue her education.

Spiritual Discipline Through Simplicity

All four were dependent on Pastor Owei's income of fifty (50,000) thousand naira per month.

Each school day, Pastor Owei spent about five hours to and fro to drop his children at school and pick them up. When he could not bear the discomfort in public transport which was premised on the insults from Bus conductors and Taxi drivers, the long delays in getting a cab, the heat of the sun and frequent rains, among others, Owei requested for a car loan from the church. Though a car to the family brought relief, it was a relief that was temporary as it led to heightened tension because the income had reduced for the repayment of the loan.

Pastor Owei needed additional money to keep him at that social level and keep his children and wife in the school; hence, in the long run Owei became unfaithful to God, the church and to himself. He cheated in his payment of tithes, offerings and also in most of the refunds from overheads, and meetings which he was no longer able to faithfully account for. The unpalatable situation began to affect his prayer life, Bible study and personal relationship with God.

After series of counseling and personal decision, Owei finally withdrew his children from private school to a public school close to his residence, where transportation to and fro was not required, nor higher school fees needed to be paid. Pastor Owei had since regained his faith and relationship with God. He lives as a beacon to younger generation of Christians and clergies alike.

Christian simplicity is not just a faddish attempt to respond to the ecological situation that threatens to engulf humanity, nor is it borne out of a frustration with technocratic obesity. Instead, it is a call to every Christian. The witness to simplicity is profoundly rooted in biblical tradition, and it is most perfectly exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ. It is a natural and necessary outflow of the Good News of the gospel having taken root in one's life.

WORKSHEET

Discuss the analysis of simplicity in the:

- * Traditional African Society, -----
- * Modern African society, -----
- * Post-Modern African society, -----
- * Western Societies -----

2. Read Matthew 6:25-33, and reflect on the passage, noting your responses

3. Set aside about 30 minutes each day of the week and 'separate the wheat from the chaff.' Pray for guidance, and think through major areas of responsibility, commitment, or desire in your life. Probe for insight into how the practice of simplicity could help you clarify what is important, and weed out what is not.

SESSION 9 | *Spiritual Discipline through the Holy Spirit (Guidance)*

Once people believed in the good news, the Holy Spirit of God dwells within them and empowers them. The Bible teaches that when someone repents from sin and believes in the Gospel, the Holy Spirit guides such person(s) into all truth and promotes spiritual growth. In the New Testament, this is often referred to as “new birth”; so called because of Jesus’ teaching that one must be born of the Spirit in order to receive salvation (Jn. 3:1-21). This new birth, generated by the Holy Spirit, not only saves one’s soul, but also motivates one to obey God and thus begins the spiritual journey (Tit. 3:5-8).

The ultimate purpose of the Holy Spirit’s operation in the life of a Christian is to promote personal transformation-transformation that makes one’s character increasingly like the character of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29, Eph. 4: 24). Spiritual growth, brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit, results in concrete, practical changes in the life of a believer- affecting how one thinks, feels, and acts.

According to the Bible, spiritual growth is exhibited in what is called the “fruit of the Spirit.” In Galatians 5:22-23, the fruit of the Spirit is listed as love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Keller (2003:156) describes these characteristics as follows:

Love: To serve people for their good and intrinsic value, not for what they bring to or for you.

Joy: Delight in God and his salvation for the sheer beauty and worth of who he is.

Peace: Confidence and rest in the wisdom and sovereignty of God more than one’s own.

Forbearance: Ability to take trouble (from others or life) without blowing up but to suffer joyfully.

Kindness: Practical kindness with vulnerability out of deep inner security.

Goodness (integrity): Honesty, transparency, being the same in one situation as another.

Faithfulness: Loyalty, courage, to be principle-driven, committed, utterly reliable, true to one’s word.

Gentleness (Humility): Self-forgetfulness.

Self-Control: Ability to choose the urgent over the important thing.

These are characteristics that Christians must strive for, and depend on the Holy Spirit to bring about. For this reason, throughout the Bible, Christians are called to walk in the Spirit, to be filled with the Spirit, and to seek God’s wisdom for direction in everyday life (Ezek. 36:27; Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:16, 25; I Thess. 5:19; Eph. 4:30; Prov. 5:4-6; Jam. 4:13-15; II Cor. 5:21). The work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian results in spiritual growth.

The theological category that encompasses this process is called “sanctification.” In biblical parlance, sanctification refers to the process whereby an ordinary person or thing is made holy or set aside for God’s good purposes. Christians are made holy through their relationship with Jesus Christ. In other words, simply by virtue of their connection with Jesus, Christians are put in right

Spiritual Discipline

relationship with God. They are holy because Jesus Christ is holy, and he shares that quality with them. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him, we might become the righteousness of God."

However, there is also a progressive sense of holiness that is the aim of sanctification or spiritual growth. It is interestingly that the Apostle Paul opens many of his letters to the ancient churches by addressing the readers as "Saints" (I Cor. 1:2). As you read these letters, however, you see that these early Christians do not seem so saintly. They are prone to weaknesses, envy, and strife. They are deeply flawed and broken--just like everyone else (this is not to excuse man's humanity). Paul continuously reminds these Christians that they are called to be a holy people. But they continue to struggle to live fully into God's purposes for them because of the pervasive and insidious influence of sin (Rom. 7: 14-25).

In light of this, the work of the Holy Spirit regarding spiritual growth can be described in two ways: First, the Holy Spirit convicts Christians of their sin and leads them to avoid evil in all forms. Second, the Holy Spirit impels Christians to pursue holiness and virtue. So, when the Bible teaches that individuals are sanctified by faith in Christ Jesus, the power for that sanctification comes from the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15: 16; II Thess. 2:13; I Pet. 1:2). According to the Bible, believer's growth will cause them to become more and more like Christ until Jesus himself returns to make all things new (Rev. 21:1-6).

The life which is lived with the charisma of the Holy Spirit is a life lived in holiness. Charisma is a gift of the Holy Spirit being given to those who are lowly/simple and humble and of a loving disposition.

Spiritual Discipline Through the Holy Spirit (Guidance)

WORKSHEET

Have you ever received guidance from the Holy Spirit? If yes, share your experiences below.

Spend reasonable periods this week to beseech God to send the Holy Spirit's guidance in specific areas of your life, and share your experiences below:

SESSION 10 | *Spiritual Discipline through the Church Community*

Lovelace (1979:167-168) argues that “no individual...is spiritually independent of the others.... Therefore, the normal Christian life is not simply a function of an individual believer’s relationship to God.” In recent years, many teachings on spiritual growth have focused on the individual, to the exclusion of corporate spiritual formation. However, the Christian community is central to a Christian’s spiritual identity.

Chester and Timmis (2008:41) made this point clearer when they wrote, “I am not autonomous. I am a person-in-community. I cannot be who I am without regard to other people.” The church community is meant to be a spiritual family in which spiritual growth is encouraged. When the church gathers, members inspire one another to go deeper with God through corporate worship, reading and hearing the Word of God and prayer. Generally speaking, a church gathering should be characterized by these aspects.

The word “community” is instructive here. A community is a body of individuals unified around something they hold in common. For Christians, the common unifier is the gospel. Christian community means community through and in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the goal of all Christian community is to “meet one another as bringers of the message of salvation; and to help individuals orient themselves to the gospel” (Bonhoeffer, 1954:23; Ferguson, 1989:86).

In Ephesians 4:12-13, Paul discusses the importance of maturing in faith by addressing and describing the church community as a whole, not as isolated individuals. In the Gospel of John, the words of Jesus to the church are very clear: Christians are to make God known through their lives together as the body of Christ (Jn. 13:35; 17:20-23). God’s intention is that Christians would mature in the community, not just on their own but be helped and guided by their own members to grow. Change is a community project.

One huge implication of this claim is that sin is a community-concern. As Chester (2010:152) observes, sin “impedes the growth of the community as a whole. It stops us from growing together as the body of Christ. . . Even our private, secret sins affect the community.” Despite its faults, the church remains the best context for change because it is the God-given context for spiritual formation and growth. “One of the greatest things about Christian community is that it gives us models of Christ-like behaviour. Of course, no one is being perfectly sustained like Jesus, but other Christians help us see what it means to walk with Jesus” (Chester, 2010:153).

Christians model growth when people see them struggle with sin and turn in faith to God. In fact, God uses people to reveal things about themselves that they cannot know on their own. Presbyterian pastor, Sinclair Ferguson, notes: “The church is a community in which we receive spiritual help, but also one in which deep-seated problems will come to the surface and will require treatment. We often discover things about our own hearts which we never anticipated.”

God uses many people, often people with contrasting personalities, to depict positive change in one’s heart, and that does not mean just the happy people or the people with whom others easily get along, but also the difficult people, the annoying people, the people who are

Spiritual Discipline Through the Church Community

nothing like the others. God places them all together in the tumbler of life to smoothen out the rough edges in others.

The situation places some level of responsibilities on others; the responsibility of receiving truth and speaking the truth in love to one another. Chester (2010:158) writes, "Love without truth is like doing heart- surgery with a wet-fish. But truth without love is like doing heart surgery with a hammer." According to the picture painted in the Bible, the church is to be a community of confession, accountability, encouragement, rebuke, and love (Matt. 18:15-17; Gal. 6:1-2).

There is usually reluctance among Christians to speak the truth in love because they fear the other person's response. But the Bible also calls them to rebuke and confront each other (Rom. 15:15; 1:28; 3:16; Tit. 2:15). Without rebuke and confrontation, sin often silently charts its own course until it blows up to devastating effect. Church communities that practice loving rebuke and repentance are communities of grace which allows being honest, open, and transparent about human struggles. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1954:86) put it this way:

The pious fellowship permits not one to be a sinner. So, everybody must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship. We are not allowed to be sinners. Many Christians are unthinkably horrified when a real sinner is discovered among the righteous. So, we remain alone in our sins, living in lies and hypocrisy. But the fact is, we are sinners.

The key is that Christians accept each other as they truly are, just as Christ has accepted them. God desires that his children should reflect his character. A community life is lived by worshipping together. This life paves the way for one to confess his/her heart and loving desires to belong. This spirit of belongingness gives room for total commitment which is action. The mind to demonstrate enables one to actually pray for the direction and enablement of the divine spirit. The burdened heart will always wait upon God for a response of his prayers which is done by meditation.

Spiritual Discipline

WORKSHEET

Explain a time when the sin's problem or challenges of individual members of your church became that of the entire church.

How much of the communal values in the traditional African society are reflected/practiced in your church today in terms of:

*Members getting married?

*Members being bereaved or dead?

*Members building living apartment or needing shelter?

SESSION 11 | *Spiritual Discipline through Holiness*

Today, rarely do people hear it said and even loudly trumpet that holiness is wholeness. There is even a well-known book of Joseph Goldbrunner entitled, *Holiness is Wholeness*. This, of course, is very true in terms of what people today call “holistic spirituality” in the sense that it respects the integral organic unity or wholeness of the human person. In such a context, to affirm that holiness is wholeness, then, is to assert quite rightly that the pursuit of holiness, far from being inimical to, or stunting healthy human growth, does in fact foster and enhance it, and that those who strive to respond to the call to holiness are not in any way exempt from the integral human condition.

Unfortunately, however, as it is happening in general with what is often stridently proclaimed as holistic spirituality-and every genuine student of spirituality knows this-Holiness as wholeness is not seldom being interpreted in practice in a grossly reductionist psychological sense; hence, genuine spirituality tends to become reduced in practice to a glorified psychology. Which person in the field of spiritual direction, for example, is not painfully aware that today, there is more need than psychological counseling? This is, in no way, to berate or decry psychology or psychological counseling, nor is it to imply by any means that psychological counseling and spiritual direction like psychology and spirituality themselves, is not closely and organically related. Of course, they are; but they are not in any sense, as is happening in a world over enthused by the doubtlessly amazing advances in psychology, to be identified with each other. Though, certainly closely linked with each other, as are Nature and Grace, psychology and spirituality are, each of them in its own specific and distinct right, an authentically and professionally valid discipline and filled with both theory and practice.

It is unfortunate that the term has ceased to attract even good people. There are many who had regarded it with suspicion, and some who had dismissed it with scorn. It is not uncommon for it to be made both cheap with the subject of some doubtful stories. This is all the more surprising because of the emphasis with which the New Testament insists upon its necessity, urges its experience, and enforces its obligations. There is little teaching and testimony on the subject, and, therefore, there is dense ignorance and much misunderstanding. The subject is generally discussed without much inquiry, even among those who take the trouble to think there is much misapprehension, and the reason is that due attention is not given to the place and work of the Holy Spirit in the sanctification of the believer for He is the Sanctifier.

The meaning of holiness must be interpreted spiritually. It has a biblical content and value. It is no use to search for it in pagan literature, however classical, for the biblical idea of holiness is not to be found elsewhere. Even, in Israel, it was of slow growth, and the idea had passed through many stages before it took its complete and final form. Its meaning is separation, and it was used to separate things in majesty and character apart, and was ascribed to him and his ways. This quality of God demanded a like quality from his people, and to his covenanted He said, “Be you holy, for I am holy.” He chose them to be “unto him a holy people.” For this purpose, we called them out from

Spiritual Discipline

among the nations. They were to be unto him a holy people” in whom all men should see a holy and sanctified people. Holiness had its positive as well as its negatives side. They were to be distinguished by moral and spiritual excellence, as well as by ceremonial and national distinctions. Holiness is an experience as well as an attitude, a life as well as a separation. Their separation unto God was to be manifested in their likeness unto him. The supreme revelation and standard are in Jesus Christ. He revealed the Holy Father and was made manifest as the Holy Spirit; thereby, making him known as both God and human by the Spirit of Holiness.

Believers are called unto holiness. “This is the will of God, even your sanctification.” “God has chosen you from the beginning in sanctification of the Spirit.” Without holiness, grace fails in its purpose; and without it, no human can see the Lord. The experience is set forth in various terms and under many forms, but in all its minified representations, the same root ideas had persisted and prevailed, Holiness is an attitude of dedication and an experience of grace in which the heart is cleansed from sins and made perfect in love.

There is a strange teaching spreading around that holiness is something quite optional. It is regarded as desirable only for certain people and in special circumstances, but its claims are by no means universal. Preachers, sometimes, speak of it as an alternative way to heaven, but as both ways get there, the routes do not really matter. Holiness is regarded as an emotional luxury, if not as a spiritual fad. Its claims are deemed to be emotional rather than ethical, and optional rather than imperative. There is little exposition of its character, and still less insistence upon its urgency; consequently, only a few seek to enter into the experience or take seriously the solemn words of the Holy Scripture. Many take it for granted that if it is necessary, it will come to them in due course without any concern of theirs. Such slackness accounts for much of the backsliding among believers. The Christian calling is one that demands “all diligence” and “earnest heed”. Those who failed to seek after holiness “fall short of the grace of God,” give opportunity to “the roots of bitterness to spring up,” and become secular and worldly like Esau, who bartered his spiritual inheritance for material good.

Another mistake made by many earnest Christians about holiness is that it comes by a gradual growth in grace and a steady progress of spiritual disciplines. They are always growing toward it, but they never get into it; hence, they are always struggling and striving to attain, but never entering into possession. The positive expectation is always seen to be afar off, and they die without having possessed it. The hopeful future never becomes positive now. The time has never called for a definite step and a positive act of faith but holiness does not come by growth; neither is it identified with growth. Growth is a process of life; however, holiness is the gift of abundant life. Growth is the result of health; hence, holiness is health. Holiness implies a crisis, a new experience, a transformation of life. It is not an achievement or an attainment, but a gift of grace in the Holy Ghost. It comes not by works but by faith.

Not a few good people mix things that differ. They confused cleaning with maturity, motive with achievement, love with blamelessness, and the perfection of grace with the perfection of the resurrection of glory; people who ought to know blunder hopelessly over those things. Perhaps, the confusion that is most common and most senseless is that which persists in associating perfection with finality. These are many people who seem to be afraid lest they should come to a point at which there will be no more room for improvement. They need not distress themselves even before their best friends being judges; but really, such shallow and foolish thinking is without excuse. Love

Spiritual Discipline through Holiness

never exhausts its inheritance or reaches its limit in being made perfect. Health never hinders growth. The perfection of efficiency is surely not final but primary.

The subject that is being dealt with here is Holiness, an authentic spiritual category. All truly theistic religions predicate the word “Holy” or “Holiness” in the first and most fundamental instance of God. In the case of Buddhism, it is in the “epiphany” or manifestation of “unconditioned or undefined reality” that the ‘Scared’ or the ‘Holy’ is revealed. For all theistic religions, then, to put it forthrightly, God as God is Holy in his very self, by very definition, as it were.

The Bible affirms this unambiguously. The great Theophanous and hymns of praise of both the Jewish and the Christian Scripture emphasize the holiness of God in this eminently singular sense. But this is not in any way to cut off or isolate God or His holiness. The God of the Bible is one who reveals and communicates Himself: He gives and shares His life and Himself, that is, He gives and shares His holiness. Holiness thus derives from God not merely as a designation but as a divine quality that is shared—a sharing in God’s life or ‘grace’ as later theology would term it. Such a sharing is both a state or condition and a consequent call or vocation. In the Book of Leviticus, God already proclaims thus: “I am the Lord, your God; therefore, be holy, for I am holy” (Lev. 11:44-45). This is explicitly echoed in the First Letter of Apostle Peter: “But as He who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:15-16).

Quite in general, then, at any rate, for all theistic is authentic terms, union with God, for God is primarily, and in the most radical sense, the Holy one. Christ’s holiness, then, is union with God in Jesus Christ. God has revealed and communicated his life, indeed himself, finally and definitely in his Son, Jesus Christ (cf. Heb. 1:1-3). Indeed, Jesus Christ is the one mediator between God and human: “for there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and human beings, the man Christ Jesus” (1Tim. 2:5). Holiness, then, in the Christian sense, comes to mean, in the simplest of terms, no more, no less than in union with Christ, or, more precisely, union with God in and through Jesus Christ.

It is true that Christian theologians across the centuries have formulated the essence of Christian holiness in diverse and different terms, often conditioned by their times, or the schools of theology to which they belonged. It is equally true to say that all truly Christian theologians have, more or less, explicitly taught, in perfect accord with a continuous and germane Christian tradition, that Christian holiness consists, in the last analysis, in union with Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God and the Redeemer, who is the one mediator between God and human beings.

Vatican II expresses formulation of Christian holiness as union with Christ Jesus in the following manner:

The church, whose mystery is set forth by this sacred council, is by faith believed to be indefectibly holy. In fact, Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is proclaimed ‘the only Holy One,’ loved the church as His Bride and gave Himself for her in order to make her holy (cf. Eph. 5:25-26), and united her to Himself as His body, and He has filled her with the gift of His Holy Spirit, for the glory of God. Therefore, all in the church, whether or not belong to him, according to the saying of the Apostle: “This is the will of God, that you be holy” (1Thess. 4:3; cf. Eph. 1:4) (Alphonso, 1996:2).

Spiritual Discipline

Alphonso (1993) explains Christian holiness from the backdrop of Trinitarian dimensions as dealing with the entire New Testament revelation, especially the Pauline and Johannine corpus, which leaves the reader in no doubt whatever that the union with Jesus Christ is in truth, the union with God the Father, through the unique mediator of the Son of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Mt. 28:19; Jn. 14:25; 15:26; 16:13-15; 1Jn. 5:7-12; 2Cor. 13:14; Eph. 1:13-14; 16-21; 4:1-6; 1Thess. 1:2:5). This Spirit of Jesus Christ is very significantly named the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of holiness because He is the life principle that effectively unites the Christian to Jesus Christ.

