

# The Way of Jesus

## Week 20

### Introduction to the Disciplines

### Solitude and Simplicity

#### Key Verses:

Galatians 4:19

*My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!*

Matthew 6.33

*Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* (ESV)

*Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.*

(The Message)

**Key Term: *Spiritual Disciplines*** – Activities within our power that enable us to accomplish what we could not do by direct effort. They move our attention to the spiritual realm of our own heart as well as our outward behavior. They also help us withdraw from total dependence on the natural and to depend on ultimate reality – God and his kingdom.

#### **Celebration of Discipline: Introduction** (DVD1 Session One)

Central Truths:

- Galatians 4.19 provides a snapshot of the goal of practicing Spiritual disciplines. God works with us and invites us into a cooperative relationship with him for the purpose of transformation
- The Spiritual disciplines are the primary means whereby we are enabled to bring our individual power packs (our bodies) before God as living sacrifices.
- The process of *indirection* describes the means whereby we participate in something we can do by direct effort (the practice of a Spiritual Discipline) in order to receive resources to do what we could never do by direct effort (loving our enemies).
- The great enemy of the Spiritual Disciplines is legalism.
- The best place to get started is right where we are.

## Simplicity

### Reflection on Simplicity: Richard Foster (Celebration.. LG p.100)

The central point for the discipline of simplicity is to seek the Kingdom of God and the righteousness of his Kingdom *first*, and then everything necessary will come in its proper order.

The inward reality of simplicity involves a life of joyful unconcern for possessions.

Because we lack a divine Center, our need for security has led us to an insane attachment to things.

### Prayer

Suffer us, O Father, to come to Thee.

Lay thy hands on us and bless us.

Take away from us forever our own spirit and replace it by the instinct of Thy divine grace.

Take away from us our own will, and leave us only the desire of doing thy will.

Give us that beautiful, that lovable, that sublime simplicity which is the first and greatest of thy gifts. Amen.

J.N. Grou

### Richard Foster Video: Simplicity (DVD1 Session Six)

#### Central Truths:

- Simplicity is an inward reality that results from a focus on the Kingdom of God
- Within us there is a whole conglomerate of selves vying for attention and dominance. As a result, we often feel distracted, torn and overcommitted.
- Only when we experience life at the center – where our many selves come under control of the divine arbitrator – do we enter into balance and equilibrium in life.
- Trust that God desires our best interests is at the heart of the inward reality of simplicity.
- Simplicity is an inward reality that results in an outward lifestyle.
- Freedom from anxiety is characterized by three inner attitudes:
  - If what I have I receive as a gift from God, and
  - If what I have is to be cared for by God, and
  - If what I have is available to others, then I possess the inward reality of simplicity.

- Because trust is at the center of a life of simplicity, a good image for the inward reality of simplicity is that of falling back into the arms of Jesus – like a person falling backwards into a swimming pool (taking the ‘Nestea’ plunge)
- Three controlling principles for the outward reality of simplicity are these:
  - Buy things for their usefulness rather than for their status.
  - Reject anything that is producing an addiction in you.
  - Develop a habit of giving things away.
 (see Celebration of Disc. Pp.90-95 for an expanded list)
- Soren Kierkegaard reminds us that the only reliable path to simplicity is to seek first the Kingdom of God.

### Notes:

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## A Conversation With Dallas Willard and Richard Foster

### OUTWARD DISCIPLINES

#### Simplicity

RF: That’s why the Discipline of simplicity, for example, is a great—well, actually frugality is the Discipline, and simplicity is the result of a life of frugality.

DW: But the way simplicity has been understood, it really is frugality. And it leads to a life where you are able to get rid of the clutter, and you are able to have a unified purpose. And that means, among other things, you can throw stuff away.

RF: I remember this wonderful phrase—I think it was from William Penn—about letting go of “cumber.”

DW: Yes, and think of a society in which we have all these rental places where you can put your junk.

RF: Right, I've got to rent another storage place.

DW: You've already got your garage full. But what that says about the person—I mean, that they are inwardly in bondage!

RF: Exactly, because simplicity is an inward reality [such] that, when that change comes about, the inward reality results in an outward lifestyle free of cumber.

DW: I guess the thing you practice most in simplicity is letting things go. It's actually trusting God instead of keeping everything around that you might need, or on the other side (the really wealthy), [it would mean not] buying all this stuff.

