

Learning From Jesus

Week 15

Introduction to the Disciplines & Solitude

Key Verse: Galatians 4:19 (RSV)

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

Reflections on An Introduction to the Disciplines

Celebration of Discipline Session One: Introduction

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 successful application of the Spiritual Disciplines is legalism.
- The best place to get started is right where we are.

Notes:

Where did the title *Celebration of Discipline* come from?

DW: You know, I don't think I've ever asked you, where did the title *Celebration of Discipline* come from? Because that was an ingenious gift to put those two together.

RF: Originally, I thought of the title *The Liberty of Discipline* because I wanted people to see how discipline moves us to liberation. We felt, however, that the term *liberty*, especially at that time, might have some political connotations that didn't... that we didn't want.

DW: In philosophy, especially moral philosophy, it has long been understood that the person of the greatest virtue is the person who is most free. There is a real, deep connection between them [virtue and freedom]. And the person who is the most disciplined is the most free.

RF: Exactly. Actually, the word *freedom* was also thought about, but finally we just settled on the word *celebration*.

DW: I think it's a wonderful, a great gift.

RF: It wasn't like we really planned it.

DW: Well, I'm sure God was giving it to you.

RF: You know, in those early days, we did a lot of celebrating. There were hard times and struggles, but there were also lots of breakthroughs.

DW: It was a breakthrough for me to understand that celebration is actually a Discipline, because from my own background, you didn't think of celebration of a Discipline. But when you understand the gospel and the invitation to live in the kingdom of God, and all that you understand, you realize that celebration is one the great ways of walking with God and getting to know God.

RF: Throwing a party in God's honor...

Reflections on Solitude

Celebration of Discipline Session Seven: Solitude

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.

Notes:

Solitude

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: The Aiden Compline

(*Celtic Daily Prayer*, Prayers and Readings from the Northumbria Community; Harper 2002, pp 30ff)

+ indicates you may make the sign of the cross

* indicates a change of reader

All say together the sections in **bold type**

The sections in ***bold italic type*** box should be said by each in turn

+ (silently)

* O Christ, Son of the living God,
May your holy angels guard our sleep
May they watch over us as we rest
And hover around our beds

* Let them reveal to us in our dreams
Visions of your glorious truth,
O High Prince of the universe,
O High Priest of the mysteries

* May no dreams disturb our rest
And no nightmares darken our dreams.
May no fears or worries delay
Our willing, prompt repose

* May the virtue of our daily work
Hallow our nightly prayers.
May our sleep be deep and soft
So our work be fresh and hard.

**I will lie down and sleep in peace
For You alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety**

***My dear ones, O God, bless Thou and keep,
In every place where they are.***

*Into Your hands I commit my spirit;
I give it to you with all the love of my heart.

* How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
Were I to count them,
They would outnumber the grains of the sand.
When I am awake, I am still with You.

**I make the cross of Christ upon my breast,
 + over the tablet of my hard heart
 and I beseech the Living God of the universe –
 May the Light of Lights come to my dark heart from Thy place;
 May the Spirit's wisdom come to my heart's tablet from my Savior.**

* Christ without sin, Christ of wounds,
 I am placing my soul and body under Thy guarding this night,
 Christ of the poor, Christ of tears.
 Thy cross by my shielding this night,
 O Thou Son of tears, of the wounds, of the piercing.

**I am going now into the sleep:
 O be it in Thy dear arms keep,
 O God of grace, that I shall awake.**

* My Christ! My Christ! My shield, my encircler,
 Each day, each night, each light, each dark.

* My Christ! My Christ! My shield, my encircler,
 Each day, each night, each light, each dark.
 Be near me, uphold me, my treasure, my triumph.

<p><i>Circle me Lord, Keep protection near And danger afar</i></p>

* Circle me, Lord
 Keep light near, and darkness afar.

* Circle me, Lord,
 Keep peace within; keep evil out.

**The peace of all peace be mine this night
 + in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Readings for April 15th
 Celebration of Discipline, chs 6 & 7**