Thus, holiness in the Christian sense is first and primarily a state or condition. That is, holiness ontologically understood, if believers are to use technical language, for through the sacrament of Baptism, the Christian is “plunged into Jesus Christ” (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27 –united with and incorporated into Jesus Christ). The Christian “puts on”, “is clothed with” the Lord Jesus Christ, as Saint Paul phrases it in Galatians 3:27; Colossians 3:10-15. This state or condition of union with Christ or holiness through Baptism matures and is carried to what might be called a ‘state of adulthood’ through the sacrament of confirmation; it is further constantly fed, nourished and deepened by the sacrament of the Eucharist, preeminently the sacrament of union with Jesus Christ speaking orthodoxically. It is easy to see and understand, then, why Saint Paul can, in his letters, consistently address all Christian initiates that they are in a state or condition of holiness for the Christian, in the precise sense in which it is distinctively and specifically Christian. This author insists on this, even while admitting that the Atavistic school of the Hinduism, with its Ahimsa Brahmas, may, with in its own system, lay claim to a sort of state or condition of holiness. The Christian state or condition of holiness, which this author has described, is a pure gift of God—a gift descending from the all-gracious Father through His Son Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

A fundamental argument that should be truly put forth is, does every gift not connote, in free human beings, a corresponding responsibility? If so, the very state or condition of Christian holiness, which consists in the believer’s ontological union with Jesus Christ, becomes for the Christian, a consequent call and a vocation— a call and a vocation to grow in union with Jesus Christ, which has obvious ethical and moral demands and exigencies. Here, precisely, then, is to be placed that profoundly significant fifth chapter of *Lumen Gentium* entitled, “The Call of the Whole church to Holiness” with its expressly worded invitation or even challenge: ... all the faithful of Christ, of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity... (Which can also be described as holiness).

While speaking of the “perfection of charity”, the reference, is to that charity, which is nothing but the love that tends to be in union: union with God through Jesus Christ. Here, too, are to be situated the many express exhortations of the New Testament writers addressed to Christians calling and challenging them all “to be holy” (1 Pet. 1:5-16; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:4; 5:3; 1Thess. 4:3). The intimate, indeed, imperative link in all these texts between holiness and moral conduct or behaviour gives, clear evidence of holiness understood in the moral sense—a holiness common to all religious traditions which is part of a responsible ongoing and maturing process of conversion. In the specifically Christian context, such a growth in holiness or union with Jesus Christ is effected through the Christian’s free response to the word of God proclaimed or read and pondered in the heart (prayer), through his/her sharing in the sacramental life of the church, and through his/her actual living out, no daily life—whether personal or family life, social or professional life of those

Spiritual Discipline through Holiness

values and attitudes that make for, foster and deepen union with Jesus Christ. This author has sought to sum up succinctly the most varied and variegated means of growth and maturing in Christian 'moral' holiness.

Christian holiness, viewed from the dimension of Ecclesiastical, sees the union with Christ or Christian holiness, whether in the ontological or the moral sense, as no mere individual or personal state or striving. While the individual Christian is most certainly personally united to Christ and, therefore holy, he/she is an integral part of a corporate people of God; indeed, a member of an organic body, the body of Christ which is the church. Though the communication aspect of holiness is very clearly set forth in Traditional Religion, as also in Islam, are in some expressions or forms of Hinduism, the characteristically ecclesiastical sense in which the Christian is an integral part of a corporate people of God- is distinctively and specifically Christian. Such a corporate or ecclesiastical dimension of Christian holiness is not to be overlooked or down-played; it is an essential dimension of it, as much in its ontological state or condition as in its challenging aspect of call and vocation with all its ethical and moral demands. Little wonder that the union directly connoted by Christian holiness is expressed by love, not only for God, but also for one's brothers and sisters in God, in Christ Jesus. Such love, like all genuine love, is directed and geared to union, as truly as it is the offshoot and fruit of union. Within this framework too, of the typically ecclesiastical dimensions of Christian holiness, it can be best understood in its eschatological dimension; in other words, its movement towards its fullness, perfection and final consummation (Gentium, 1955:40).

Gentium (1955:41) further argues that Christian holiness is one, in that it consists in that union with Jesus Christ which is effected by the Holy Spirit (One in Essence, yet not identical for all). In his argument, to say that holiness in one is not the same as to say that it is identical for everyone. Gentium speaks of one type of holiness. Not only is every individual person gifted and graced according to the measure of the sovereign freedom and liberality of the father of all gifts: "Grace has been given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift" (Eph. 4:17; cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-11).

Alphonso (1993:23-43) spells out that there is holiness required of laity and of the priest. He argues that every single person has been graced in Jesus Christ in a singularly unique and unrepeatable fashion. As unique God-given meaning in one's life becomes the secret of unity and integration of the whole sweep of that person's life. It may be necessary to say, that the union with God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit, which is the only substance of Christian holiness, is of God's doing. In biblical revelation, it is no human beings who go to God; it is God who comes to humans.

The primary and the initiative in communicating his life and love to humankind belong to God. The only role human freedom and liberty has to play is to actively open itself, to dispose itself to receive the self-giving and self-communicating God, who is forever coming unto man's loves to save, redeem and sanctify them. So, on the part of the free human being, union with God or union with Christ consists in the freedom of the heart or inner freedom. As this author has been so consistently stressing no spirituality-inner freedom, which connotes both a 'freedom from' all that block the invading life and love and power of God and a resultant freedom for or openness or availability-to the ever self-giving and self-communicating God. Thus, on the part of the free human person, what is required for holiness and growth in holiness is the free heart and ongoing in, or

Spiritual Discipline

deepening of, this inner freedom of the heart. The one who is interiorly free will find God or be unnoted with God will find measure in which he/she is interiorly free.

Growth in Christian holiness, then, is growth in inner freedom or openness to the Holy Spirit who then leads him by his gifts; through these gifts, he urges him to those active purifications or "freedom" and accomplishes in him those passive purifications or "freedom" which dispose him effectively for time union with God or holiness. The life of holiness as "being in Christ" is the union with Christ. It is living every moment in God's presence. It does not require independent life but requires dependent life with God. A life of holiness with the risen and the crucified Christ is able to transform one and present such blameless before God. It is one which is lived by grace from on high. It is a life where the sins of pride and of weaknesses are all crucified to the cross (Gal. 2:20).

So, a life of holiness for the world is a life that states purposeful life of holiness. A life that honours God is demonstrated by his service to Him. A life of holiness for the world is a life characterized by the close connection between a prayerful life and the prophetic witness to the social and political needs.

Foster (1989:244) describes this as the decision to set the mind on the higher things of life which is an act of the will. In the conception of Foster, this is not something that falls on our heads; rather, it certainly results to a consciously chosen way of thinking and living, as well as the healing and redemption in Christ and, thus, breaks into the inner recess of the lives and relationships, and the inevitable result of joy.

Spiritual Discipline through Holiness

WORKSHEET

Explain the truism that 'Peace' and 'Holiness' are the sides of the Christian walk in life.

Show some practical moral and ethical things you will do this week to demonstrate holy commitment to your calling.

SESSION 12| *Spiritual Discipline through Worship*

What makes today's Christians long for fellowship is not that their former lives have been incapable of realizing togetherness but that the fellowship with the Father is what people needed and desired. An enabling group is that which is made up of those women and men who gather from time to time to experience brotherhood with fellow members. They also develop their particular gifts, and organize house-groups for the edification of others. Human love tends to bind for selfish gains or, sometimes, exploiting the people hard and cut rulers; it also makes one dependent on human and worldly influence which can cause damage rather than good. Divine love, on the other hand, releases freedom, dependent on God and opens access for one another through Christ. This is love that keeps Christians together.

- Four elements of worship are:
- Scripture Reading,
- Prayer and meditation,
- praise and or hymn and
- offerings/tithes

There has been too much of strange things in the worship of a particular group of worshippers. They have not taken to heart the diversified members in contextualizing her worship. The abuse of worship has eaten deep in various churches today. Worship must be given a closer look. Pastors must do all possible best to seek guidance from the Holy Spirit so as to enhance worship. There must be confession and adoration. Men and women must personally experience God's presence and move in that strength to witness.

Worship as a sacrifice is the giving of one's life to God in service. It purifies and reconciles people in order for them to offer better service unto God. Worship, as mystery, reveals people to Christ as the suffering servant incarnated as they partake of His blood and body.

Haselbarth (1976: 33-39) argues that family worship must remain foundational and functional for God's children to avert the numerous challenges facing them in the world. She maintains that family worship which characterizes: call to worship, a hymn, a psalm – reading, the daily text, followed by a short explanation, prayer, intercession, offering of substances, the Lord's Prayer, the benediction. Or a shorter version may include: a hymn, the reading of a text, exhortation and a prayer. Haselbarth believes that an effective family worship heals many divisions on a deeper level.

Reading from the Gospel of John 4:16-18 – the dialogue between Jesus and the woman identified as 'Samaritan woman,' - was controversial then as now. The Samaritans and the Jews disagreed over sacred places and the sacredness of worship. This tactic of changing the subject when the word comes too close is age-old. However, the Lord did not brush this distraction aside; instead, He patiently answered her questions, but not in the way she wanted. He made it clear that sacred places for worship are not the point – the manner of worship is thus;

Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when you shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at

Spiritual Discipline through Worship

Jerusalem, worship the father.... But the hour cometh, and now is, when the truth... for the Father seeketh such to worship him must worship him in spirit and truth (Jn. 4:21, 24).

The woman's first need was afterwards met (verse 29), but in doing so, the Lord has met a wider need for us. His teaching about worship goes to the heart of it that the being of God is spiritual, and, therefore, all acceptable worship must be spiritual: "in spirit and in truth." The Savior's word brings us to first things.

What does "in spirit and in truth" mean? Many see in it a license for freedom in the externals of worship. As if the Lord allows the outward to be left to us as long as the inward criterion is met. But that can hardly be the Lord's meaning given He mentions the worship offered at Jerusalem. In the temple there, worship was minutely regulated and could not be offered according to the worshippers' will. It would be strange if gospel worship were not regulated also, and as can be seen later, it certainly is.

As to the meaning of "in spirit and in truth", it is an echo of Isaiah 66:2 which says "to this man will I look; even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and tremble at my word." Here, through the prophet, Jehovah refers to the second temple, and warns against over-playing this building and confining Him to an earthly shrine. This is important because the chapter looks also to gospel times, when, like the Savior's Words, true worship will be inward; "to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembles at my word." Notice the similarity between Jesus words in John and Isaiah's:

Jesus	Isaiah
"in spirit"	"in truth"
"contrite spirit"	"tremble at My Word"

Table 4

Therefore, there is a condition of spirit and reverence for scripture. The parallel is even there concerning the Lord's desire for such worshipers. It is appropriate then to apply these principles to the consideration of worship.

12.1. Spiritual/Biblical Worship Has Suffered in this Generation

The times we live in may be described as restless and questioning times. The cumulative effect of Evolution dogma has removed from peoples' minds the verities and absolutes of the past. The prevailing notion is that nothing is necessarily fixed and unalterable now. Everything, in every area of thought and life, can be opened to re-valuation. That the secular and humanistic society has lost its bearings should not surprise the Christian. What should surprise the Christian is to see the extent to which the spirit of the age has crept in to evangelical and reformed churches. Some decades ago, there was a consensus over the character of divine worship – nowadays, it is a subject for endless re-appraisal and debate. Also, some Christians have lost their bearings.

The catalyst for change came with the charismatic movement. When this erupted in the 1960s (http://www.biblelea.guetrust.org/statement_of_faith.htm/accessed 19/06.2015), it challenged every accepted norm. However, the impact of this movement is not confined to the

Spiritual Discipline

churches it has conquered. Its influence has gone far beyond, and like the spirit of the age it represents (<http://www.bibleaguetrust.org/articles/understanding.pdf> accessed 19/06.2015), it visited upon many churches the same loss of fixedness and certainty. One thing after another came up for grabs, but particularly the character of worship. There is an irony in this; Charismatic worship claims to restore the inward dimension to worship because of its superior claims regarding the Holy Spirit. Yet, it manifests a “spirit” that has little time for scripture – regulated norms. A typical example of this contrasts historic and new worship thus:

... Evangelical tradition that centers on the word preached. Our work as the congregation was to listen, to stand under the Bible's authority, and to accept its words as words to us. Today our form of worship is charismatic and Pentecostal, so today's grouped rules are different Our work today as honorary charismatic is to celebrate that freedom ... for worshiping in spirit and in truth I like to call charismatic worship 'full-body worship', a worship of heart and mind and soul and strength. We go crazy when we think about all God has done for us and with us (<http://www.westmont.edu/work/lectures/charismaticchapel.html> Accessed 19/06/2015).

In other words, “the word preached” was inhibiting, but the Holy Spirit has liberated them. This is to set the Spirit over against scripture and is typical of charismatic thinking. However, the reality is “in spirit and in truth”, the Holy Spirit will always lead Christians to have utmost reverence for, and subjection to, His Word – even to “tremble” at it (Isa. 66:2). Tragically, many formerly sound churches, while rejecting charismatic doctrine, have conceded to its assumptions, about worship. Robert L. Goldsby acknowledges that today’s prevalent worship styles (often called a ‘blended worship’), owes its origin to the charismatic renewal, most are not charismatic worship as it was known in the 70s and 80s. That isn’t necessarily bad or good, it is just different.

Those who have not changed their convictions are, sometimes, branded as “traditionalist” and “Pharisees”. Yet, this were many years ago; those using such epithets would be Christians are today, for a godly consensus over these things prevailed then. In other words, Christians have not changed with spirit of the age - they have. Yet they are the ones who are deemed troublers of Israel.

12.2. Worship is Supremely Important

Worship is dearer to God than anything else people do. Goldsby (<http://www.goldsbyfamily.info/theology.htm>) writes that “no greater gift can be given to Christ than His peoples’ love” which when transposed could mean, no great tribute can be given to God than His peoples’ worship. A little survey of scripture shows the following:

Firstly, creation: The Bible opens with, “in the beginning, God” for six days creates, and on the seventh day, He rests and consecrates the Sabbath day. After just six days of earth’s history comes a weekly day for the worship of the Creator. Adam, Eve, Abel and the Patriarchs would have worshipped God on the Sabbath day.

12.3. Worship is There from the Beginning

Secondly, the Ten Commandments: At the onset, “you shall have no other God before me” and then “thou shalt make unto thyself no graven image, neither shalt thou bow they self-down.

Spiritual Discipline through Worship

(Ex. 20:3-5). Next comes God's name and His day (Ex. 20:7-11) and the first table of the moral law is all about worship.

Thirdly, the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father which art in heaven hallowed be thy name." As soon as one invokes the name of God, the Father, one is under obligation to worship Him thus, "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name. Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness" (Ps. 29:2).

Fourthly, Malachi 3:3 and the work of the refiner. As Jesus puts Christians through fiery trials to come forth as gold, it is that they "may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness." All His dealings with Christians are that He might have from them a holier, purer worship – the most important thing.

Fifthly, in both Testaments, whenever God comes to humans, the reaction is always a bowing before Him. The more God manifests himself, the lower men go before him in awe, fear and worship. Whether it is Abraham (Gen. 17:17); Job (Job 42:5, 6); Joshua (Jos. 5: 14,15); Isaiah (Isa. 6:5); the Disciples (Matt. 17:5,6); Peter (Lk. 5:8); John (Rev. 1), as soon as they meet God, the reflex action is the deepest reverence. He draws near to people like this now in the means of grace (see Psalm 22:3) and the effect should be the same.

The supreme importance of God and to Christians of today about worship is not the conviction of churches. It is seen as a "secondary issue," it can be modified to help "outsiders" feel more comfortable, and believers to find a style that suits them. Here is an example from the web site of Duke Street Church, Richmond:

We use a variety of different styles of worship and types of music. You can expect a little bit of everything in the way of worship at Duke Street. We expect our church family to be mature enough to accept all kinds of music and worship styles, rather than defining 'the proper' way to worship by their own generational or personal preference (<http://www.dukestreetchurch.com/mod.php>.Accesses 20/06/2015).

There is, indeed, confusion in the worship of God among the evangelicals.

12.4. Worship is under the Discipline of Scripture

Such is its importance, that God has put worship firmly under the control of his word. He knows that left to human devices, they would get it wrong. Therefore, he has given human an authoritative pattern revealed in the scripture (Matt. 28:20).

Worship was minutely regulated in Old Testament days. The detailed prescriptions of the ceremonial law were there to be obeyed. The tabernacle, and afterwards the temple, the sacrificial altar, the furniture within those sacred places, the sacrifices and offerings, the priests, the choirs and musical instruments – in all these, God was most particular. Violating some of these or any of them could be fatal (Lev. 10:1-3; Num. 4:15; 1Cor. 13:7-10; 15:12-15).

The above applied even to a situation when people made their "lay altars" for worship. In Exodus 20:25, God stipulated what He required: "if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it. The instruction is clear enough. No human hand must change anything. The stones must be left rough for God." However, in Isaiah 65:3, He complains of a people "that provoke me to anger continually to my face that sacrifice in gardens and burn incense upon altars of brick" one issue here were the altars of brick.

Spiritual Discipline

One can imagine the people saying 'but rough, misshapen lumps of stone are so unrefined. Let us chisel neatly-shaped bricks for God and build altars out of them. One can use masonry gifts in worship and erect aesthetically-pleasing altars on which to offer His sacrifices; yet, God says that these innovators are people that "provoke me to anger continually to my face." There is a need to have this clear understanding in the minds of people: if they presume to do in worship otherwise than what God has said, they make "altars of brick" one step away from word-regulated worship offends God and provokes the eyes of His glory. God has not changed His nature under the gospel era: He is as particular about his worship now as before, because He 'does not change'.

Some might argue that since worship during the Old Testament era was so minutely regulated, why should people continue to follow such elements? Charismatics and their reformed sympathizers often appeal to the worship leaders, musical instruments, choirs, hand-clapping, dancing, among others, to justify their new model of worship but this is inadmissible for two reasons.

Firstly, the ceremonial laws relating to worship were typical. They set forth Christ, gospel blessings, and spiritual worship (1Cor. 3:16; Eph. 5:19 – "... making melody in your hearts unto the Lord" Heb. 13:15; 1Pet. 2:5, 9). But with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, he fulfilled them all. Being typical, and now fulfilled, they cannot be the patterns for today's worship. Those things were Jewish and "the weak and beggarly elements" (Gal. 4:9). If people would demand these, they should also have the tabernacle, temple, animal sacrifices, and human priests, among others. But God had rent the veil of the temple from the top downwards, and destroyed the temple itself in AD 70. The typical worship is over; thereby, fulfilling the Lord's words to the Samaritan woman. Gospel worship leaves these things behind.

Secondly, Christian worship is patterned, not upon the temple/tabernacle and its typical paraphernalia, but upon the synagogue which eventually replaced the ancient temple rituals (cf. Psalm 74:8). The principles of synagogue worship were there already, in Nehemiah 8:1-12, for example, anticipating its gospel counterpart.

(thackway<http://www.bibleaguetrust.org/articles/iscontemporarymusicdefensible.pdf>
Accessed 20/06/2015).

Ezra stood on a pulpit of wood above all the people, the law was read distinctly, and the people mourned and rejoiced. Then, they prayed and praised, followed the reading of the Word, the teaching of the Word, and its effects upon the assembly.

In Luke chapter 4, when the Lord, Jesus Christ, enters the synagogue at Nazareth, the scroll was handed over to him and he read from the prophet of Isaiah, from which he later taught the people. This is another glimpse of synagogue worship. The main elements were singing of the Psalms, reciting of prayer, the reading and teaching of the Word which is the pattern for New Testament worship. James 2:2 is an interesting confirmation on this as it asserts, "for if there comes unto your assembly a man with a gold ring..." the marginal rendering of "assembly" is *synagoge*—the Greek word for synagogue. The Christian Church is patterned on the Jewish synagogue and is called such in this place.

This helps the Christian understand the reason why the New Testament is virtually silent about the 'Mechanics' of worship. It is because its principles, in synagogue worship, are already there in the Old Testament and, therefore, do not need repetition. Under the gospel era, there is much greater emphasis on the inwardness and simplicity of worship, as anticipated by the Lord (Jn.

Spiritual Discipline through Worship

4:24) and before him, Isaiah (Isa. 66:2).

12.5. Worship Must Have God's Word as Central

This truth is remarkably confirmed by Psalm 138:2, "Thou hast magnified thy word above thy name" (KJV). One would expect God's name to be the most magnified, but Scripture says that His word is above his name. Is not this because the word reveals God's name, teaches man its meaning, gives substance to and inspires reverence for it? God's name without his word would bring no expressed meaning to humans. Therefore, during worship, the word enables humans to "sing God's praises with understanding" (Psa. 47:7) and must be foremost. This has been the historic conviction of gospel churches until the last few decades.