RF: I remember once feeling drawn to experience this, and it wasn't much really; it was a ten-speed bike, and I felt I needed to just let go of it. I just listened for a couple of weeks, and I heard a man mention that he wanted very much to get a bicycle for his son, but didn't have the ability to do it. I went to him and said that we had one—used, but good—and I remember going to his house to give it to him singing that little chorus, "Freely, freely did we receive, freely, freely give." When we gave it to him, he came out to the car to talk to us, and he was only connected to the church in a really distant way, and he said, "Why are you doing this?" That gave a little opportunity to share a little about what was going on with me, and it was just a wonderful experience of letting go.

DW: Well, then, you know what you did was to bring the kingdom near to that man. You might just as well have said, "Because the kingdom is at hand."

I think after this talk, I'll go home and throw away twenty-five books.

RF: And your wife will rejoice; so long as they are not her books.

## Solitude

### Reflections on Solitude (DVD2 Session Seven)

#### Central Truths:

- Whereas prayer is the most central of the Disciplines of Engagement, the *via positiva*, solitude is the most central of the Disciplines of Abstinence, the *via negativa*.
- Solitude creates an open, empty space where we can be found by God and let go of all competing loyalties
- Thomas Merton says, "It is in deep solitude that I can find the gentleness with which to love others."
- Solitude and Silence teach me to love others for who they are, not for what they say.
- We need the balance of both solitude and community.
- In solitude we are not attempting to recharge our batteries so we can win a rat race; in solitude we learn to ignore the rat race altogether.
- Solitude can help us to learn to be present where we are.
- As we learn to die to ourselves, we can come alive in God.

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### A Conversation With Dallas Willard and Richard Foster

RF: Well, now, solitude is one of the key Disciplines, isn't it?

DW: I think for most of us in this world, solitude is the breakthrough Discipline; it's the primary Discipline because in solitude you really do just go alone and do nothing. And you have to add that last clause to help people get the point because when you go into solitude, you are saying to the world, "Hands off."

That is a very crucial move in being able to take hold of the spiritual life and redirect it. You have to come to the place where you are prepared to be alone and do nothing, and to allow yourself to find your soul because, really, I think the main thing people do in solitude is discover they have a soul; they have something that is lasting, that is eternal, beyond the reach of anything except God, and they are able then to re-center their picture of life and then make choices, like about simplicity. I may have to stay in solitude for a while before I can throw those twenty-five books away.

RF: You know, your adding that phrase “and do nothing” is so valuable. I remember one of my earlier experiences. I went to this little retreat place, and I had been reading in 1 Samuel, so I thought I’d start there—which I thought was good—but after 1 Samuel comes 2 Samuel, and then I brought a book about prayer, and I began reading that, and I remember thinking, *Why am I not praying?* I mean, I was doing all these good things, but as a way of keeping me from learning to be still.

DW: See, you are holding on to your projects when you do that.

RF: Right, these things I could quantify, these things I could measure, and it wasn’t until the next day when there were three little sisters, nuns, who invited me to their worship time that morning, so I went... They were so gracious; the first thing we did was to sing, and I’m sure they chose it for me; it was “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”—the Luther hymn. Then the sister in charge said, “And now we are going to be quiet and listen to God.” And I was trapped. For twenty minutes I couldn’t do anything.

DW: [laughs] And a Quaker at that...

RF: And it just opened up this whole recognition.

DW: Well, you see, your time on the island—that was solitude [too]. And it really scares people because they are so used to running their world. But here again, I would say that once they experience it, all doubt is gone. And truthfully, spiritual Disciplines in general you can talk about until you turn blue, but they are self-validating. Actually, nothing else validates them [but experience]. And you have to stay in this posture—in this care of solitude—accepting being alone and doing nothing. Until you come to that—experiencing doing nothing—you don’t get it. I encourage people, pastors, and leaders to have some time each week when they do nothing. Now, for some people golfing is about as close to that as they will get.

RF: When I golf, it is doing nothing.

DW: But if you can do it in that attitude, well, at least it's not competitive.

## **Spiritual Tool: Simplicity Exercises**

### **Thoughts**

Commit Matthew 6.25-34 to memory this week. Meditate on it, pray over it, and write down any resulting thoughts, insights and questions.

### **Emotions**

Clean out your clothes closet and give away everything you have not worn in the past year. What do your feelings teach you?

### **Will**

Monitor your attitudes and behavior regarding material possessions as you encounter them in your daily activities this week.

### **Behavior**

What is something you can do to simplify your life? Tell a friend, then do it.

### **Social Interactions**

Simplify your speech. Make every attempt to avoid words used either to draw attention to your accomplishments or to flatter the other person.

## **Readings for Next Week:**

Celebration of Discipline, Chs 1 & 3