

The Intentionality of Incorporating Spiritual Disciplines

Big Idea:

As we seek to become transformed into the image and likeness of Jesus the Christ (Romans 8:29, 2 Corinthians 3:18), we often find ourselves wondering just how this process is supposed to occur. Intentionally incorporating spiritual disciplines has for centuries been a key to a deep and meaningful relationship with Jesus. We will briefly explore the what, how and why of spiritual disciplines.

ICE BREAKER:

The concept of discipline will likely have different connotations for the various members of your group. Discuss briefly your understanding of, and feelings about discipline, as well as your beliefs about what purpose it serves in the process of individual and personal growth. (i.e. parents discipline children. What purpose does that serve?)

CONVERSATION STARTER:

Early in my Christian walk I hated the word discipline. I knew all too well what that old, stale word meant. Discipline was what happened when I crossed the line. Maybe I had broken one of my parent's rules. Perhaps I showed up late to soccer practice and as a result I was going to spend the next hour- sometimes more- aimlessly running laps around the field while the rest of the team scrimmaged or engaged in ball drills of some kind. Discipline wasn't fun. In fact, my impression of discipline was that its specific purpose was to rob me of any enjoyment I might be able to squeeze out of a moment- this was definitely the case when running laps on the soccer field...I learned very quickly to look as miserable as possible while following through on my "punishment."

As I have matured, I have begun to see that my earlier understanding of discipline was pretty incomplete. As a parent I now understand that the purpose of my own father's discipline was to help nurture and guide me so that positive character qualities would take root, and hopefully stay with me for the rest of my life. My college soccer coach was instrumental in teaching me the value of being on time. In the same way, spiritual disciplines are a means to a greater end. As we pray, fast, read scripture, meditate on God's words, etc... we begin to be transformed, and not just for the sake of this life, but for eternity!

THINK:

1. Are there any activities in which you place so much value, they find themselves on your calendar on a weekly or even daily basis?
2. What is the value of creating a routine at work? At home? For your recreational activities?
3. Is there a value that you can perceive in dedicating time to intentionally interacting with God through Bible study, prayer, fasting, meditation, etc..?
4. Are you setting aside time to be intentional in your relationship with God? Or said another way, is your relationship with God based on more than just spontaneous encounters?

EXAMINE:

Let's take the remaining time as a group to briefly examine the spiritual disciplines that have already been mentioned in this study.

We will look at prayer and fasting together, since in scripture they are often addressed this way. Read Matthew 6:5, 6:16, and 6:18, and Acts 13:2, 13:3, and 14:23 to answer the following questions:

1. In Matthew 6:5 and 6:16, Jesus begins his instructions about both prayer and fasting with the word "when." What can we safely assume (in other words, if Jesus had used the word "if" instead of "when" how would it change the meaning of his words to us)?
2. What can we assume from Jesus discussion about engaging in prayer/fasting publicly vs. privately?
3. Look at the three passages in Acts. Prayer and fasting precede the making of important decisions in each of these verses. What can we take away here?

We will also examine the reading of scripture and meditation on the words of God together. Read Joshua 1:8 (we could also look at numerous Psalms about meditation). Read also 2 Timothy 3:16.

4. Would it be fair to say that God desired Joshua to encounter Him in the scriptures on a daily basis?
5. Based upon what you know, what is the difference between reading scripture and meditating on scripture?
6. What does Paul tell Timothy that scripture is good/useful for? How does this apply to us?
7. What value do these two passages place on continually and intentionally encountering God through the words of scripture?

THIS WEEK: This week's challenge is to set aside time each day to encounter God through prayer or reading and meditating on scripture. Don't settle for chance encounters...be intentional!

*“Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better,
promising benefits in this life and in the life to come.”*

1 Timothy 4:8