The capitulation of churches to charismatic assumptions is part of the modern reaction against the above scenario. On a radio programme which centered on "Beyond Belief" on the subject of worship. Had the panelists discussed the way Muslims, Hindus and Charismatic Christians engage in worship, and there were representatives who took part. The point made was that there is need for practicality about their worship (Muslims and Hindus). Muslims bow down and touch the ground with their heads in prayer, Hindus do similarly, and charismatic have their physical expressions too. One of the panelists then contrasted protestant reformed worship as: "people sitting in a building in rows of pews/chairs, meekly listening to a cerebral message. That is thin gruel."

Christians are not surprised to hear such a caricature from someone who is probably a stranger to true worship. The world reckons that worship should be expressed in sensual ways because this is all it knows. What is alarming about charismatic – type "liberated" worship is the same approach: carnal, fleshly, and knowing little restraint under the word of God.

Worship in Spirit and in Truth, however, will not only be governed by the word but comes to its climax in that word preached or taught; then, God speaks to His people and His people, in devout hearing, make their worship-ful response: "Now therefore, are we all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God (Acts 10:33). The Puritan, Arthur Hildersham, expressed it well: "he that hath the spirit of Christ (and) any true love of zeal of God in his heart, will joy in the plentiful and free preaching of the word, which is a chief part of God's worship; a principal occasion of our most solemn assemblies." True worshippers seek to come before God in spirit and in truth, with a contrite spirit, trembling at his word. Worship will then be intensely spiritual, with everything else reduced to its utmost simplicity. The more worship is like this; the more Christians expect the Lord to be among them and favour them with his manifested presence and commanded blessing.

12.6. 'New Worship' Has Lost Confidence in God's Word

Christians need to ask why is there a need to re-evaluate the content and style of worship in their day? Why borrow the worship music, songs, and methods of the charismatic and break with the reverent worship which their forefathers of faith used and offered to God? The answer is: because churches have lost confidence in the sufficiency of the Holy Scripture to both regulate worship and be the instrument of gracious fruit. The same goes for the new methods of evangelism as the church tries to appeal to a secular world. The call to modernize is familiar. Christians have heard it from the FIEC, movement Wales. It is being sounded in so many quarters that people grow

Spiritual Discipline

weary of it.

What is not mentioned, however, is, where might this eventually lead the Church to? For an answer, consider the slogans below:

- It's Jonah Gospel Truth Crusade!
- Jonah is coming to Heritage Cathedral!
- Jonah Storms Port Harcourt City

These advertisements, teeming with unscriptural innuendos, are extreme examples, of course. Yet, some of these languages are familiar. 'Alternative styles of worship...

Head of worship.... "Engaging with people who would not normally come" to the Spirit-Filled Baptist Church can almost be forgiven for a ludicrous resort as this. Yet, brethren who know better seem blind to the fact that disobedience to God's word can lead them into similar abyss. With the sort of music bands, worship leaders, worship styles, songs and ditties, Christians are already "a generation that set not their hearts aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God"(Ps. 78:8). Where will Christians be by the next generation?

Worship is the highest activity humans must engage in: nearest the angels and the glorified saints in heaven. It is more in reverence to God than for humans. True worship is an inward adoration of the most-High God, and primarily vertical in its direction. As such, it has no attraction for the unbelieving world, nor, does it seem, for Christians who make 'music' and 'a buzz' their prerequisites. It will, however, be esteemed by clean hearts and a desire to worship God in the spirit and according to his word. Foster (1989:199-200) observes that "to worship is to experience Reality, to touch Life...we have not worshipped the Lord until Spirit touches spirit." Worship is dynamic, dramatic, dialogical and contagious.

Spiritual Discipline through Worship

WORKSHEET

What is wrong with the mode or pattern of worship today?

How have you contributed to the errors in your corporate worship?

Underscore those actions to be carried out to remedy these errors.

SESSION 13| *Spiritual Discipline through Service*

Foster (1988:162-163) observes that “true service builds a community.” He further points out that, “It quietly and unpretentiously goes about caring for the needs of others. It draws, binds, heals, and builds.” Also, he maintains that “true service comes from a relationship with the divine another deep inside. We serve out of whispered promptings, divine urgings. Energy is expended but it is not the frantic energy of the flesh.

Doctor Luke records (in Luke chapter 9:46) that there arose amongst the Disciples an argument about who should be the greatest. Who must have sown this seed (thought) in the Christian community? Your guess is as good as mine. One thing that must be noted is the fact that no Christian community overcomes together without this thought immediately emerging as a seed of discord. Thus, at the very beginning of Christian fellowship, there is engendered an invincible, often unconscious, life-and-death contest.

It is vitally necessary that every Christian community from the very outset faces this dangerous enemy squarely, and eradicates it. There is no time to lose here; for from the first moment when a man meets another person, he is looking for a strategic position he can assume and hold over against that person. There are strong persons and weak ones. If a man is not strong, he immediately claims the right of the weak as his own and uses it against the strong. There are gifted and ungifted persons, simple people and difficult people, devout and less devout, the sociable and the solitary.

Does not the ungifted person have to take up a position just as well as the gifted person, the difficult one as well as the simple? And, if I am not gifted, then, perhaps, I am devout anyhow or if I am not devout it is only because I do not want to be. Would not the sociable individual carry the field before him and put the timid, solitary man to shame? Would not the solitary person become the undying enemy and ultimate vanquisher of his sociable adversary? Where is there a person who does not with instinctive sureness find the spot where he can stand and defend himself, but which he will never give up to another, for which he will fight with all the drive of his instinct of self-assertion?

All this can occur in the most politely or even in a pious environment. But the important thing is that a Christian community should know that somewhere in this there will certainly be reasoning among them about which of them should be the greatest.” It is the struggle of the natural man for self-justification. He finds it only in comparing himself with others, in condemning and judging others. Self-justification and judging others go together, as justification by grace and serving others go together.

13.1. The Service of Holding One's Tongue

Often, people combat their evil thoughts most effectively if they absolutely refuse to allow them to be expressed in words. The spirit of self-justification can certainly be overcome only by the spirit of grace; nevertheless, isolated thoughts of judgment can be curbed and smothered by never

Spiritual Discipline through Service

allowing them the right to be uttered, except as a confession of sin. As the scripture says, "He, who holds his tongue in check, controls both the mind and body (Jam. 3:2ff). Thus, it must be a decisive rule of every Christian fellowship that each individual is prohibited from saying just anything that occurs to him. This prohibition does not include the personal word of advice and guidance. But to speak about a brother covertly is forbidden, even under the cloak of help and good will; for it is precisely in this guise that the spirit of hatred among brothers always creeps in when it is seeking to create mischief. Scriptures such as: Psalm 50:20-21; James 4:11-12; Ephesians 4:20 exhort on the need for control of the tongue.

Where this discipline is practiced right from the beginning, each individual will make a matchless discovery. He/she will be able to cease from constantly scrutinizing the other person, judging him, condemning him, putting him in his particular place where he can gain ascendancy over him and this doing violence to him as a person. Now, he/she can allow the brother to exist as a completely free person that God has made him to be. His view expands and, to his amazement, for the first time, he sees shinning above his brethren, the richness of God's creative glory. God did not make this person as I would have made him. He did give him to me as a brother not for me to dominate and control; hence, I must find above him the creator. Now, the other person, in the freedom with which he was created, becomes the occasion of joy; whereas, before that time, he was only seen as a nuisance and an affliction.

God does not will that I should fashion the other person according to his image that seems good to him; rather, in his very freedom from me, God has made every person in His image. I can never know beforehand how God's image should appear in others. That image always manifests a completely new and unique shape from that which comes solely from God's free and sovereign creation. To me, the sight may seem strange, even ungodly. But God creates every human being in the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ, and the crucified. After all, even that image certainly looked strange and ungodly to me before I grasped it.

Strong and weak, wise and foolish, gifted or ungifted, pious or impious, the diverse individuals in the community, are no longer incentives from talking and judging and condemning, and thus, excuses for self-justification. They, rather reassure us for rejoicing in one another and serving one another. Each member of the community is given his/her particular place, but this is no longer the place in which he/she can most successfully assert self, but the place where he/she can best perform the assigned service.

In a Christian community, everything depends upon whether or not each individual is like an indispensable link in a chain. Only when, each link, even the smallest, is securely interlocked, is the chain unbreakable. A community which allows unemployed members to exist within it will perish because of them. It will be well, therefore, if every member receives a definite task to perform for the community, that he/she may know in hours of doubt that he/she too, is not useless and unusable. Every Christian community must realize that not only do the weak need the strong, but also, that the strong cannot exist without the weak. The elimination of the weak is the death of fellowship.

No one is considered strong by self-justification, which means the use of domination and force, but through justification by grace, and therefore, service, should be given the Christian community. Once a man has experienced the mercy of God in his/her life, he/she will, henceforth, aspire only to serve. The proud throne of the judge no longer lures him; he wants to be reckoned

Spiritual Discipline

below with the lowly and the needy because that is where God found him for the scripture says, “mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate (Rom. 12:16).

13.2. The Service of Meekness

He who would learn to serve must first learn to think little of himself. For the scripture enjoins Christians that no man should “think of himself more highly than he ought to think” (Rom. 12:13); hence, “this is the most profitable lesson, truly to know and to despise ourselves. To have no opinion of ourselves, and to think always well and highly of others, is great wisdom and perfection” (Kempis, 1989:116). This is also validated in the scripture as, “Be not wise in your own conceits” (Rom. 12:16).

Only he who lives by the forgiveness of his sin in Jesus Christ will rightly think little of himself. He will know that his own wisdom reached the end of its tether when Jesus forgave him. He remembers the ambition of the first man who wanted to know what is good and evil and perished in his wisdom. That first man who was born on this earth was Cain, the fratricide. His crime is the fruit of human’s wisdom. As the Christian can no longer fancy that he is wise, he will also have no high opinion of his own schemes and plans. He will know that it is good for his own will to be broken in the encounter with his neighbour. He will be ready to consider his neighbor’s will more importantly and urgent than his own. What does it matter if our own plans are frustrated? Is it not better to serve our neighbours than to have our own way?

But not only my neighbor’s will, but also his honour is more important than mine. The scripture observes rightly, ‘How can you believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that comes from God only?’ (Jn. 5:44). The desire to have one’s own honour hinders faith. One who seeks his own honour is no longer seeking God and his neighbour’s. What does it matter if one suffers injustice? Would one not have deserved even worse punishment from God, if he/she had not been dealt with according to His mercy? Is not justice done to him/her a thousand times even in injustice? Would it not be wholesome and conducive for one to learn how to bear such petty evil silently and patiently? This is underlined in the scripture that, “the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit (Eccl. 7:8).

One who lives by justification by grace says, Bonhoeffer (1954, 96), is willing and ready to accept even insults and injuries without protest; taking them from God’s punishing and gracious hand. It is not a good sign when one no longer bears to this without immediately resorting that even Paul insisted upon his rights as a Roman citizen, and that Jesus replied to the man who struck him, “why smite me” In any case, Christians will really act as Jesus and Paul did if they have not first learned, like them, to keep silent under abuse. The sin of resentment that flares up so quickly in the fellowship indicates again and again how much false desire for honour, and how unbelief, still smolders in the community.

Finally, one important thing must be said. To forego self-conceit and then associate with the lowly means in all soberness and without mincing the matter, to consider oneself as the greatest of all sinners. This arouses all the resistance of the natural man, but also that of the self-confident Christian. It sounds like an exaggeration or untruth; yet, even Paul said of himself that he was the foremost of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15); he said this specifically at the point where he was speaking of his service as an apostle. There can be no genuine acknowledgement of sin that does not lead to this extremity if one’s sinfulness appears to be in any way smaller or less detestable in comparison with

Spiritual Discipline through Service

the sins of others. He, who would serve his brother in the fellowship, must sink all the way down to these depths of humility. How can one possibly serve another person in unfeigned humility if one seriously regards his/her sinfulness as worse than own self? Would one not be putting oneself above or could one have any hope? Such service would be hypocritical; as Kempis (1989:48) asserts, "Never think that thou hast made any progress till thou look upon thyself as inferior to all".

13.3. The Service of Listening

The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to His word, so, the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them. It is God's love for humanity that He not only gives humanity His word but also lends them His ear. So, it is His work that humans do for others when one learns to listen to them. Christians, especially ministers, often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others as the one service they have to render; thereby, forgetting that listening can be a greater service than speaking.

Many people are looking for an ear that will listen they may not find it among Christians, because some Christians are talking when they should be listening. But he, who can no longer listen to his brother, will soon discover that he/she is no longer listening to God either; he/she will be doing nothing but prattler in the presence of God too. This is the beginning of the death of the spiritual life, and in the end, there is nothing left but spiritual chatter and clerical condescension arrayed in pious words. One, who cannot listen long and patiently, will presently be talking beside the point and never be really speaking to others; albeit, he/she is not conscious of it. Anyone, who thinks that his time is too valuable to spend, keeping quiet, will eventually have no time for God and his brother, but only for himself and for his own follies.

A brotherly pastoral care is essentially distinguished from preaching by the fact that, added to the task of speaking the word, there is the obligation of listening. There is a kind of listening with half an ear that presumes one already knows what the other person has to say. It is an impatient, inattentive listening that despises the brother and is only waiting for a chance to speak and, thus, get rid of the other person. This is no fulfillment of human obligation, and it is certain that here too, people's attitude toward their brothers only reflect their relationship with God. It is little wonder that some Christians are no longer capable of the greatest service of listening that God has committed to them as that of hearing their brother's confession, if Christians refused to give ear to their brother on lesser subjects.

Today, secular education is aware that, often, a person can be helped merely by having someone who will listen to him/her, and upon this insight, to construct own soul therapy, which has attracted great numbers of people, including Christians. But, Christians should not forget that the ministry of listening has been committed to them by Him who is Himself the great listener and whose work they should share. Christians should listen with the ears of God so that they may speak the Word of God.

13.4. The Service of Helpfulness

Another service that one should perform for another in a Christian community is that of active helpfulness. Initially, this means, engaging in simple assistance in trifling, external matters. There is a multitude of these things wherever people live together. Nobody is too good for the

Spiritual Discipline

meanest service. One who worries about the loss of time that such petty, outward act of helpfulness entails is usually taking the importance of his career too solemnly.

Christians should be ready to allow themselves to be interrupted by God because God will constantly be crossing their paths and cancelling their plans by sending other people with claims and petitions. They may pass them by, preoccupied with their seemingly more important tasks, as the priest passed by the man who had fallen among thieves, perhaps, reading the Bible. When they do that, they may pass by the visible sign of the cross raised to thwart their path and to show them that, not their will must be done, but God's will. It is a strange fact that Christians, and even ministers, often, consider their work so important and urgent that they will allow nothing to disturb them. They may think they are doing God a service through this, but actually, they disdain God's mysterious but straight path. They do not want a life that is crossed and balked. But, it is part of the discipline of humility that Christians must not spare their hand where it can perform a service, and that they should not assume that their schedule is their own to manage; instead, they should allow it to be arranged by God.

In the observation of Bonheoffer (1954), 100 in the monastery have the vow of obedience to the abbot deprives the monk of the right to dispose of his own time. In evangelical community life, free service to one's brother takes the place of the vow; for, only where hands are not too good for deeds of love and mercy in everyday helpfulness can the mouth joyfully and convincingly proclaim the message of God's love and mercy.

13.5. The Service of Bearing Burdens

This service is about bearing with others; hence, the scripture in Galatians chapter 6:2 reads, "Bear you one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." That is to say, this law of Christ is a law of bearing, which means "forbearing and sustaining". The brother's need is a burden to the fellow Christian; precisely, because he is a Christian. For the pagans, the other person's need never becomes a burden at all. He/she simply side-steps every burden that people impose upon him.

The Christian, however, must bear the burden of a fellow brother; he/she must suffer and endure the other person's weaknesses. It is only when one helps another person to carry a burden that the person is really a brother and not merely an object to be manipulated. The burden of humans was so heavy for God Himself that He had to endure the cross. God verily bore the burdens of humans in the body of Jesus Christ. But He bore them as a mother carries her child; and, as a shepherd enfolds the lost lamb that has been found. God took the sins of humans upon Himself and they weighted Him to the ground, but God endured. In bearing with humans, God maintains fellowship with them. It is the law of Christ that was fulfilled on the cross and Christians must share in this law. They must be ready to suffer with their brethren; what is more, now that the law of Christ has been fulfilled, they can humbly bear with their brethren.

The Bible speaks with remarkable frequency of "bearing" which is capable of expressing the whole work of Jesus Christ in this one word, "Surely, he has borne our grieves, and carried our sorrows... the chastisement of our peace was upon him" (Isa. 53:4-5). Therefore, the Bible can also characterize the whole life of the Christian as bearing the cross. It is the fellowship of the cross to experience the burden of the others; if one does not experience it, the fellowship one belongs to is not Christian. If any member refuses to bear burdens, he/she denies the law of Christ.

Spiritual Discipline through Service

It is, first of all, the aspect of freedom of the other person that constitutes a burden to the Christian. The other person's freedom collides with his own autonomy, yet he must recognize it. One could get rid of this burden by refusing the other person his freedom, by constraining him/her and, thus, doing violence to his/her personality by stamping one's own image upon him/her. But if one lets God create His image in the person, by this token, one gives the freedom and him/herself bears the burden of the freedom with another creature of God. The freedom of the other person includes what entire Christianity means by a person's nature, individuality and endowment. It also includes the weaknesses and oddities, which are such a trial to their patience, everything that produces frictions, conflicts, and collisions among them. To bear the burden of the other person means involvement in the worth and created reality of the other person, to accept and affirm it, and, in bearing with it, to break through to the point where they take joy in it.

The above scenario will prove especially difficult where varying strengths and weaknesses in faith are bound together in a fellowship. The weak must not judge the strong and the strong must not despise the weak. The weak must guard against pride and the strong guard against indifference. None must seek his own rights. If the strong person falls, the weak one must guard his heart against malicious joy at his/her downfall. If the weak one falls, the strong one must help him/her rise again in all kindness. One needs as much patience as the other. The scripture underscores this as, "Woe to him that is alone when he falls; for he has not another to help him up" (Eccl. 4:10). It is doubtless this bearing of another person's burden is the freedom that the scripture means when it speaks of "forbearing one another" (Col. 3:13), and "walk with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4:2).

Then, besides the other person's freedom, there is the abuse of that freedom that may become a burden for fellow Christians. The sin of the other person is harder to bear than his freedom; for in sinning, fellowship with God and with the brother is broken. Here, the Christian suffers the rupture of his fellowship with the other person that had its basis in Jesus Christ. But, here, too, it is only in bearing with him/her that the great grace of God becomes wholly plain. To cherish no contempt for the sinner but, rather to prize the privilege of bearing with him/her means not to have to give the person up as being lost; to be able to accept him/her and to preserve fellowship with the person through forgiveness. The Bible endorses, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, you which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness" (Gal. 6:1). As Christ bore and received men as sinners, so, they in his fellowship may bear and receive sinners into the fellowship of Jesus Christ through their forgiving of sins.

Christians may suffer the sins of their brother; they do not need to judge. This is a mercy for the Christian; for whenever sin does occur in the community, one must examine and blame self for unfaithfulness in prayer and intercession, lack of brotherly service, of fraternal reproof and encouragement. Indeed, one must examine personal sin and spiritual laxity by which one has done injury to him/herself, the fellowship, and the brethren. Since the sin of every member creates a burden and indicts the whole community, the congregation rejoices in the midst of all the pains and the burden the brother's sin inflicts, that it has the privilege of bearing with and forgiving. Luther once noted, "Behold, you bear them all, and likewise all of them bear you, and all things are common, both the good and the bad."

The service of forgiveness is rendered by one to the others daily. It occurs, without words, in the intercessions for one another, and every member of the fellowship, who does not grow

Spiritual Discipline

weariness in this service, can depend upon it that this service is also being rendered to him/her by the brethren. Anyone who is bearing burden with others knows that he/she is also being bore with, and only in this strength can he/she go on bearing.

13.6. The Service of Proclaiming

What all Christians should concern themselves with is the free communication of the word from person to person, not only by the ordained ministry which is bound to a particular office, time, and place. The major thought is the unique situation in which one person bears witness in human words to another person, bespeaking the whole consolation of God, the admonition, the kindness, and the severity of God. The speaking of that Word is beset with infinite perils. If it is not accompanied by worthy listening, how can it really be the right word for the other person? If it is contradicted by one's own lack of active helpfulness, how can it be a convincing and sincere word? If it issues, not from a spirit of bearing with and forbearing, but from impatience and the desire to force its acceptance, how can it be the liberating and healing word?

