

Information, Formation, Transformation

By Bob Young

As one considers the nature of the spiritual life, the historic focus in churches of Christ has been on information. Concepts of spiritual formation or transformation have been much less in view. That we are recovering the biblical focus on Christian living is cause for celebration.

Spiritual disciplines are assumed in the Bible. Consider Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Prayer, fasting, and giving alms are treated as normal activities of the devoted life (Matt. 6:1-15). Paul was aware of the need for spiritual discipline (1 Cor. 9:23-27; 1 Tim. 4:6-8; 2 Cor. 11:27). Not only do we need discipline, we need accountability.

A text not frequently associated with spiritual discipline is Romans 6. Paul writes of the need to deliberately offer self, thus breaking the control of the flesh (Rom. 6:12-23). Paul continues this theme through Romans 7-8. The chart pictures the warfare Paul describes between the Spirit and the flesh.



As human beings have a spiritual side (psyche, soul) and a physical side, so the war that is waged around us and within us is between the flesh and the spirit. The Spirit of God opposes the fleshly.

This article lists and describes several “internal” spiritual disciplines or practices that may be helpful in the development of one’s quiet time and personal relationship with God.

SOLITUDE

- This refers to time alone with God. This discipline helps us develop the specific purpose of being with God, in the same way that we might set aside time alone with a spouse or other person.
- Solitude suggests that we choose to be alone with God. Solitude as a spiritual discipline is not an accident in life.
- Solitude is a place of reflection or meditation.
- Solitude provides a place to gain perspective.
- It is at times a frightening place.
- Solitude provides a place of self-identity and self-examination.

- Solitude is often a place of conversion—repentance and change.
- Many Christians have affirmed that solitude with God is the beginning of compassion.
- In solitude, one can establish priorities by sorting out the urgent and the important. If urgency and importance are two axes in life, four things may be true of any given item. In ascending order of priority, the item may be (1) not urgent and not important, (2) urgent but not important, (3) important but not urgent, or (4) both important and urgent.

SILENCE

- Silence provides the opportunity to listen to God.
- Silence carries with it the mark of solitude
- Silence often feels like a loss of control
- Silence may strengthen our thoughts and words
- Silence may keep us from sin
- Silence is ultimately a matter of the heart more than a matter of surroundings.

FASTING

- Fasting provides a way to express sorrow.
- Fasting is a times a sign of repentance.
- Fasting may be used to make a request from God.
- Fasting works in our lives to reveal what controls us.
- Fasting may prepare for suffering.

PRAYER

- Prayer without ceasing empowers prayer with ceasing.
- The great biblical model of prayer is the Psalms, although other prayers of the Old Testament are also powerful and worthy of study and imitation.
- The model prayer which Jesus taught his disciples (Matt. 6 and parallels) is valuable for understanding the nature of prayer and things which should be included.
- Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17 demonstrates the nature of intimate relationship and pleading.

JOURNALING

- Journaling is between you and God.
- Journaling provides a record and helps us remember.
- Journaling helps clarify thoughts and helps us process that which has occurred.

For Further Reading

Roberta Bondi. *To Love as God Loves*.

Thomas Merton. *Bread in the Wilderness*.

William Law. *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*.