Moreover, the person who has really listened and served and borne with others is the very one who is likely to say nothing. A profound distrust of everything that is merely verbal often causes a personal word to a brother to be suppressed. What can weak human words accomplish for others? Why adding to the empty talk? Are we, like the professionally pious, to "talk away" the other person's real need? Is there anything more perilous than speaking God's Word to excess? But, on the other hand, who wants to be accountable for having been silent when he/she should have spoken? How much easier is ordered speech in the pulpit than this entirely free speech which is uttered betwixt the responsibility to be silent and the responsibility to speak!

Added to the fear of one's responsibility to speak, there is the fear of the other person. What a difficult thing it is to utter the name of Jesus Christ in the presence of a brother! Here, too, is it difficult to distinguish between right and wrong. Who dares to force him/herself upon the neighbour? Who is entitled to accost and confront the neighbour and talk to him/her about ultimate matters? It would be no sign of great Christian insight were one simply to say at this point that everybody has this right, indeed, this obligation. This could be the point where the desire to dominate might again assert itself in the most insidious way. The other person, as a matter of fact, has his/her own right, own responsibility, and even own duty, to defend him/herself against unauthorized interference. Also, each person has his/her own secret which dare not be invaded without great injury, and which he/she cannot surrender without destroying him/herself. It is not a secret dependent on knowledge or feeling, but rather, the secret of one's freedom, salvation and being. This correct judgment lies perilously near to the deadly dictum of Cain: "Am I my brother's keeper?" A seemingly sacred response of God is, "His blood will I require at your hand" (Ezek. 3:18).

As Christians live together, the time must inevitably come when during crisis, one person will have to declare God's word and will to another. It is inconceivable that there are times when correct things are not being spoken by one to another. It is unchristian to consciously deprive another person of the one decisive service we can render to him/her. If we cannot bring ourselves to utter it, we shall have to ask ourselves whether we are not still seeing our brother garbed in his human dignity which we are afraid to touch, and thus, forgetting the most important thing, that he/she, too, no matter how old or highly placed or distinguished, is still human like us; a sinner in

Spiritual Discipline through Service

crying in need of God's grace. He/she has the same great necessities that we have, and needs help, encouragement, and forgiveness as we do.

The basis upon which Christians can speak to one another is that each person knows the other as a sinner who, with all his/her human dignity, is lonely and lost if not given help. This is neither to make him/her contemptible nor to disparage in any way. On the contrary, it is to accord him/her the one real dignity that all humans have, namely, the thought that they are sinners; they can share in God's grace and glory and be God's children. This recognition gives to our brotherly speech the freedom and candor that it needs. We speak to one another on the basis of the help we both need. We admonish one another to go the way that Christ bids us to go. We warn one another against the disobedience that is our common destruction. We are gentle and we are severe with one another, for we know both God's kindness and God's severity. Why should we be afraid of one another since both of us have only God to fear? Why should we think that our brother would not understand us when we understood very well what was meant when somebody spoke God's comfort or God's admonition to us, perhaps, in words that were halting and unskilled? Or do we really think there is a single person in this world that does not need either encouragement or admonition? Why, then, has God bestowed Christian brotherhood upon us?

The more people learn to allow others to speak to them, to accept humbly and gratefully even severe reproaches and admonitions, the freer and objective will we be in speaking to ourselves. The person whose touchiness and vanity make him/her spurn a brother's earnest censure cannot speak the truth in humility to other; he/she will be afraid of being rebuffed and with the feeling that one has been aggrieved. The touchy person will always become a flatterer and, very soon, he/she will come to despise and slander the brothers. However, the humble person will stick both to truth and to love. He/she will stick to the word of God and let it lead him/her to the brothers. As one seeks nothing for oneself and has no fears for him/herself, one can help his/her brother through the word.

Reproof is unavoidable; God's word demands it whenever a brother falls into open sin. The practice of this discipline in the congregation begins in the smallest circles. Where defection from God's word in doctrine or life imperils the family fellowship and with it the whole congregation, the word of admonition and rebuke must be ventured. Nothing can be crueler than the tenderness that consigns another to their sin, and nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin. It is a ministry of mercy, an ultimate offer of genuine fellowship, whenever we allow nothing but God's word to stand between us, judging and succoring. Then, it is not we who are judging; God alone judges, and God's judgment is helpful and healing.

Ultimately, we have no charge but to serve the brothers; never to set ourselves above them, and we serve even when we must speak the judging and dividing word of God to them, even when, in obedience to God, we must break off fellowship with them. We must know that it is not our human love that makes us loyal to other persons, but God's love that breaks its way through to them only through judgment. As God's word judges, it serves the person and he/she who accepts the ministry of God's judgment is helped. This is the point where the limitations of all human action toward the brothers become apparent: "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him (for the redemption of their life is costly, and it fails forever)" (Ps. 49:7-8, ARV).

Spiritual Discipline

This renunciation of our own ability is precisely the prerequisite and the sanction for the redeeming help that only the word of God can give to the brothers. Our brothers' ways are not in our hands; we cannot hold together what is breaking; we cannot give life to what is determined to die. But God binds elements together in the breaking; thereby, creating community in the separation and grants grace through judgment. He has put His word in our mouthswanting it to be spoken through us. If we hinder His word, the blood of the sinning brother will be on our heads. If we carry out His word, God will save our brother through us thus, "He, which converts the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (Jas. 5:20).

13.7. The Service of Authority

"Whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister" (Mk 10:43). Jesus made authority in the fellowship dependent upon brotherly service. Genuine spiritual authority is to be found only where the ministry of hearing, helping, bearing, and proclaiming is carried out. Every cult of personality that emphasizes the distinguished qualities, virtues, and talents of another person, even though these be of an altogether spiritual nature, is worldly and has no place in the Christian community; indeed, it poisons the Christian community. The desire we so often here expressed today for "Episcopal figures", "priestly men", "authoritative personalities" springs frequently from a spiritually sick in need of the admiration of men, for the establishment of visible human authority, because genuine authority for service appears to be so unimpressive. There is nothing that so sharply contradicts such a desire as the New Testament itself in its description of a bishop (1 Tim. 3:1 ff). One finds nothing whatsoever as respect to worldly charm and the brilliant attributes of a spiritual personality. The bishop is the simple, faithful man sound in faith and life, who rightly discharges his duties to the church. His authority lies in the exercise of his ministry. In the man himself, there is nothing to admire.

Ultimately, this hankering for false authority has its root in the desire to re-establish some sort of immediacy; a dependence upon human beings in the church. Genuine authority knows that all immediacy is especially baneful in matters of authority. Genuine authority realizes that it can exist only in the service of Him who alone has authority. Genuine authority knows that it is bound in the strictest sense by the saying of Jesus: "One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren" (Matt. 23:8). The church does not need brilliant personalities but faithful servants of Jesus and the brethren. Not in the former but in the latter is the lack. The church will place its confidence only in the simple servant of the word of Jesus Christ because it knows that then it will be guided, not according to human wisdom and human conceit, but by the word of the Good Shepherd.

The question of trust, which is so closely related to that of authority, is determined by the faithfulness with which a man serves Jesus Christ, never by the extraordinary talents which he possesses. Pastoral authority can be attained only by the servant of Jesus who seeks no power of his own, but who himself is a brother among brothers submitted to the authority of the word.

Remember, love cannot remain by itself; it has no meaning. Love has to be put into action and that action is service. True service comes from a relationship with the divine and other humans deep inside. Christians are to serve out of whispered promptings and divine urgings. Energy is to be expended but it is not the frantic energy of the flesh (Foster, 1988:161).

WORKSHEET

Which of the categories of service in the marketplace is already part of your life? Which would you like to begin or develop further, in your practice of service?

Set aside time for a slow, careful, and meditative reading of the climactic moment recorded in John 13:1-20 when Jesus washed his disciples' feet and then declared of his action as an act of service. Use the above text to:

- Pray that your reading will become a form of intimate communion with God. Imaginatively, place yourself in the event by reading the narrative as if you were actually there as one of the disciples.
- Ask God to use key words or phrases to stir an inner response in you. If and when that happens, stop reading and meditate on that word or phrase.
- Pray for insight into what God is teaching you, as well as for wisdom in applying that insight in your life.

After reading the passage at least twice, contemplate its significance as a whole. Then reflect on any particular insights of personal significance to you that emerged while you were reading. Collect and express your thoughts by writing them down.

Glossary

My Spiritual Development

Perhaps, the best way to tell the story of one's spiritual development is to express it from one's daily meditations experiences and relationship with God and fellow humans. This author believes that space will not permit to explain in detail the account, but to have a concise narration will be giving in brief to also stir up a spirit of revival and, thus, to glorify the Lord.

➤ January 7th

On this day comes the healing for which I have been longing for so long. Oh, see how God melted me this morning! How joyous it is when one is healed! Praise be to His name! God has stirred my heart in an unusual way. How unspeakable and precious He is.

Thanks be to God for daily devotion! How it has helped me! My thoughts have been revolutionized. I have been reading them hour after hour, day after day, never got hold of anything like this in my life before: "An alarm of a healed leper."

During my intercession this morning, I read a few scriptures (specifically, Luke 5:12-16). I did not know when I ran out of my devotional time schedule. I was led to a moment of confession. Oh, how I have lied and failed in prayer, for I have spent minutes when I ought to have spent more time.

But, glory be to God, I believe He is leading me into a deeper experience when I will count all things but a loss for Christ, where I will suffer, sacrifice, pray, study, and serve as never before. Oh God, help me to press on, and on and on. Amen!

➤ January 8th

In my reading this morning, my attention was specially drawn to the following verse "...they sought means to bring Him in" (Lk 5:18). The power to heal sick people and all kinds of diseased persons was on Him to heal all those brought to him. He did not advertise his presence but they were drawn by his holy life and presence. May God make this incentive to me! I was reading the New Testament though rapidly that morning for the purpose of selecting that truth which will bring conviction to me about healing and its assurance to me as a preacher.

God is giving searching messages on sin, salvation, heaven, hell, healing and faith. I spent an hour in prayer and had sweet fellowship. May God lead me on! I want to know and experience more of the power of Jesus' healing. Oh! Never will I be satisfied until God demonstrates his power in every man and woman, and they weep their way to the cross.

➤ January 9th

In Jesus, there is neither east nor west. There is neither Jew nor Gentile. Jesus' ministry actually set down the ideal; identifying Himself with the outcast in the society. Jesus Christ came to

Glossary

My Spiritual Development

bring hope to those who are hopeless, life to those who are lifeless. The call to the new home and life is, "come." It carries with it the realization of one's present predicament. The divine offer of Christ is "rest"; a rest to the broken heart! Rest from the burden of material pursuit and deliverance from unhealthy habits, diseases and sins! Thank You Jesus, the healer of my soul!

➤ January 10th

In my devotional reading this morning, God gave me an insight from Luke 6:5. Jesus demonstrated a sound knowledge of the Scriptures as well as of his "right as Lord over all things. There are many promises in the Bible; it only requires my sound knowledge, not mental knowledge but experiential knowledge in God, which then gives me the right to the claims of the promises of God upon me.

The devil will flee if I display a right claim to those promises that God has given me. It will also help me to live above the wiles of the devil if I know my relationship with Christ. Save me, Lord, from the gross darkness of ignorance in the world!

➤ January 11th

When I got up this morning, I looked restless. My flat mate looked at me and exclaimed, "You look half-dead! As soon as you have said "hello" to me, why don't you go and wash your face?" I gratefully did as he suggested.

This time, I could not help the problem. I know I was driving him to that point of total frustration again, and I was driving myself *also* there too. No matter what I had tried to do went wrong. I was crying out to God constantly but my mind was in such a state of anxiety that I knew I could not hear the Holy Spirit, no matter how much I wanted to. I got down on my knees and cried out to God for about half an hour; telling Him all the things that were wrong, and asking Him what to do. But such was the turmoil in my spirit; there was no way I could hear Him, even if He had chosen to answer. So, I got up off my knees and went to sleep.

➤ January 12th

I found myself noticing things that I had not seen before - the way the wind as well as the trees sculpted the atmosphere; how there were some quite extraordinary leaves to be found, if one had the patience to watch over them.

That afternoon, haven returned from my classes, I rested. As I breathed in the quietness that pervaded the atmosphere, I realized that God was speaking to me in a still small voice. In the quietness of my spirit, He had said one word, "Rest".

It was much later that evening as I sat outside under a flower tree, and watched the night wind gently breaking on the compound, that I finally began to understand what He meant. I have called you, and I will also use an instrument to see you through this training.

➤ January 13th

My fellowship with the Lord was growing, too. I was beginning to hear the Holy Spirit as I had not heard Him for years. He is my teacher again, pointing out truths and insights and revelations in an almost unbroken stream. It is awesome.

Spiritual Discipline

One of the most wonderful things I experienced was the depth of His love for me - the infinite patience which He had shown me in the past, when I had had no time for Him, or no desire to listen. He wanted me to regard my fellowship with Him, above everything I do for the rest of my life.

➤ January 14th

And I could be changed, as Paul was changed. In fact, it was God's purpose that I be changed continually into the image of His Son. I had seen people who had fought the good fight with all their might and had gained real victory. And since my present assignment was irritability, I was going to go on battling against it until I was an overcomer. Yes, I remember the words of that old hymn, "To him that overcomes the crown of life shall be, he with the king of glory shall reign eternally!"

There was the promise; it was about the time I was getting hungry and thirsting, so I would go on seeking God - no matter what Satan does. Only now, I will make a point of asking my friends to pray for me, for the Lord to protect and see me through.

➤ January 15th

I made Saturday my second day of prayer and fasting, pleading with God for eight hours and had a very blessed experience. Have I been reading the marvelous life story of Mrs. Fletcher? How little I know of her wonderful walk with God. Oh, how she suffered! What patience, faith and confidence! It drives me to my knees and I have to cry out as I see my unworthiness. Lord, deliver me from everything that does not glorify Thee. Keep me each moment in thy will. Give me a little of what John Fletcher possessed. Oh, how I yearn for more! How my heart hungers after righteousness.

➤ January 16th

This morning, on my way to church, the peace of God filled my heart to overflowing. Passages of scripture came to me and I sang as I walked along. Especially precious was that verse:

"Jesus, the name high over all,
In hell, or earth or sky;
Angels and men before it fall,
And devils fear and fly."

I wondered at the unusual presence of God and asked myself if such peace could remain with me in time of trials and persecution. After the service, I was greatly encouraged by two who told me of fetters snapped and wonderful blessings received. Trial and bitter opposition followed. Satan is still busy. Even some of our best church members are allowing themselves to be made his tools to hinder the work and put obstacles in the way.

➤ January 17th

It is coming to me more and more to challenge my work; to test and prove everything. I feel quite certain that one of the outstanding reasons for failure lies in the fact that we do not judge ourselves correctly.

I must challenge my preaching. God claims that His word is a fire, a hammer, and a sword. Now, if it is not that there is something wrong. God has promised fruits; there must be results. He must make His word what He says it is.

Glossary My Spiritual Development

I challenge my prayer life. Have I power to prevail with God? If not, why not? Has God not most emphatically stated that He shall give whatsoever He said"? If I pray and do not get answers, there must be something wrong.

I must challenge my Christian experience. Do I feel any uprisings, any tempers? Is there anything contrary to love in my heart? Am I growing in grace and going on with God? Have I completed my deliverance from sin? Do my nearest and dearest believe in my religion? Lord, judge me, and bring me to a higher level spiritually.

➤ January 18th

One other thing stirs me whenever I look back at my youthful days, the fact that many people gave me something or meant so much to me without knowing it. Such people, with whom perhaps, I never exchanged a word and others about whom I merely heard things by reports, had a decisive influence on me; they entered into my life and became powers within my success. Usually, one's significant hours do not announce their coming but arrived unexpectedly.

If I had before me those who have thus been a blessing to me and could tell them how it came about, they would be amazed to learn what influence their lives have passed from them into mine. Help me, precious Lord, not to be a failure and of negative influence to others.

➤ January 19th

Alas! How much of my life is lavished away! Oh, the intricacies, windings, wonderings, turnings, conversations of my deceitful youth! I have lived in the midst of a cooked and perverse generation, and with them, have turned aside unto crooked ways. Now, it is high time for me to make straight paths for my feet, and to redeem what is past by amending what is present for greater years to come. May I make good use thereon by making haste. God knows how little time is left for me, and may I be a good minister to improve the short time remaining thereof.

➤ January 20th

All great things are only a great number of small things that have been carefully collected together. He, who loses nothing, will soon grow rich. Besides, let us remember that God looks at people's actions, not only at the motive. The world judges people by their appearances; God counts for nothing what is most dazzling to humans. What he desires is a pure intention and a sincere self-renunciation.

➤ January 21st

It appeared to me beyond all expression to follow Jesus Christ; to learn of Him and live for Him. Another thought I had was the sense of how sweet and blessed a thing is if it was to walk in the way of duty; to do that which was right and needed to be done and agreeable to the holy mind of God; that it caused me to break forth into a kind of loud weeping, which held me some time, so that I was forced to shut myself up and fasten my doors. I had, at the same time, a very affecting sense of how meet and suitable it was that God should govern the world and order all things according to His own pleasure; and I rejoiced in it that God reigned, and that His will was done.

Spiritual Discipline

➤ January 22nd

Let us bless God with true thankfulness if He has enabled us to make any progress in life as if we had made it through our own strengths; and let us not be troubled with the weak agitations of self-love; instead, let them pass away; do not think of them. God never makes us feel our weaknesses but that we may be led to seek strength from Him. What is involuntary should "not trouble us; but, the great thing is never to act against the light within us and desire to follow wherever God would be pleased to lead us.

➤ January 23rd

"Learn of me," He says, "and ye shall find rest for your souls." How few of us have ever associated them-ever thought that Rest was a thing; to be learned; ever laid ourselves out for it as we would to learn a language; ever practiced it as we would practice the violin. The last thing most people do is to associate Rest with work.

➤ January 24th

If God is spending time to work upon a Christian, let him/her be still and know that it is God. And if he/she wants to work, one will find it in being still. All the works of the world are merely a taking advantage of energies already impacted thereon.

➤ January 25th (Micah 6:1-8)

I must not be so eager about protecting my rights to the extent of forgetting my duties. For my duties are just the observances of my neighbour's rights.

The lowly friend of the Lord will most surely be both peaceful and merciful. He cannot help it. The fragrance will cling to him as the fragrance of the orange clings to him who labors in the fruitful groves of pain. My Lord is the Lord of the past and of tomorrow; I will trust Him and not be afraid.

➤ Responses

Reading from literatures, I have come to the awareness and the deepening consciousness that God's existence cannot be limited in the one who totally and faithfully gives to Him his life. My devotional life is now rekindled and revitalized for great things of the Lord. Amen is to all the things God has promised me and family in the ministry.

Compilation of Personal Thoughts/Ideas/Feelings

➤ *The Imitation of Christ: Thomas A. Kempis*

The highest wisdom is to aim for the heavenly kingdom through indifference to the world. Vanity, therefore, is to strive for perishable riches and to rely on them!

Let it be shameful for you to serve others for the love of Christ and be looked upon as poor in this world. Do what is in you to do, and God will strengthen your good will.

It is a great thing to persevere in obedience and live under a prelate and not to be a law to oneself. It is much safer to stand in subjection than in command. Many are more under obedience from compulsion than from affection and they easily feel the hurts and complaints.

It is good for us, at times, to have some burdens and adversities; for they often call a man back to his heart that he may recognize himself to be in exile, and not fix his hope on anything earthly. When a well-intentioned man is troubled, tempted or afflicted by evil thoughts, then, he understands his greatest need for God without whom he realizes that he can do nothing good. Then, he is sad; he laments and prays because of the unhappiness he suffers. It is then he is tired of living any longer, and wishes that death would come, that he might be released and be with Christ. Then, once more, he truly perceives that complete security from care and fullness of peace cannot exist on earth.

To live on earth is actually a kind of unhappiness. The more a man wishes to be spiritual, the more bitter the present life seems to him; because he feels more intensely and sees more clearly, and the failures through human corruptness. For to eat, drink, watch, sleep, rest, labour and submit, are the other needs of nature, and are really a great trial and affliction to the devout man who would gladly be relieved and free from every failing.

Why should I be specially chosen and called by God for this ministry of reconciliation? Oh! God, your love is unsearchable.

➤ *The Pursuit of God - A. W. Tozer*

There is need for the longing after God. It helps our great nation to turn from corruption to righteousness. The lack of this pursuit of, or after God lowers our estate and our holy desire.

Lift up your heart unto God with a meek stirring of love; and mean well for yourself and none to any gods. And thereto, look thee loath to think or aught/but God Himself. So then, enough work in thy wit, nor in thy will, but only God Himself.

Father, I want to know Thee, but my coward heart fears to give up its toys. I cannot part with them without inward bleeding, and I do not try to hide from Thee the terror of the parting. I come trembling, but I do come. Please root from my heart all those things which I have cherished so long and have become a very part of my living self, so that Thou may enter and dwell there without rival. Then shall my heart have no need of the sun to shine on it, for Thyself will be the light of it, and there shall be no night there In Jesus Name, Amen!

Spiritual Discipline

"Thou hast formed us for thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee". My decision is that God would rend the veils of my self-life from top down as that of the temple. This will enable me to draw nearer in full assurance of faith. God, help me so to do in Jesus Christ's name. Amen!

➤ Contemplative Prayer – Thomas Merton

Monastic prayer is, first of all, essentially simple. In primitive monasticism, prayer was not necessarily liturgical, though liturgy soon came to be regarded as a specialty of monks and canons. In John Cassia's Conference, prayer was seen as a great stress laid by the early monks on simple prayer made up of short phrases drawn from the psalms or other parts of Scripture. The first monks looked upon the Psalter, not only as a kind of compendium of all the other books of the Bible, but as a book of special efficacy for the ascetic life, in that it revealed the secret movements of the heart in its struggle against the forces of darkness.

St. Macarius once answered a question using this phrase, The meditation of my heart I sin your sight..., prayer of the heart which consists, in invoking the name of Christ, with profound attention, in the very ground of one's being, that is to say in "the heart" considered as the root and source of all one's own inner truth. To invoke the name of Christ "in one's heart" was equivalent to calling upon him with deepest and most earnest intensity of faith, manifested by the concentration of one's entire being upon a prayer stripped of all non-essentials and reduced to nothing but the invocation of his name with a simple petition for help.... There is no other perfect meditation than the saving and blessed name of our Lord Jesus Christ dwelling without interruption....

The most important need in the Christian world today is this inner truth nourished by this spirit of contemplation. The praise and love of God, the longing for the coming of Christ, the thirst "for the manifestation of God's glory, his truth, his justice, his kingdom in the world, are the Christians' desires. Without contemplation and interior prayers, the Church cannot fulfill her mission to transform and save humankind. Without contemplation, she will be reduced to being the servant of cynical and worldly powers, no matter how hard her faithful may protest that they are fighting for the kingdom of God.

Without true and deep contemplative aspirations, without a total love for God and in uncompromising thirst for his truth, religion tends, in the end, to become an opiate.

Meditation

➤ CREATED TO PRAISE DAY 1

Psalm 107:1-22

“Oh, that man would praise the Lord for his goodness...” (v. 8 KJV).

This meditation begins the studying of the thrilling theme of praise. Also, to be considered is the thought of thanksgiving, as it is a close relative of praise. The two have been referred to as the “Siamese twins of the Christian family”.

Although, the thoughts contained in the two words are quite distinct and separate - we praise God for who He is; and we thank Him for what He does - we must not hold to these distinctions too rigidly, as they sometimes merge into each other.

We begin the studies by asking ourselves an important question: Why were we created? The best answer to that question is contained in the word of the Westminster Catechism: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” In other words, we were created to praise. In light of this, how many of our waking hours are given to the praise of God? Is it not true to say that we spend more time worrying, grumbling, and complaining than we do in praise of our creator? Yet, when we pause to thank God, what endless reason can we find to be grateful of.

Someone has said that there are two types of Christians in the world: those who take God for granted and those who accept Him with gratitude. Which are you? A Christian who knows how to fill his life with praise faces life buoyantly and confidently because in every situation, no matter how dark and difficult, he/she is conscious of God’s mercy streaming in from heaven. So, make up your mind on this first day of our excursion into the subject of praise to become a praising and thankful Christian. Learn to praise the Lord at all times; up times, down times, dark times, bright times- and I promise you that life will soon take on a different meaning.

WHY NOT SAY THIS PRAYER OF CONFESSIO, ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND COMMITMENT.
O God, forgive me for the blessings I had taken for granted rather than with gratitude. Teach me over these next few weeks the art of praising you at all times, for Jesus sake. Amen. “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him Forever.” I want to enjoy You from this day onward. My life shall be praise unto You. Amen!

➤ AT ALL TIMES! DAY 2

Psalm 34: 1-22

“I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips” (v.1)

We ended last meditation by stating that one of our greatest needs as Christians is learning to be a praising and thankful people, and not to be taking things for granted, but with gratitude.

❖ Created to Praise

The Bible fairly bulges with the truth that we are created to praise, and encourages us to praise our Creator with enthusiasm, energy, determination vociferously, and at every opportunity. We are taught by both Old and New Testament writers that it is our duty to praise the Lord, and there are times when the almighty Himself takes up the issue, not merely to encourage our praises,

Spiritual Discipline

but to demand it (Psa.50:13 – 17:22-23).

There can be no doubt, to even the most casual reader of the scripture, that praise is as important a spiritual focus as prayer, and that without it, our lives become jaded and impoverished. In our text today, the Psalmist tells us that he praised God “at all Time.” Can we really be expected to praise God on all occasions and at every opportunity? Surely, it means praising God most if not at all times. One cannot be expected to be full of praises when the days are dark and gray, or the doctor is calling every day, looking graver each time he leaves. Not so: “I will extol the Lord at all times,” says the Psalmist. “His praise will always be on my lips.”

Take a leaf out of the Psalmist’s book and follow his advice. Make this day a day of continued praise. Magnify the Lord in your heart in a special way. Reflect on the wonder of the fact that you, a soiled sinner, can come into His presence and linger there as long as you like. Rejoice in the fact that he belongs to you and you belong to Him, and nothing can separate you from his love.

TAKE A MOMENT THEN TO SAY THIS PRAYER: O Father, this day, I want to be filled with unceasing praise – praise such as I have never given and never known before, for Jesus sake I ask it. Amen.

Praise is as important a spiritual focus as prayer.

➤ BURSTING THE DRUM DAY 3

Isaiah 43:1-21

“This people have I formed for myself, they shall show forth my praise” (v.21 KJV).

We continue meditating on the importance and necessity of praise. I can never understand how it is that, over the centuries, the Christian religion has become associated with gloom. Even, during the Old Testament times, as we can see from our text today, God encouraged His people to exhibit a life of praise. Praise, to the Old Testament saints, was vocal and vociferous.

❖ Vocal Praise

The early church was so joyful on the Day of Pentecost that they were accused of being drunk. Modern Christians do not come under this dark suspicion. The first Franciscans had to be reprovved for laughing in church because they were so radiantly happy. The early Methodists took some of their tunes from operas and set their songs to dance music. General Booth told the first Salvationists that if they felt the Spirit moving them during a hymn or prayer, they could jump. They did!

Dr. Farmer, a brilliant organist and musician, once adjudicated at a music festival where a Salvation Army band was playing. He appealed to the drummer, a fairly new convert, not to hit the drum so hard, to which the man replied, “I’m so happy, sir, I could burst the blessed drum.” He turned to another new convert who was playing French horn and asked him also to restrain himself. “But sir,” said the horn player, “I’m so full of joy, I want to blow this thing straight!”

It is easier to hear stories such as these and think ourselves a little superior. We might even think, “Well, that was a different generation, today’s religion is more sophisticated.” The faith of Jesus and exuberance are not something to be set apart. They belong together and must be brought together- here in the post twenty-first century.

Oh God, make us once again a people of praise. Help us to be exuberant, joyful, infectiously happy, so that cold conventionalities thaw in our presence, for Jesus sake. Amen!

Meditation

The faith of Jesus and exuberance are not something to be set apart.

➤ WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO US? DAY 4

Psalms 100:1-5

“Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise” (verse 1)

We saw in the last meditation that the early Methodists and Salvationists manifested a joy and exuberance that, in some sections of today’s church, would be greatly frowned upon. W. E. Sangster wrote, “It is when the fires in the individual heart die down that convention frowns on exuberance and an air of superiority is affected toward those who cannot restrain their joyous praise.”

Church history is full of instances showing that when a movement of the Spirit begins, those involved in it demonstrate an unrestrained delight that later gives way to formalism and convention. Aside the fact that new movements and new beginnings excite a good deal of natural enthusiasm, I cannot believe it is God’s purpose for His people to lapse into dull conventionalism and empty routine. May I, through these pages, make a plea for a livelier and more enthusiastic approach to worship and praise in our Churches? Our services ought to be centres of glowing gratitude where the saints, intoxicated with the wonder of their salvation, praise and magnify the Saviour together.

Of course, there will be those like Michal, David’s wife (2 Samuel 6:16), who will abhor any semblance of joy, and will murmur something about fanaticism and emotionalism. But there is nothing more beautiful and wonderful than to be in the midst of God’s people when their hearts are bursting with praises. A Christian has only to look at Jesus for what to praise Him. A glimpse of Him sets all the bells ringing in one’s heart. Charles Wesley spoke for us all when he wrote:

In the presence of the heavenly Lamb, Thrice happy I am and my heart it doth dance at the sound of His Name.

LET US MAKE A PRAYER: O God, forgive us that we are so often thought by the world to be sober and dignified when it is a travesty of our true traditions.

➤ DOES GOD NEED OUR PRAISE? DAY 5

Ephesians 5:5-21

“Always giving thanks to God the father for everything” (verse 20)

Having examined together the importance and necessity of praise, we turn now to consider a question which is often raised whenever the subject of praise is discussed: Why does God insist on being praised? Is it because He needs constant reassurance that He is good and great? Or is it because there is a need in God that only praise can fill? Not all.

❖ Problems with Praise

This question troubled me greatly when I first became a Christian. I was told by my pastor and elders, “Now that you are a Christian, you must read your Bible every day, pray as often as you can, and praise the Lord at all times.” I got on fairly well with my daily Bible reading and prayer, but when it came to praise, I encountered serious difficulties. I kept thinking to myself, is God so insecure that He wants me to boost His ego by my praise? The idea that God craved for praise, like a vain woman angling for compliments, was abhorrent to me. Then, someone gave me a book in

Spiritual Discipline

which the author pointed out that while God does not need our praise (“it is not in our power to add to His plenitude”), He delights in it, nevertheless. The author narrated the story of a Sunday school teacher who received a cheap pen-knife as a present from one of his students. It was the product of hoarded pennies. Did he need it? No! Did he want it? Yes!

God does not need our gifts. He does not need our thanks. But does He want them? Oh yes! In the narrow sense of the word, nothing we do can meet a need in God, for He has no needs. He is, however, a Father who desires the gratitude of His children and delights in their thanks, no matter how hesitant or inadequate they may be.

Then, make a COMMITMENT IN PRAYER. O Father, although I know I cannot meet a need in you, for you have no needs, yet I see that I can bring joy and delight to your heart through my praise. Help me to give it; not grudgingly or sparingly but freely, joyously and perpetually. Amen!

God is a Father who desires the gratitude of His children and delights in their thanks.

➤ PRAISE DOES US GOOD DAY 6

James 5:10-20

“Those, who have reason to be thankful, should continually be singing praises to the Lord” (verse 13 TL B).

We saw in the last meditation that whatever reasons God has for insisting on our praise, it is not because it meets a need in Him—for God has no needs. If there is one truth beyond dispute among Christians, it is the perfection of God. He is uncreated, self-sufficient, and lacks nothing. He, therefore, does not need our gifts, sacrifices, or even, our praises.

If God does not need our thanks, then, why does He so often encourage us, through His Word, to be thankful? The answer is simple, though it must not be considered simplistic: we need it. It does us good to be thankful. In one sense, being thankful does more for us than it does for God; although, of course, we must not forget that He finds great pleasure in it.

Modern-day psychology is discovering something in this century that has been a law of life ever since humans appeared on earth, namely: that we are not made happy by what we acquire but by what we appreciate. In other words, the degree to which we are thankful or appreciative determines our happiness in every area of life. When we acquire something new, be it a new house, a new car, or new clothes, etc., we are usually keenly appreciative. However, six months later, the same object (now no longer so deeply appreciated) no more bring us one-tenth of the excitement and pleasure it has once brought us.

Our thankfulness and appreciation diminish, and when that happens, boredom sets in. And not only boredom, other, much more serious, consequences occur when we lose the spirit of thankfulness and praise.

O God, teach me the art of continual thankfulness, and help me never to become bored with you, for I know that if that happens, then, life will soon disintegrate. Help me, Lord Jesus. Amen!

Being thankful does more for us than it does for God.

➤ A WRONG FOCUS DAY 7

1 Thessalonians 5:14-23

“Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will” (verse 18)

Someone once said that a neurotic is a person who focuses more on what he lacks than on

Meditation

what he possesses. Many of us live on the borders of neurosis because we fail to recognise the blessings of God in our lives and the way in which He is working all things out for good.

Someone once wrote to me, "For weeks, I had been going about concentrating on the difficulties in my life, and I had become deeply depressed. Then, something you wrote in *Every Day with Jesus* caused me to look at the good things that were happening to me, and instantly, the depression was lifted."

The contents of the above letter do not surprise me, for I have come to see that life works like this: If we focus on our difficulties, we get depressed; however, if we focus on God's mercies, we will be uplifted. It is so easy to concentrate on the negative things in our lives. So many of our waking hours are spent thinking about what is going wrong—business problems, disagreements, broken possessions and relationships—that we use up emotional energy which could be put to better use. Some people complained because God put thorns on roses; others thank him for putting roses on thorns. How much time do we focus on what is going right—usually the 80 percent taken for granted areas?

A great thinker once wrote, "Man is not made happy by what he has but by what he is thankful for." Whether it is material possessions, success, friendship, or love, every factor which might bring us greater happiness only makes us actually happier as we appreciate it. It is so simple: Someone gives you a gift, and as you thank them for it, they are gratified. Thankfulness rewards the giver, but it rewards the receiver too. To receive without being thankful is to miss the joy of appreciation which is the real gift. A gift unappreciated is, in one sense, un-given.

Father God, I know you are trying to teach me that I am fulfilled, not by what I possess, but by what I am thankful for. Burn this truth deeper and deeper into my spirit, for Jesus' sake. Amen!

If we focus on God's mercies, we will be uplifted.

➤ EXPRESSION DEEPENS IMPRESSION DAY 8

Psalm 107:1-43

"Has the Lord redeemed you? Then, speak out! Tell others about how he has saved you."

We continue meditating on the fact that we are made in the inner structure of our being for praise, and it is only when we praise that we complete ourselves and experience fulfillment. We saw the other day that we cannot really enjoy anything until we express, in some ways, our appreciation of that enjoyment. C. S. Lewis wrote, "We delight to praise the things we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses the pleasures that we feel but completes it." Praise consummates the experience.

Why does a young man in love enjoy telling his fiancée how beautiful and adorable she is? Is it because he read somewhere in a book a chapter on the importance of giving compliments? No. It is because he instinctively feels that the delight he experiences can only be fully felt when it is expressed. It is a law of life that expression deepens impression. Have you ever found yourself in position of sharing your feelings with someone about a pleasant experience you had, only to find that as you share it, you feel a warm inner glow that surpasses even the joy you knew during the experience itself? That was the law of "expression/impression" at work.

W. E. Sangster, in one of his Westminster Sermons, wrote, "One of the worst moments for an atheist is when he feels thankful and has no One to thank." How sad to watch a glorious sunset but to keep silent about it because that people with you are more interested in the flames of a garden

Spiritual Discipline

bonfire. How sad, however, to meditate on the goodness and greatness of God and fail to appreciate it because no expression is given to the joy and delight felt?

My God and Father, how can I ever thank you enough for designing me in this wonderful way? The more praise I express, the more I have to express. And the cycle will never end. Praise be to your wonderful Name. Amen! "Praise not merely expresses the pleasure we feel but completes it."

➤ AND THAT IS HEAVEN DAY 9 Revelation 4:1-11

"Day and night they never stop saying: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord'" (verse 8).

Yesterday, we touched on the fact that it is only as we express things that we really experience them; for, there is a law in life that says "expression deepens impression." This is so, even, when our expressions are weak and inadequate.

❖ Delight in the Creator

What if praise to perfection, utterly "get out" the appreciation that wells up inside us? What then? Well, the object would be fully appreciated and, in return, our joy would reach its fullest consummation. If it were possible for a human being to love, enjoy, and delight in the Creator to the fullest extent possible, and give expression to that feeling in a continued and uninterrupted form, then that person would be in the most perfect bliss imaginable. It would be heaven! Until I understood this, I thought that heaven, described in the text before us today as a place of unceasing praise, would be rather dull and boring. I pictured it, I am afraid, as an interminable church service, but I failed to see that our praises here on earth are nothing compared to how we shall praise our Creator when we get to heaven.

Imagine being in a state where you are in perfect love with God, satiated with Him, drunk with Him, overwhelmed by a delight which, far from being pent-up within you, flows out in free and unrestrained expression. Imagine, too, what it would be like to express the praise you feel freely, without restriction or inhibition. In the giving and expressing of such praise, a human being would experience such delight, such overwhelming joy, that it would fill his personality to its utmost limits. And that is heaven!

O Father, all I can say is this, "If it is so blessed here, what would up there be!" With you is unrestricted joy. Amen. Imagine what it would be like to express freely the praise you feel.

➤ NOT A DEMAND— AN OFFER DAY 10 Matthew 16:21-28

"Whoever loses his life for me will find it" (verse 25).

Over the past few days, we have been coming to grips with an important question: "Why does God insist that we praise Him?" We have seen that apart from the joy our praises bring to the heart of God, praise also meets a deep need in us. However, there is another vital reason for which God invites us to praise Him. Through the process of praise, God is able to communicate His presence more fully to us. As we give ourselves to Him in praise, He, in turn, is able to give Himself to us.

Meditation

❖ Why Should This Be?

Self-giving is one of the established principles in the universe: “Give, and it will be given to you,” said Jesus (Luke 6:38). Is this a principle which holds good only for men and women? No. God is bound by it too.

❖ Giving All the Way

The Almighty will never ask us to do something He hasn't done Himself. He moved toward us through the door of the incarnation where He gave Himself to us, and then later, at the point of crucifixion, He gave Himself for us. It was giving all the way. By going through the door of self-giving and abiding by His own eternal principles, God has demonstrated the truth that in order to receive, one must first give. He gave Himself to us (and for us) and, as a result, millions have responded to His love by going through the door of self-giving and giving themselves to Him. It is as if God is saying, “Nothing of value can be received in this universe without self-giving. As you go through the door of self-giving and focus upon me in adoration and praise, so I am able to move through that same door and affirm my presence in your hearts.” Seen in this light, His insistence on being praised is not so much a demand as an offer.

O God, now it all makes sense! You insist on my praise because as I give to you so you are able to give to me. It is my interests you have at heart—not your own. I am eternally grateful. Amen.

Through the incarnation He gave Himself to us; through the crucifixion, He gave Himself for us.

➤ THE ROOT OF SIN DAY 11

Daniel 5:13-23

“The God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored”(verse 23 RSV).

While we must not lose sight of the fact that the prime purpose of praise is to honor and glorify God, what praise does for us is so important that we must continue discussing it.

There is a good case for arguing that the root of sin is thanklessness. The temptation of Eve involved getting her to doubt whether God should be thanked-or blamed. The serpent persuaded Eve to overlook the fact that God had given her everything she needed, and concern herself with the one thing she was denied— access to the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Look how cunningly the serpent approached her:

“God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God”(Gen. 3:5 RSV). Eve then decided to focus on the thing she was denied rather than to thank God for all that He had provided.

It is basically the same decision, by the way, which contributes to lack of what society describes as neurotic. The neurotic is a person who is usually obsessed by what he feels he lacks, and focuses on that more than on the things he has. He focuses on negative rather than on positive factors.

In the text before us today, God reprimands Belshazzar for failing to recognise that He was the source of his existence. The apostle Paul told the Christians in Rome a similar truth when he said, “They are without excuse; for although they knew God, they did not honour him as God, or

Spiritual Discipline

give thanks to him" (Rom. 1:20-21 RSV).

Thanklessness lies at the root of mankind's sins and most of our everyday sins as well!

O God, save me, I pray, from the sin of thanklessness. Keep me awake and alert to all the positive things that are going on in my life-and help me to be continually thankful, for Jesus' sake. Amen!

Thanklessness lies at the root of mankind's sins.

➤ HEAL THY PRAISE DAY 12

Psalm 92:1-15

"It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praise to thy name" (verse 1 RSV)

Have you ever considered how praise is essential, not only to our relationship with God, but in relationships with one another too? Thanklessness was a major factor in the destruction of Eve's relationship with God; it destroys human relationships as well. "Love makes the world go round," goes an old romantic song, but it is only half true. If it is love that starts our world going around, then, believe me, it is thankfulness that keeps it spinning.

The most exciting romance or, for that matter, marriage will eventually grind to a halt if there is no day-to-day thankfulness expressed in a smile, a kiss, or a word of appreciation. C. S. Lewis wrote, "The people who praise most are those who enjoy life most." He wrote further, "I had not noticed how the humblest and, at the same time, the most balanced and capacious minds, praised most, while the cranks, misfits and malcontents praised least." Isn't it true that the best critics are those who find something to praise in even the most imperfect book while the bad critic would have us read only that which accords with his own high, and often, impossible standards?

A doctor once told me that the happiest and healthiest people are those who are quick to praise—not the flatterers or the insincere, but those who look for and who are quick to recognize the praiseworthy aspects of every situation. Dyspeptics, I am told by those who work in the medical profession, are notorious grumblers. Is their dyspepsia due to their inner disharmony? Perhaps, one thing is sure, when we fail to praise that which is good and worthy of recognition, we are depleted, starved, and poisoned, and we lose our sense of well-being.

Father, something is being burned into my consciousness—the laws of life. I am not able to escape them. Nor would I, for to escape them would be foolishness to the highest degree. I would accept them and be what you designed me to be. Amen. If it is love that starts our world going around, it is thankfulness that keeps it spinning.

➤ INNER DIVISION DAY 13

Colossians 3:1-15

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since ... you were called to peace" (verse 15).

Yesterday, it was discovered that the healthiest and happiest people are those who are quick and ready to praise God. Someone has defined praise as "inner health made audible." What is the connection between a readiness to praise and inner and outer health? Well, it is quite simply this: we are made in our inmost beings for praise. God has designed us to be praising beings, and if this is not our chief characteristic, the machinery of life gets out of gear—for we are geared to fulfill our part in creation. And what is the purpose for our creation? We see it again in Revelation 4:11, "And for thy pleasure, they are and, were created" (KJ V).

Meditation

Our first responsibility, of course, is to praise God, but we have a responsibility, too, to appreciate others. Some are vociferous in their praise of God but extremely grudging in their appreciation of others. Such a person will never be truly happy (or healthy) because he is a divided being.

A man I knew in one of the churches that I once pastored would shout the praises of God in every service, but at home, he was a sour and surly individual. At the request of his family, I spoke to him about it, but he appeared blind to the problem. The law of life then took its toll. He became crippled with rheumatism, and within a year or two, he was a chronic invalid. His doctor said he was tied up with inner conflicts, and although not all rheumatism starts this way, it was so in his case, according to the doctor. He was a divided person, and as such, he was working against the grain of life. He was a praising person in church but a surly and cantankerous person at home. And life recorded its verdict—chronic invalidism.

O God, help me to be a whole person—not a divided person. I want to be one with you and others, for your own dear Name's sake. Amen. God has designed us to be praising beings.

➤ LOADED WITH BENEFITS DAY 14

Psalm 68:1-9

“Blessed is the Lord, who daily loaded us with benefits ...” (Verse 19 KJ V).

Quietly, we are coming to the conclusion of the fact that praise, in relation to ourselves, is the profitable thing to do. It is the right thing to do because to take benefits from God without a thought or a word of thanks is mean and contemptible. Even, a dog wags its tail when given a bone. It is the profitable thing to do because when we praise and give thanks, we do what we were designed to do, and life rewards us with health and happiness.

When I use the word profitable, here, I am not thinking cynically, like Robert Walpole, who wrote that “gratitude is a lively sense of future favors,” Nor of the agnostic who caricatured the psalmists as praising God for what they could get out of Him saying: “God, I know Your like praise. Do is for me and I will give you some.” Instead, I mean “profitable” in the sense of foregoing discussion that a Christian, who is quick to praise, and swift to thank, lives in a constant state of happiness and goodwill.

This approach to life builds a barricade against depression and contributes to good mental health. Being thankful for the good things that come to us, rather than just grumbling about the bad things that go on around us, helps us to keep our minds balanced and functioning in the way God had designed them to do.

It is a well-known fact of human life that mercies can be found at the heart of tragedies, and if we are alert, we can see something to be grateful for in even the most dark and dismal circumstances. When we are unaware of God's love for us, it is often because we have not tried to perceive it. To see His love, you have only to look.

O Father, give me eyes to see your goodness that you shower upon me on every hand, and when I see it, help me not to merely look at it, or even gaze at it, but to stare at it—and give thanks. Amen. A Christian who is quick to praise will live in a constant state of happiness.

Spiritual Discipline

➤ THE SACRIFICE OF PRAISE DAY 15

Hebrews 13:5-21

“Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually” (Verse 15 KJV).

“God,” wrote C. S. Lewis, “is a great Giver and a great Lover. There is nothing which delights Him more than having His gifts received and appreciated.”

At times, however, we are not quick to recognise the gifts and blessings of God, and then our task is to exercise faith—to believe and to receive. Faith is an expression of the willingness to receive God’s love—His gifts—and thankfulness is the emotional reaction to the exercise of faith.

Think it through a little further with me. One God’s part there is the offer of love –free, unmerited favour. On our part, there is the decision of faith—an active choice to believe in God’s love toward us and receive it; and gratitude and thankfulness is the emotional response we have to that decision. On some occasions, there has to be what someone to be described as “an adoring venture of faith,” or else, there would be no feeling of thankfulness.

When cancer strikes, for example, it isn’t easy to be a praising person, though I am surprised at the number of times while talking to Christians who have succumbed to this dreadful disease how so many of them find reasons to be grateful. The ministry of praise, at such times, may be what the Bible terms “the sacrifice of praise” –thanksgiving that has blood upon it. There are Christians who are so in touch with God that they believe God’s love surrounds them, even when they are overtaken by a tragedy such as I have just described. It strains faith and taxes it to its utmost limit, but saints down through the ages have risen up to testify that it is possible. The sacrifice of such thanksgiving is, indeed, precious in God’s sight.

O God, give me the kind of faith that trusts you, even when it can’t trace you; and survives, even the most overwhelming tests for Jesus sake. Amen.

“God is a great Giver and a great Lover. There is nothing which delights Him more than having His gifts received and appreciated.”

➤ VICTORY THROUGH PRAISE DAY 16

For Reading and Meditation: 2 Chronicles 20:1-24

“And when they began to sing and praise, the LORD sets an ambush against the men . . . so that they were routed” (verse 22 RS V).

We shall turn to examine some specific biblical situations where praise played a prominent part in turning defeat into victory. In a way, that seems impossible to define properly; however, praise releases God’s power into difficult situations and sets the stage for great spiritual victories. We begin with the story of Jehoshaphat.

The situation described in 2 Chronicles 20 was extremely critical. A vast army was invading the kingdom of King Jehoshaphat who laid out his plight before the Lord in fear and trembling. Through his intercession, God showed him the secret of victory. He was to place in the forefront of his army a selected group of singers whose task was to go ahead of the army by singing and praising the Lord. It sounds like a pretty far-fetched idea, doesn’t it? Imagine a modern-day general ordering his troops to walk toward the enemy behind a small group of people who are singing praises to God! It is the kind of situation that causes human reason to balk. What happened to Jehoshaphat and his men? As the singers went out ahead of the army, God gave them such a victory that their enemies were routed, and peace came once again to the land. The secret of this story is

Meditation

found in verse 15: “The battle is not yours, but God’s.”

Many are constantly defeated by their circumstances because they are not ready to accept that the battle is God’s—not theirs. Even, sometimes, when we have realized our powerlessness to cope with the problem, we are afraid to let ourselves go and trust in God’s power. We are not called to understand—we are called to stand.

Lord, in this conflict between acceptance and understanding, help me to put acceptance first. Help me to see that praise is a proven path to victory, and enable me to practice it—today. Amen. Praise releases God’s power into difficult situations.

➤ THE FALL OF JERICHO DAY 17

For Reading and Meditation: Joshua 6:1-20

“All the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat” (verse 5 KJ V).

Today, we are to look at another biblical account where praise released God’s power into a situation and turned defeat into victory. The city of Jericho was a fortified stronghold. The Israelites, who had wandered for forty years in the wilderness, certainly, didn’t have the weapons needed to overthrow such a secure community. God told Joshua to march around Jericho for six days in succession. On the seventh day, he was to get the priests to blow their trumpets and shout.

Joshua trusted God, but I wonder what you and I would have done if we had been in that procession? Would we not have dismissed the idea as foolhardy and ridiculous? See what happened! “And suddenly, the walls of Jericho crumbled and fell before them, and the people of Israel poured into the city from every side and captured it!” (Verse 20 TLB). We don’t know what the Israelites shouted, but I feel quite sure it was a shout of praise. The example of Joshua and the destruction of Jericho clearly demonstrate that God gives us victories by means and principles that look utterly foolish and contradictory to human wisdom and ingenuity.

In some of life’s situations, God tells us to trust Him, praise Him, and watch Him work. All He requires from us is the step of faith on our part to do what He asks, whether we understand it or not. Are you, at this moment, confronted by walls of great difficulty that threaten and overwhelm you, and although you have prayed, you still cannot see the victory? Well, now, try praise. This does not mean that prayer is unimportant; it is definitely an important pathway to God. But so is praise. So, praise Him, trust Him, and watch Him work.

O Father, I praise you today, from the bottom of my heart, that you are the God of miracles and wonders. I believe that as I praise you, my “walls of Jericho” will crash down. Hallelujah! God tells us to praise Him, trust Him, and watch Him work.

➤ THE WAY OF DELIVERANCE DAY 18

For Reading and Meditation: 2 Samuel 22:1-20

“I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies” (verse 4).

Today’s meditation continues examining biblical situations in which praise proved most powerful. It is possible, (am I speaking to someone who is in a spiritual mess) to realize that everything in life seems to have gone wrong; yet, as one drags self through one crisis, one faces another. Day by day, you are being pulled down into a vortex of despair that threatens to engulf the soul. Then, lift up your head and throw back your shoulders because God is able to grant

Spiritual Discipline

deliverance. Amen!

Consider David, God's servant, in his struggles against the heathen armies of his day. Beset by the threats of those who sought his downfall, he turned to God in his time of trouble in an attitude of praise thus: "I call to the LORD, who is worthy, of praise, and I am saved from my enemies." What a word is this! For David, the way of praise was the way of deliverance from his problems. Realizing the power of his Creator, David turned from meditating on his problems to praising the Lord, and instantly, God's power went to work for him. He knew it could not fail, for he had seen it work time and time again. Praise released God's power into a difficult and dangerous situation.

Turn from your problem right now and focus on God. With all the sincerity of which you are capable, begin to praise Him. Tell Him how great and wonderful He is and how glad you are that He is on your side, and you on His. Make much of joy about Jesus in your praise, for God delights in the praises of His children. If the devil tells you that this is manipulation, tell him you will continually praise God whether or not He delivers you. But mark my words, deliverance will come. The God of David is just the same today.

Lord, I thank you for making this day a day of deliverance for me. As I praise you now, I know I shall step out from the dungeon of despair into the sunshine of a bright and glorious victory. Thank you, Father. Amen. Make much of joy about Jesus in your praise, for God delights in the praises of His children.

➤ SENDING PRAISE AHEAD DAY 19

For Reading and Meditation: Mark 6:30-44

"Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish ... and gave thanks" (v. 41 GNB).

Today, we shall look at an incident in the life of Jesus to see how He used praise as the precursor to a miracle. In the passage before us, Jesus is presented as one with a pressing challenge; there are thousands of people who have been listening to Him for some time but who are now hungry. What should He do? Should He send them away as the disciples have suggested, into the surrounding villages in order to buy food? For Jesus, it is quite clear, however, as to how God wants Him to proceed.

The interesting thing about the life of Jesus is that whenever He is confronted by a difficult and desperate situation, He always seems to have anticipated it during prayer. Prior to choosing His disciples, He has spent some time in prayer (Lk. 6:12-13). Earlier, in verse 31 of Mark chapter 6, Jesus had taken His disciples to a quiet place for spiritual retreat. Did He do this to prepare them, and Himself, for the miraculous feeding of the five thousand? It would appear so. This author has no doubt that Jesus had used prayer to commune with God and find out what God wanted Him to do on every situation. Then, having sought God's will, He could approach the situation with confident faith and praise.

How did the miracle occur? Did Jesus plead with God for a supernatural display of His power? No, He looked up to heaven, gave thanks, and the bread extended itself in response to His "mighty multiplying touch." It is always right to use prayer as a means of getting to know God's mind over any situation. Then, once assured of this, we can send praises and thanksgiving ahead in order to bring back the answer.

Meditation

Father, I see that both prayer and praise are important. Help me not to give up one for the sake of the other. Guide me in a right and balanced use for Jesus sake. Amen.

Whenever Jesus was confronted with a difficult situation, He always seemed to have anticipated it in prayer.

➤ SINGING JAIL-BIRDS! DAY 20

Acts 16:16-34

“And at midnight, Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God” (verse 25 KJ V).

We continue to meditate on some biblical instances where praise was used to release God’s power into a dark and difficult situation, and turn defeat into victory. Today, we are to study the story of Paul and Silas while in prison at Philippi.

After being accused of corrupting the city, Paul and Silas were stripped and beaten until the blood flowed from their bare backs. They were then put in an inner part of the prison and their feet securely clamped in stocks. Paul and Silas refused to believe, however, that God had deserted them or that He was unmindful of their plight. They had a strong inner conviction that everything was working out for God’s glory and their good. In such moments, it is not only prayer that is needed but praise. As they sat there in the dark dungeon, with the dried blood on their backs and unable to stretch their aching legs, they began to sing hymns of praises to God.

Suddenly, at midnight, there was a great earthquake, the prison doors flew open, and the chains fell off every prisoner. The jailer was horrified. Thinking that he would be held responsible for the situation, he tried to kill himself. Paul, however, shouted to him that all the prisoners were still in the prison and had not escaped. The jailer, sensing that a miracle had occurred, came to Paul and Silas, and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

What would have happened, I wonder, if Paul and Silas had sat in the stocks bemoaning their fate? I doubt if any miracle would have taken place. Praise, however, became the note around which God constructed a symphony of sound that broke through the natural barriers to bring freedom and deliverance to His rejoicing children.

Lord, I see that unutterable peace possesses the hearts of your children when they have the right attitudes and do the right things. Then, the consequences are mighty—because they are in your hands. I am so thankful. Amen.

Praise turns defeat into victory.

➤ TRY PRAISE DAY 21

For Reading and Meditation: Psalm 56:1-13

“What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee” (verse 3-4 KJ V).

Over the past few days we have been examining some scriptural passages of where praise was the precursor to a miracle. If we step outside the Scriptures for a moment and examine the writings of some of the great saints of God, we find an almost unanimous agreement that praise is as powerful as prayer in bringing about spiritual victories.

William Law, a great thinker and a great Christian of the eighteenth century, wrote, “One dark night, as I wrestled before God in prayer, I could find no answer. Then I turned to praise, and instantly, the tide turned and I was borne on the wave of a miracle that astonished me and my

Spiritual Discipline

entire household.

Christmas Evans, the Welsh revivalist, wrote that once, while preaching in a church, he found it as “hard as brass.” He stopped preaching and began to praise God. “Instantly,” he wrote, “the hardness turned to wave of spiritual revival. People ran to the front to commit their lives to God. I have never seen a meeting so suddenly transformed.”

One dark period, many years ago, I suffered a few weeks of depression that brought me to the verge of giving up the ministry. I tried praying, but the more I prayed, the more depressed I felt. The Spirit said, “Try praise.” However, I rationalized the issue and persuaded myself that what I was hearing was a voice from my own subconscious. Again, the Spirit said, “Try praise.” I did, and the heaviness lifted from me within seconds. I felt as if a great weight had been taken off my shoulders. Joy flooded into my heart in response to my praise of God. From that day to this, serious depression has never once entered my life.

O God, something is opening up before me that I can only feebly understand; yet, it beckons me toward new horizons. Help me to put into practice that truth of what you have been teaching me during the last few days for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Praise is as powerful as prayer in bringing about spiritual victories.

➤ AN OBEDIENT HEART DAY 22

For Reading and Meditation: Matthew 12:30-37

“Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (verse 34)

We have been studying convincing biblical evidences that praise releases God’s power into certain situations and that heartfelt gratitude to God is often the prelude to a miracle. Now, I intend to bring into the picture several other considerations. Unless we do so, we are in danger of taking this truth entirely out of context and of seeing it as the only answer to all our problems. Every biblical truth suffers from two great dangers—over-emphasis and under-emphasis.

Two decades ago, one of the books that took the Christian world by storm was, *Prison to Praise* by Merlin R. Carothers. Many Christians, coming from church backgrounds where praise was rarely mentioned or practiced, overreacted to the contents of the book and reasoned that praise is the only answer to all their problems. They overlooked the fact that there were other spiritual considerations that demanded attention, such as prayers, Bible reading, and so on.

God’s Word spells out a number of conditions and requirements for a thankful worshiper, the first of which is an obedient heart. God considers obedience to His Word as of more importance than extravagant sacrifice. An Old Testament prophet, speaking on behalf of the Almighty, stated, “To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams” (1 Sam. 15:22). Since “out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks,” what we say or sing should reflect the commitment of our hearts to God. If it doesn’t, then, our efforts to praise, whether it be by vociferous praise or spectacular music, will fail to reach the ears of our Creator, God.

O God, help me not to fasten on one truth to the exclusion of others. I want to be a balanced Christian—not a biased one for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

God considers obedience to His Word as of more importance than extravagant sacrifice.

➤ LOST ON THE WAY UP DAY 23

For Reading and Meditation: Amos 5:21-24

Meditation

“Away with the noise of your songs, I will not listen to the music of your harps” (verse 23).

Yesterday, it was discovered that God’s Word spells out several conditions required of a thankful worshiper, the first of which is an obedient heart. If praise does not come from an obedient heart, it will fail to reach the ears of the Almighty.

One night, a minister in a very fashionable church had a dream in which he saw himself standing by the throne of God in heaven. As he looked down to the earth, he saw his congregation and the one-hundred-voice choir at Sunday worship. The strange thing was, however, that although he saw the lips of the choir and the congregation move in song, the only sound that rose to heaven was that of one solitary voice.

He turned to the Lord and asked for an explanation: “Why is it, Lord, that out of a congregation of many hundreds and a choir of a hundred highly trained voices, I can hear only a single voice?” The Lord replied, “The only sound that reaches up to heaven is the sound of heartfelt praise—anything less than this is lost on the way up.”

Upon closer inspection by the minister, it was revealed that the solitary voice reaching heaven was that of a little boy, not even in the choir, who sang the praises of God with utter delight and sincerity. In Mark 7:6-7, Jesus quotes the words of Prophet Isaiah, “These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.” Whether our praise is spontaneous or, as with a choir or a singing group, carefully rehearsed and prepared, our sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise must meet God’s conditions if they are to be pleasing and acceptable to Him.

O God, enable me to have an obedient heart so that the expression of thankfulness and praise is not lost on the way up to heaven in Jesus’ Name. Amen.

The only sound that reaches up to heaven is the sound of a heartfelt praise.

➤ BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS DAY 24

For Reading and Meditation: Matthew 5:21-26

“First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift” (verse 24).

We are seeing that praise and thanksgiving must meet God’s conditions if they are to bring joy and pleasure to the Almighty. Today, we are to examine another requirement for a thankful worshiper—reconciliation with fellow Christians.

In today’s passage, Jesus shows the order of priority in Christian worship. He is saying in effect: “It’s no good coming to God with a sacrifice if you have a broken relationship with a fellow believer. Put that right first and, then, God will be delighted to accept your offering.” We may have the most wonderful sermon to preach, the most delightful music to perform, the most inspiring testimony to give, the most heartfelt praise to present, but if we fail to take the steps necessary to bring about the healing of a broken relationship, then, our attempts at worship will never rise higher than the ceiling of the church.

In Wales, many years ago, I knew of two ministers, one a Calvinist and the other an Arminian (Calvinists and Armenians are different theological doctrines). Every Sunday, they would denounce each other from their pulpits. As a result, their churches became nests of hate. A Christian leader visited the town and heard of the problem. He invited the two men to where he was staying in order, as he said, “to help them bury the hatchet.” They buried the hatchet but left the handle sticking out. So, when the leader left town, they were at it again.

Spiritual Discipline

O God, I see so clearly that to try and offer you praise when my heart is full of bitterness or hatred toward another Christian is to dishonor you.

This very day, help me O Lord, to heal all the broken relationships that I have, in Jesus' Name. Amen. Praise and thanksgiving must meet God's conditions if they are to bring joy and pleasure to the Almighty.

➤ HUMILITY DAY 25

For Reading and Meditation: Amos 4:1-9

"Bring your sacrifices... and brag about your freewill offerings ... this is what you love to do" (vv. 4-5).

Today, we are to examine another condition required of a true worshiper which is genuine humility. A spirit of pride and self-righteousness can make our sacrifices and thanksgiving unacceptable, as today's text makes clear. Listen to how it is rendered in the Living Bible: "Go ahead and sacrifice to idols ... keep disobeying... your sins are mounting up. Sacrifice each morning and bring your tithes twice a week! ...How you pride yourselves and crow about it everywhere!"

In fact, an attitude of pride can turn a sacrificial offering of praise into an act which is sinful. Remember the story of the Pharisee who gave thanks to God that he was not like the tax collector? (Lk. 18:9-14). It were thanks that were not really thanks at all. One of the greatest dangers we face as we grow in the Christian life is the danger of spiritual pride. I have seen young men leave Bible College with a brilliant ministry ahead of them come crashing down; reduced to nothing because of spiritual pride.

Several weeks ago, after a severe storm, I looked out of my window and saw the branch of a tree lying in the road. A neighbour appeared at that moment and took it away. Later, when I spoke to him about it, he said that parasites had eaten into the branch; thus, weakening it to such an extent that when the storm came, it broke off and fell.

"Pride kills thanksgiving," wrote Henry Ward Beecher, "but a humble mind is the soil out of which thanksgiving naturally grows. A proud man is seldom a grateful man for he never thinks that he gets as much as he deserves." The most dangerous parasite I know is spiritual pride. Many are weakened by it and fall in the time of resting.

O God, deliver me from the stranglehold that pride has upon my life; for pride can destroy me but humility will develop me for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Thanksgiving, naturally, grows out of a humble mind.

➤ A REJOICING SPIRIT DAY 26

For reading and meditation: 2 Corinthians 9:6-15; Exodus 35:29

"For God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7)

Today, we are to examine yet another condition of a thankful worshiper with a rejoicing spirit. In the passage before us today, Paul admonishes that we must give "not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Paul, of course, is talking about the giving of money or other resources to the work and service of the Lord; but the same principle applies equally to the giving of praise. God loves a cheerful giver. Praise that is not given cheerfully falls short of the ideal.

If expressing your praise is a struggle; something is seriously wrong. If a friend says to you, "I have had a problem with a hasty temper for some time, but I have agonized and struggled over it

Meditation

and, now, I have found victory,” you would probably say, “Splendid, I’m delighted to hear it.” If, however, the same friend said to you, “You have done quite a lot for me and I have come to appreciate it, but it has cost me a lot of weary effort, “you would probably tell him to keep appreciation to himself. True thankfulness is spontaneous and happy- or else, it falls short of the mark.

Do you remember that unwanted Christmas present? When it was given to you, you groped for words of appreciation that wouldn’t come. It was kind of the person who gave it to you, of course, and you felt you ought to be grateful. You stammered a little. “Thanks,” you said, “Thanks very much” but deep down inside, you knew it was not real appreciation. However, what happened when you were given something you really wanted? How the words of gratitude tumble out! “Thanks ever so much. It’s just what I wanted.” No feeling that you ought to be grateful. You were just grateful-you could not help yourself.

O God, how I long for my gratitude to you to be like that-the spontaneous overflow of a swelling heart. Help me to be a truly grateful person; not engineer in gratitude but give the real thing. Amen!

Praise that is not given cheerfully falls short of the ideal.

➤ WITH GRACE DAY 27

For Reading and meditation: Colossians 3:16-17; Ephesians 5:18-20

“Singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16 KJV)

We continue to examine the requirements for a thankful worshipper. Today’s meditation centers on another quality that is needed to accompany praise-given to God, which is divine grace. The most frequently used word in the New Testament for giving thanks is the Greek word *eucharistein*, which implies intimacy with the person to whom the thank is given. Matthew uses this word when he records the story of Christ giving thanks to His Father at the Last Supper (Matt. 26:27). The root word for thanksgiving is *charis* “grace.” “This is why while giving thanks before a meal; we refer to it as “saying grace.” However, what does Paul mean when he says that we should praise God “with grace in our hearts to the Lord”?

There are many definitions of grace and all of them are inadequate. St. Augustine wrote, “What is grace? I know until you ask me; when you ask me, I do not know.” Grace is goodwill, magnanimity, and big-heartedness. A Christian who has grace will have a generous disposition; will hold no bitterness and harbor no resentment.

I heard of a family who were meticulous in saying “grace” before meals, but as soon as the meal began, they quarreled with each other consistently. One of the children spent a few days with another family who did not only say “grace” before their meals but demonstrated grace while they ate. There was no bickering, no quarreling. “Now I see why I didn’t have an appetite,” said the girl. “My family is always quarreling; but since I’ve been here, my appetite has come back and I’m eating normally. I feel well.”

You can’t praise God genuinely if you have a bitter and quarrelsome spirit. If you do, then you are praising God without grace in your heart.

Lord, I see the folly of trying to praise you and be at peace with you when my heart is not at peace with others. Make me a truly gracious person in everything I do and with everyone I meet. Then, my praise will reach the highest height of heaven. Amen. You can’t praise God genuinely if

Spiritual Discipline

you have a bitter spirit.

➤ FAITH DAY 28

For Reading and meditation: Hebrews 11:1-10

“Without faith, it is impossible to please God” (verse 6)

We are to consider one final condition and requirement for a thankful worshiper which is faith. We have been seeing in recent weeks that God commands us to praise Him for everything that happens to us-good, bad, and indifference (Eph. 5:20). We can only do this when we have the faith and confidence to believe that God is working everything together for the specific good of making us like His Son; thereby, conforming us to His image (Rom. 8:28-29).

The condition for enjoying our Christian liberty, as stated by Paul to Timothy, is that we receive everything with thanksgiving (1 Tim. 4:4). I have often referred in my writings to Kagawa, the famous Japanese Christian. He is criticized by many for some of his statements, but even his harshest critics recognized him to be a true man of God.

In his later years, having lost his eyesight, he stubbornly refused to believe that God had finished with him and his life. Faith rose up in him to find a cause for gratitude. He wrote, “Having so largely lost my eyesight, the power to see has extended into every part and parcel of my person. Eye-blindness means a wider seeing.” He further wrote, “I am conscious that I am adventuring with God.”

However, the real secret of his faith is revealed in his words, “Despite the lack of my eyesight, the whole creation is mine. God threw it ink when He gave me Christ.” That is it! All things are ours if we have Christ. As long as I love God and have faith to believe that everything that comes my way can be used for greater effectiveness, then nothing can stop the swelling of praise in my heart. Nothing!

My Father and my God, give me the faith that locks into your providence and dares to believe that good comes out of everything when you are in it. Amen.

“Despite the lack of my eye-sight, the whole creation is mine.

➤ WORKING WITH GOD’S DESIGN DAY 29

For Reading and Meditation: Psalm 103:1-22

“Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name” (verse 1).

Having examined, over the past weeks, something related to the practical benefits of praise, we turn to consider a question which must be uppermost in many people’s minds: What do I do if I don’t really feel like praising God? If I give God praise when I don’t feel like it, am I not in danger of engineering gratitude? Am I not a hypocrite? The problem is compounded for some when they read in church liturgy such statements as this: “It is very meet, right, and our broadest duty, that we should at all time, and in all places, give thanks unto thee, O Lord.” If a person is thankful only because it is “meeting, right and our broadest duty,” is that true thankfulness? Thankfulness is like love; it is only truly satisfying when it is spontaneous; when it leaps out of itself, so to speak, when it cannot be held in.

While reading through the psalm chosen for today’s meditation, one might say, “I don’t feel like that. The psalmist’s sentiments are foreign to me.” What then is the way of true thanksgiving? Foremost is that we must understand something of the wonderful design of our beings, and work

Meditation

with that design to achieve what God wants and expects of us.

There are three main aspects to our being: will, feelings, and thoughts. Our feelings do not respond to an act of will, but they are greatly influenced by two other factors-right factors, but let's begin today by determining to fill our thoughts with the right content, for right thinking always produces right feelings.

O Father, help me to feed my thoughts on the message of your love and your goodness. Then, my feelings will carry the message too. Amen!

Right thinking produces right feelings.

➤ BLESSINGS WORTH THINKING ABOUT DAY 30

For Reading and Meditation: Philippians 4:1-8

"If anything is . . . Praiseworthy - think about such things" (v. 8).

Yesterday, the emphasis was that our thoughts greatly affect our feelings. Our emotions follow our thoughts just like baby ducks follow their mother. Although, the will is powerless to influence the emotions, this is not true of the thoughts. Thoughts can direct and focus the emotions in a way that can bring about great changes in our feelings. This, then, is the first step on the path of thanksgiving-to think on God's goodness, to fill the mind with the facts concerning His love, and to hold them in the thoughts until they, in turn, have their effect on the emotions.

There is a hymn which states, "Count your blessings" a good but an impossible advice. Well, think again-your arithmetic is not good enough! There are a million things of which you are not even aware, but the sweat and the toil would, in themselves, be useless apart from the blessing of God.

The great majority of us have never been desperately hungry; while millions of people starve, there is usually enough on our tables. Think about that! Think too of the blessings of love and friendship. If you feel sick, there would, no doubt, be a loving hand to smoothen your pillow. If you suffered bereavement, someone would share your in suffering. Love and friendship! Do you have them? They are blessings worth thinking about. Think also of the things which we take so often for granted- the smile of a friend, a birthday or an anniversary, the loyalty of one's family, good health, and so on.

Think, therefore, on God's blessings and be thankful.

O God, forgive me that I am such an ungrateful creature. Help me to focus my thoughts on the abundance of your blessings so that, in turn, my heart might be full of praise. Amen.

Think on God's blessings and be thankful.

➤ REASON FOR THANKSGIVING DAY 31

For Reading and Meditation: 2 Corinthians 4: 1-15

"So that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God" (verse 15)

In 1930 when America was fighting the grip of economic depression, the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism raised a strong protest against the keeping of the annual Thanksgiving Day, which is commemorated on the third Thursday in November. They claimed that in a country where thousands were without jobs, there could be no reason for thanksgiving. Millions, however, ignored their protest and gathered in their homes as usual to give

Spiritual Discipline

thanks and praises to God for His blessings upon the humbled and penitent into the arms of a loving heavenly Father? And what too of the blessings that come from our Saviour Himself- salvation, sanctification, revelation, or the love that overshadows us, encompasses us, and undergirds us?

Is there no reason for thanksgiving? Away with the suggestion! We thank God for the air we breathe, the light by which we see, the kiss of devotion upon the lips of a mother or wife, the cry of a new-born baby, the smell of newly mowed grass. Let us, in this disturbed, confused, turbulent, and God-denying generation, meditate on the goodness of our God until we build inside our souls a steeple of praise, and install within it the symphonic sounds of everlasting rejoicing.

O God, again I have to confess that I am prone to see only the shade when the sunshine of your love beams all around me. Today, and every day, with your help, I shall focus more on the sunshine than the shade. Amen.

In this God-denying generation, meditate on the goodness of God.

➤ A JOURNAL OF GRATEFULNESS DAY 32

For Reading and Meditation: Philippians 1:3-11

“I thank my God every time I remember you” (verse 3).

If the first step on the pathway to praise is to think about our blessings- and to think on them long and hard- then, it makes sense to record the more special blessings in a permanent form, otherwise, they might be forgotten.

A missionary, who recorded all his prayer requests, claimed that between 87 and 90 percent of his prayers were answered precisely the way he had asked. Whenever he felt a little discouraged, he would take out his notebook, meditate on the goodness of God to him, and it would not be long, he wrote, before praise would “bubble up in his soul.” Make a practice of noting God’s special blessings, name them one by one; and it will surprise you what the Lord hath done. Make a practice, too, of thanking those through whom some of God’s blessings come. It does people good to be thanked.

One man, I know, keeps a Journal of Gratefulness in which he records the names of those whom God has used to encourage or minister to them. Everyone gets a letter of thanks. He got the idea from reading about a well-known writer who had suffered a nervous breakdown and was confined to a hospital room. A friend said to him, “Why don’t you list the people who have helped you in your life and write them a letter of thanks?” He did, and this not only turned out to be the basis of his healing but also opened a whole new dimension to his life. He recalled a school-teacher who had given extra time to teach him, and he wrote to her. She replied, “When I got your letter, I was blinded with tears. I taught in school for fifty years, and yours is the first note of appreciation I have ever received. I shall cherish it until the day I die.”

Father, if there is someone to whom I should say “thank you,” help me recall the situation and contact them- for your own dear Name’s sake. Amen.

Record special blessings; otherwise, they might be forgotten.

➤ THANKSGIVING FOREVERYTHING DAY 33

For Reading and Meditation: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

“Give thanks in all circumstances, for this are God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (v. 18).

Meditation

Today, we are to continue in considering the importance of showing a personal “thank you”; not only to God, but also to those who have helped us or have ministered to us. “Pride,” notes one writer “believes that I achieved what in reality God and others did for me and through me.”

Think back as far as you can remember all the people who have benefited your life. Have you ever thanked them? Eventually, you might want to thank them all, but begin by selecting one and send him or her letter of appreciation. The way to accomplish a seemingly impossible task is to break it down into achievable goals. Your first goal should be just one letter.

One man I knew wrote, not only to his former school-teacher, but also to a bishop who had been of great spiritual help to him. Although, the thanks were belated, this is what the bishop wrote in reply: “Your letter was so beautiful, so real, that as I sat reading it in my study, the tears fell from my eyes- tears of gratitude. My wife is now dead, but before I realized what I was doing, I rose from my chair and called her name to show it to her, forgetting for a moment that she was gone. You will never know how much your letter has warmed my spirit. I have been walking about in the glow of it all day long.” Need I say anything more? So, make a practice of thanking people; it will please God. He often sends His special mercies by the hands of other people, and He likes His messengers to be thanked also. Gratitude is only as sincere as the effort one makes to express it. “Someone somewhere is waiting for a letter from you.” Lord, don’t let me wriggle past this challenge or try to rationalize it in anyway. Make me a thankful person both to you and your messengers. Amen.

Gratitude is only as sincere as the effort you make to express it.

➤ A RANSOMED SINNER DAY 34

For Reading and Meditation: 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

“Thank God for his Son—his Gift too wonderful for words” (verse TL B).

Today, we shall continue meditating on the importance of focusing our thoughts on God’s blessings in our lives so that right thinking can produce the right feelings. What is the greatest blessing God has given us? There can be no doubt about the fact that it is Christ! The blessing of knowing Him is so great that as Paul states in the text before us today, it’s just “too wonderful for words.”

Have you ever thought what your life would be like without Jesus Christ! It would be a dark picture; When Baron Von Huegel considered that question, he wrote, “I should be A corrupt, or, at least, an incredibly unhappy, violent, bitter, self-occupied, self-destructive soul, was it not for Christ and for Him having come and saved me from myself.” You and I might phrase it differently, but we would all share the same conclusion: without Christ we would be utterly self-centered and self-engrossed.

This author met Christ fifty years ago at the front of a church in south Wales. I came to Him with nothing to offer except my moral and spiritual bankruptcy. To my amazement, He took me, forgave me, reconciled me to God, to myself, to others, to nature, to life, and sent my soul singing its way down through the years.

A missionary, traveling on a plane, was given a card with his meal. On it was written: “What do you think of our meals?” He wrote: “Too good for a ransomed sinner.” When the stewardess read the card, she smiled and asked him what he meant. He told her that this was the way he looked at everything—not just a meal. He saw everything in the light of being a ransomed sinner. How do you take things—for granted or with gratitude?

Spiritual Discipline

Blessed Saviour, I wonder if I will ever get over the wonder of being a ransomed sinner. I do not doubt it, nor do I want to get over it. I shall be grateful for all eternity. Amen!

How do you take things—for granted or with gratitude?

➤ ACHIEVING THE IMPOSSIBLE DAY 35

For Reading and Meditation: Philippians 2:12-18

“God is at work within you, helping you want to obey him, and then, helping you does what he wants” (verse 13 TL B).

We have been studying for the past few days the importance of thinking about God’s multiplied mercies in order to prime the pump of praise in our hearts. We cannot, by an act of will, change our feelings, but we can use our will to focus on right thoughts; and these, in turn, bring about right feelings, but He does hold us responsible for what we do with our wills.

The will can be used in another direction also—to bring about changes in the way we act and behave. Stanley Jones stated, “It is easier to act yourself into a new way of thinking than to think yourself into a new way of acting.” Now, don’t misunderstand this. He is not saying it is better but easier. The focusing of thoughts may be difficult for some people, especially if you are down in the dumps or depressed. If this is a problem and you can’t use your will to focus your thoughts on God’s blessing, then, use your will to change your behaviour.

I once asked a depressed person to read aloud Psalm 136. He did—dolefully. “Now read it again,” I said, “but this time throwback your shoulders, say the words with emphasis, and imagine how you would say it if you really believe what you are reading.” He did what I asked and said that he immediately felt better. I got him to read it several times in this way and his depression was lifted (Not all depression, of course, responds to this method). There is an important principle here. When we use our will to do what God asks us to do—praise Him even though we don’t feel like it—He responds to this act of faith by bringing about a change in our feelings—miraculously.

O Father, help me to understand and apply this important principle to my personality. Give me the faith that believes that when I do the possible, you will do the impossible. Amen.

The will can bring about changes in the way we act and behave.

➤ THE ONE CENTRAL TRUTH DAY 36

For Reading and Meditation: 2 Corinthians 2:1-17

“But thanks be to God, who in Chris always leads us in triumph” (Verse 14 RSV).

We saw last week that what holds our thoughts holds our emotions. It follows, therefore, that if we work on the content of our thoughts, this, in turn, will determine the content of our emotions. This week, we shall examine one of the most vital truths a Christian must grasp if his life is to be free from strain and become a paean of praise.

A letter I received contained this request: “Is there a central truth, one dominant unifying concept, which a Christian must believe, and which, more than anything else, enables him to face all the adversities and discouragement of life triumphantly?” I replied that there was, and I gave what in my view is the most sustaining truth of the Christian life: It is not so much what happens to us that is important but how we respond to it. We are what we respond to—nothing more and nothing less.

Meditation

Toynbee, the great historian, once wrote, "When a civilization-or an individual-comes up against a problem, he will react in one of the four ways: (a) archaism; (b) futurism; (c) detachment; and (d) transformation."The first three represent a fleeing from the issue while, the fourth is a facing of the issue, and transforming it into something better. When we hit a problem, we will probably adopt one of these four attitudes in order to find a solution. We will detach, or take everything that comes-good, bad, and indifferent-and turn it into something else. Only a Christian can take the last of these ways as only the Christian faith has the power to turn every difficulty into a discovery, every test into a triumph, and every setback into spring-board.

My Father and my God, I sense today that I am on the verge of discovering the secret of poise and power in the Christian life. Hold me steady so that I shall not miss one single aspect of it In Jesus' Name. Amen

Only the Christian faith provides the power to turn every difficulty into a discovery.

➤ THE WAY OF TRANSFORMATION DAY 37

For Reading and Meditation: Psalm 139:7-12

"Even there, your hand will guide me; your strength will support me" (verse 10 TL B).

There are various ways in which we can respond to life's difficulties and problems, but the Christian way is the way of transformation. By transformation, I mean the facing of life as it comes day by day and be beneficial. If you adopt this attitude to life and make it a central conviction, you will, inevitably, become a truly praising person.

A famous psychiatrist wrote, "Thankfulness is the perfect antidote for mental illness." But what is mental illness? I took a book on the subject of psychology off my bookshelf to find out. This is what it stated, "Mental illness is a fear of reality- a lack of awareness, an escape from the present." This is a limited definition, of course, but it is a fact that the mentally ill finds it difficult to face reality while the mentally healthy is better equipped to face life with calmness and confidence.

But what is reality? Reality is seeing life as it is. Life comes to us with many problems-injustices, deceit pain; hurt, the disloyalty of friends, sickness, accidents, diseases, and so on. For the Christian, however, there is another side to this. Reality includes the sovereignty of God; the loving purposes of the Almighty and the providential care that He has for His own. If a Christian doesn't see the full perspective- that God is in control of the universe and that He is at work in turning every stumbling block into a stepping-stone -it is quite possible that he/she will succumb to difficult situations, because he/she is failing to respond correctly.

Reality, for the Christian, is bringing Jesus alongside all of life's problems and seeing life from His point of view.

O God, I am so thankful that I don't need to run away from anything. I can meet everything with a song- a song of victory. Transformation is my open door into reality. Amen.

God is at work in turning every stumbling block into a stepping-stone.

➤ MAKE EVERY THING SERVE DAY 38

For Reading and Meditation: 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

"We are hard pressed . . . but not crushed . . . struck down, but not destroyed." (verse 8-9)

Today we ask ourselves, how did Jesus face difficulties and problems in His own life? Did He retreat into the past, escape into the future, withdraw into Himself, or take everything that came

Spiritual Discipline

and transform it?

Actually, Jesus took the same way of transformation. He refused to retreat into Israel's glorious past - refused to escape into the glorious future of the kingdom of God, and he refused to withdraw in detachment as did the Pharisees (the separatists). He faced life realistically and made it to serve Him.

He was employed as a carpenter, and as He worked, made Himself ready for the day when He would build a new humanity. He met temptation in the wilderness and made it serve and strengthen Him. He went into the wilderness "full of the Holy Spirit" and came out "in the power of the Spirit" (Lk. 4:1-14). Temptation turned fullness into power. He took twelve ordinary men and made them into preachers and teachers who changed the course of history. He sat by a well in a little town called Sycha in the despised province of Samaria, and led a woman into salvation; where-upon, she became an evangelist to the whole village, saying, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did" (Jn. 4:29).

When He was criticized by the people of His day for eating with publicans and sinners, He took the criticism and transformed it into three parables—The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, and The Lost Son (Luke 15). These are, without doubt, the most beautiful parables ever uttered; showing the heart of a seeking, loving, and redemptive God. He took a reviling and turned it into a revelation.

O Father, I see so clearly that if I hold this tremendous truth in my heart –that with you I can transform everything that comes—then, praise will be as natural to me as the very air I breathe. Thank you, Father. Amen.

He took a reviling and turned it into a revelation.

➤ A RADIANT PHILOSOPHY DAY 39

For Reading and Meditation: Hebrew 13:1-8

"For God has said, 'I will never Neither fails you nor forsakes you.' That is why we can say... 'The Lord is my Helper and I am not afraid of anything'" (verse 5-6 TLB).

Once, I was asked, is there one central truth which a Christian must believe, which, more than anything else, will enable him to face all the adversities of life triumphantly? I replied that there was. It is not so much what happens to us that is important but how we respond to it. This was the peace and a poise that kept Him unperturbed, even in the midst of a storm!

Was this characteristic of Jesus only? No, His disciples possessed it too. Act 5:40-41 records that after the apostles had been beaten, they left the presence of the council rejoicing. Rejoicing over injustice! When you can rejoice at an injustice done to you, then, you are really triumphant. You have transformed the worst into the best. A joyous Christian was arrested for preaching on the street. He said to one of the policemen who led him away, "If you have the same opinion of me as I have of you, then, we are going to have a wonderful time together." The policemen didn't know what to do with the man but to let him go. The man transformed the situation with his goodwill.

A New Testament text referring to Joseph states thus: "And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God" (Acts 7:9 RSV). That phrase, "But God," is at the end of every injustice and every problem. He has the last word. Christ can transform every bad thing that comes your way—sorrow, pain, hurt, disloyalty, bereavement—everything, providing you let Him. This is an incomparable philosophy of life—and a radiant one.

Meditation

Lord Jesus, with this secret in my heart, I can face everything in the knowledge that life can do nothing to me, and I can do everything to it—I can transform it. Praise be to your wonderful Name. Amen.

When you can rejoice at an injustice done to you, then you are really triumphant.

➤ REDEMPTIVE REACTIONS DAY 40

For Reading and Meditation: Luke 10:25-37

“On one occasion, an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus” (verse 25).

The issue of developing the right responses to what happens to us deserves some further meditation. A modern writer states, “Religion is occupied, to a great degree, with the performance of right actions—do this, don’t do that, and so on.” This is important, but it is only half the truth.

Right actions are an essential and integral part of the Christian message, but so are right reactions. Some people would go so far as to say that our reactions are more important than our actions. There are many people who do not lie, cheat, steal, or commit adultery. They are outwardly correct in their actions, but they may be upset and inwardly disrupted by wrong reactions to what life and other people do to them. Drunkenness, adultery, lying, cheating, and stealing can cloud the countenance and make the lines of the face sag. However, just as definite will the same thing happen to you if you react to life with self-pity, resentment, fear, jealousy, or retaliation. These and other negative reactions made for a disrupted interior and a sad face.

The actions of Jesus were wonderful, but so were His reactions. About half of the Gospels are taken up with a description of His actions while the other half with His reactions, and His reactions were as redemptive and revealing as His actions. When a lawyer stood up to put Him to the test, He answered his question and then gave the world the unforgettable story of the Good Samaritan. On the cross, He prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk. 23:34). The highest reaction to the greatest injustices that revealed the nature of God as redemptive love in final terms.

Lord Jesus, how can I thank you enough for showing me how to react to life. Now, I have the key; help me to place it in the locked doors I face today and react redemptive to everything. Amen!

Jesus’ reactions were as redemptive and revealing as His actions.

➤ TURNING HELL INTO HEAVEN DAY 41

For Reading and Meditation: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

“Love never fails” (verse 8).

We are seeing that there is a Christian way of reacting to everything that comes, and right reactions are just as important as right actions.

Some years ago, a woman sought the advice of a Christian counselor on whether or not she should get a divorce. After hearing her story, the counselor said, “If what you have said is true, then, if ever a woman had a right to a divorce, you have one.” They had broken every moral law and brutalized his wife so much that she had to spend nights away from home in fear for her physical safety. The counselor went further to say, however, “The question is not so much about what your right is, but whether you can take the grace of God in this situation and let it make you better.”

I know many Christian counselors who would refrain from giving that kind of advice, but this one felt it was what God would have him say. The woman refrained from instituting divorce

Spiritual Discipline

proceedings and went through another five years of hell—literally. Her husband would lock her out of the house in drunken fits, even nailing up the doors. He destroyed some of her clothes and smeared the rest with boot polish. She prayed every day, “Lord, teach me how to respond to this situation so that I might make it serve the ends of your kingdom.”

She continued to show such love to her husband that, eventually, her love broke him. He gave his life to Christ, stopped drinking, and rebuilt his business. The daughter told her mother, “If that had been me, I doubt whether I could have done it.” But the mother, by utilizing the grace God, gave her and reacting in a loving way, succeeded in turning a hell into a heaven.

Father, I wonder how I would have responded in this situation. One thing is clear—there is a great gap between what I am and what I know I can be. Help me to close that gap—beginning today for Jesus’ sake. Amen!

“Lord, make this problem serve the ends of your kingdom.”

➤ UNRESOLVED CONFLICTS DAY 42

For Reading and Meditation: Luke 9:51-56

“When the disciples ...saw this, they asked, ‘Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?’” (Verse 54).

Today, we shall continue to meditate on the need for developing right reactions to life. In this world, a Christian is bound to be treated in an unchristian way; for humanity is largely unchristian. The reactions to unchristian treatment become as important as their actions.

I know a woman who, for her family was treating her poorly, developed a good deal of self-pity which pushed her toward a martyr complex. One day, someone gave her a copy of *Every Day with Jesus* where she read about “How to be Stable in an Unstable World.” Through reading the piece, she saw how much she was drifting from the Christian position and surrendered her attitude of self-pity. She wrote to me to say, “If that book had not fallen into my hands at that time, I think I would have drifted too far into a martyrdom complex too difficult to have a come-back.”

➤ A LADDER TO RIGHT REACTIONS DAY 43

For Reading and Meditation: Romans 12:9-21

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (verse 21)

We have seen enough to convince us that if we are to enjoy a life of continued praise, we must pay attention, not only to our actions, but to our reactions as well. As this matter of right reaction is so important to spiritual and physical health, let me offer you a ladder by which you can climb out of the pit of distorted thinking.

Spend some time quietly before God by going over your life to see if you are reacting wrongly to life’s situations. God knows all about us because He is omniscient; but the question is, do we know all there is to be known about ourselves? The answer, of course, is that we do not; for there are areas deep within us which respond only to honest self-examination. Psalm 139 begins by stating that God knows everything there is to know about us; why pray that He might search us when you know that each person needs to know more about himself. Ask God to help you see yourself as He sees you- from within. You have been looking at life from a certain angle, and it will not be easy for you to see yourself differently unless He comes to your aid. You will need divine aid to shift to God’s viewpoint.

Meditation

Be alert to the fact that you will try to defend yourself since defenses have been built up by you over many years to justify your reactions. Many of us argue ourselves into self-justification of our reactions so that it is not easy to admit we are wrong. It is far easier to confess wrong actions than wrong reactions. Pay special attention to this; for unless you win at this point, you will be blocked all along the way.

Lord Jesus, I see that you want to save me completely from wrong reactions and wrong actions. I consent to what you are doing in my life today, and I surrender both of these to you now for your praise and glory. Amen!

It is far easier to confess wrong actions than wrong reactions.

➤ LIKE PRODUCES LIKE DAY 44

For Reading and Meditation: Mark 3:20-30

“How can Satan drive out Satan?” (Verse 23).

Today, we are to continue on building a ladder that will help us overcome wrong reactions. Before we go to the next step, however, we must pause to consider what one of yesterday’s lesson. It is easier, it was observed, to confess wrong actions than wrong reactions; for the wrong reactions take place deep within us, away from the glare and scrutiny of the vice of the public gaze. Someone once wrote that, “Wrong reactions are the vice of the virtuous.” Virtuous people can point to wrongs being done to them and use the outer wrongs to justify the inner wrongs. However, there can be no justification for wrong reactions, for whether seemingly justified by the actions of others or not, they are inwardly devastating. To justify them will not take away their evil effects-in you.

Be relentless with wrong reactions: uproot them, and get them out leaving no roots to sprout again. It’s no good chopping away at the trunk or the branches if the roots are allowed to remain. A man once said to me, when I pleaded with him to give up his resentment of a fellow Christian, “But my resentment of him is keeping him under control; God is using my resentment redemptively. It may be a wrong means, but it will achieve a right end.” However, resentment is a false end. Can Satan drive out Satan? Can someone by acting like the devil get the devil out of other people? Like produces like. A bitter spring produces a bitter stream, and resentment produces resentment. Dig remorselessly into your life and make sure that everything is brought up and out. A partial surrender ends only in total defeat.

Lord, I want to take a step once and for all from wrong reactions to right reactions. I do it now, in your presence; firmly, positively and conclusively, for your own dear Name’s sake. Amen!

➤ BE READY TO CHANGESDAY 45

For Reading and meditation: Philippians 3:1-11

“Whatever was to my profit, I now consider a loss for the sake of Christ” (v. 7)

Today, we are to continue in climbing the ladder that leads one out of wrong reactions.

Resist the built-in desire that you have to stay as you are, and make up your mind that with God’s help, that you are going to change. There is something about human nature that resists change. We cling to old habits and desires simply because, like shoes we have worn for some time, they feel comfortable and secure. Many of the ceremonies in the House of Commons in Great Britain are ‘out-of date’ and have no relevance to a modern generation, but the traditionalists would say, “Let things remain as they are-there is no real need for a change.” The outdated

Spiritual Discipline

ceremonies of the House of Commons harm no one, but there are many things that we cling to in our lives which must go, if we are to move on into maturity in the Christian life. We are disturbed by change; our ability and willingness to change for the better into Christ-likeness, however, determines our spiritual poise and power.

Picture the worst thing that can happen to you, and imagine yourself responding to it with praise. Unless you can be thankful for the worst that can happen, then, you are a candidate for insecurity. "No man wrote Professor John Joyce, "is safe unless he can stand anything that can happen to him." At the heart of many lives is a worm eating away that says, "Suppose this is taken away or lost or destroyed- what then?" When I say "worst," I have to make one exception-sin. You can't be thankful for that! A Christian, with God's help, can stand anything that happens to him. And why? Because whatever happens to him can be used for greater and higher purposes.

O Father, already, I can feel my feet on this ladder to right reactions. In you I am safe, for nothing can work successfully against me. Eternal praise be to your Name. Amen.

Christians with God's help can stand anything that happens to them.

➤ IT COMES TO PASS DAY 46

For Reading and Meditation: Psalm 30: 1-12

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (verse 5, KJV)

Today, we come now to the last two steps on the ladder out of wrong reactions.

❖ God's Forgiveness

Accept God's forgiveness for your wrong reactions as well as for your wrong actions. God is as eager to deliver you from your wrong reaction as from your wrong actions. The father in the story of The Prodigal Son wanted to restore his younger son who had sinned by his actions, but he was just as eager to restore the elder son who had sinned by his wrong reaction of bitterness and unforgiveness. If at the end of the story, the eldest son was "outside," it was not because redemption was not extended to both.

Realize that everything that happens – will always come to pass. A preacher with little education was asked what Bible verse he loved most. He replied, "And it came to pass." When pressed for the reason for this strange choice, he replied, "Well, problem and difficulties come our way, but they always come to, pass." His application of that particular text was not an accurate biblical interpretation, but as someone stated who heard him made the remarks, "It was unsoundly sound!" Troubles come, but they always come to pass.

Our text for today states, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." The sorrow comes and passes, but the joy goes on forever. In the midst of life's difficult problems, say to yourself, "Though it comes, but it shall come to pass." Then take hold of God's grace and remain steady. Are you facing a storm at this very moment? Then, there is a word from God for you: hold on to God and ride on the storm. It has come, but it will come to pass.

O God, my Father, I am thankful that my light afflictions, which are but for the moment, are working out for me "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." I can sit still. Help me to do so. Amen. Take hold of God's grace and remain steady.

Meditation

➤ THE PTLA CLUB DAY 47

For Reading and Meditation: Romans 12:9-21

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn” (verse 15).

As we come to our last day of meditation together, I want to share with you some words of caution and admonition. First, let us be on our guard that we do not reduce praise to the level of mere clichés.

I heard that some years ago, a group of Christians who called themselves “The PTLA Club.” The initials PTLA, I understand, means, “**Praise the Lord Anyway.**” I have it on good authority that on one occasion, the group visited the home of a father and mother whose son has been killed by a hit-and-run driver while walking home from school.

“Well, PTLA,” said the spokesman for the group to the grieving parents.

“PTLA?” said the father. “I’m afraid; I don’t understand what you mean.” “Praise the Lord anyway,” said the spokesman. “If you do that, you will stop concentrating on your problem, and you will feel a lot better for it.”

Can you think of anything more insensitive than that remark? There was nothing wrong with the advice to give praise with statement such as “Praise the Lord” and turn them into clichés? There are many reasons, but the main one is a lack of deep faith in the providence of God, and so, they try to reassure themselves with nice-sounding phrases. It is a form of escapism which seeks to dull the harshness of reality. One Christian psychiatrist refers to it as a form of Christian schizophrenia—a faith that maintains itself by means of a fantasy word, completely divorced from the real world of pain, suffering, evil, and a cross.

O Father, make me sensitive to the hurts and suffering of others so that I do not gloss over their problems with a quick PTLA. I must be careful not only what I say, but also when I say it. Amen.

➤ WE ARE FREE! DAY 48

For Reading and Meditation: 1 John 4:7-2

“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us” (v. 10).

Another danger to be avoided in relation to the matter of giving praise is seeing it as a means by which we earn God’s love. Some Christians regard praise as a good piece of behaviour by which they earn God’s approval. God does not love us because He loves us.

❖ God Already Loves You

We can see right at the beginning of our studies that God has no needs. He doesn’t need our gifts. He doesn’t need our sacrifices and He doesn’t need our thanks. We are free! God’s attitude or response to Him may be. Isn’t this incredible? It is so bewildering that multitudes of Christians stumble over it, particularly those who spent the early part of their lives trying to get an insensitive parent, or parents, to love them. Let me assure you that all the thankfulness in the world cannot pull one ounce more love out of God than He already gives you. Your thankfulness certainly changes you so that you can receive more of that love, but the block is never in Him—it is in you. There is nothing anyone can do that can motivate God to love you more than He does, for He already loves you with all the force and energy of His being.

Spiritual Discipline

As we are free to be thankful, this presents us with a uniquely human possibility—the choice to respond to Him spontaneously in thankfulness. As we have seen over and over again, during the past few weeks, genuine thanks are freely given. How could it be genuine if it is conditional or coerced? Let the wonder of this truth sink deep into your soul as it is spelled out again. God does not love you because you are thankful—you are thankful because He loves you.

Gracious Father, help me to focus on this truth until the wonder of it drives me forward in more active and fruitful services than I have ever known before for Jesus' sake. Amen!

God does not love us because we are thankful; rather, we are thankful because He loves us.

➤ NOT ENOUGH STARS! DAY 49

For Reading and Meditation: Psalm 145:1-21

“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised” (v. 3 KJV).

We come now to the last day in our meditations on praise and worship. One consideration remains as we draw to a close—what endless reasons we have to be thankful! We are often rebuked in our thanklessness by people less fortunate than ourselves and, conversely, we are often reminded by them of the number and sources of our blessings.

❖ Phelps's Box

A minister once told how he used to visit an invalid girl. She was a delightful Christian, but because of her affliction, she was confined to a “Phelps's Box.” It looked like a shallow coffin, and it was used many years ago for children who suffered from curvature of the spine. The little girl of whom the minister spoke was strapped into this box, and there, she lives day and night, being taken out only for an hour or two a day. She asked that her box be put near the window so she could see the sky.

One day, she said to the minister, “In this position, I can only look up, and on those nights when I find it difficult to sleep, I play with the stars.”

“How do you play with the stars?” asked the minister.

“Well, she said, “I pick out the brightest star I can find and I say, “That' Mommy.' I pick out another one and say, “That's Daddy.' I find a twinkling one for my brother, my puppy, my doctor, my spinal perambulator... “On and on, she went. Her list seemed endless and, sometime later, when she seemed to be running out of breath, she said, “But there just aren't enough stars to go around.”

If, after completing these readings, you think you have no reason to be thankful, then look out tonight and count the stars. There aren't enough stars to go around.

O God, take these meditation on praise and turn them into a burning glass that sets fire to my soul. You have given me so much: give me one thing more –a praising heart for Jesus' sake I ask it. Amen

What endless reasons we have to be thankful!

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'Spiritual Discipline' discusses the issue of spiritual discipline in no single feat. It underscores that it is a fluid concept, with a wide range of accepted meanings and applications. In broad terms, spiritual discipline or formation is the process of spiritual shaping and growth which offers the believer effective hand, feet, ear and heart to enable him to become a functional part of the Body of Christ in the dying society. The Book echoes and persuades the believer to truly live out his avowed faith without pretense. It also urges the adherent to not only be religious but to be spiritual by respecting human values, effective steward of the earth and other God-given blessings. The focus of the book is to bring the adherent to become what he ought to so as to create a decent society.

This Book which is primarily written to help Christian Leaders nurture their spiritual relationships as well as help God's people fulfill their ministry; explores truth from African Traditional Society, Psychology, Ethics, Education and Philosophy.



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