

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

VERSION 2.2.11



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Spiritual Formation

Introduction



Development Associates International

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Overview

You are beginning a course called ***Spiritual Formation***. This course is meant to encourage disciplined habit patterns that will open you to God's work deep within your heart and thus reshape your spiritual health from the inside out. **Spiritual Formation** requires reading, study, written response and spiritual discipline practice—each week. Your practice of the disciplines will lead to an inner transformation of your life and character through God's grace.

At the end of this course, you will devise an action plan based on your personal experience with the spiritual disciplines. The purpose of the plan is to move you forward into a lifetime of continued spiritual formation.

We assure you that every effort will be undertaken to ensure confidentiality during the duration of this course. Therefore, be encouraged to be open and honest as you complete your assignments. Your facilitator understands the intense struggles of the spiritual life. Feel free to be candid when you respond to your assignments. Your facilitator is the only person who will see the assignments you submit.

Spiritual Formation consists of thirteen units coupled with an associated spiritual discipline.

- Approach each unit prayerfully, expecting God to reveal specific insight into all you think and do.
- Begin by reading the unit's introduction. It will give you the instructions you need to complete the course.
- Complete the readings both in your textbook (*Devotional Classics*) and in the "Reader" at the end of a unit in your workbook before you work through the questions and material in the workbook itself. Focus on learning the main points of the readings and evaluating the implications for your ministry. You will want to respond in your journal to particular readings.
- The workbook contains illustrative lectures along with a number of reflection questions and assignments. Please answer each question in writing. Most often you will need additional space for your answers. We suggest you keep your reflections in a dated personal journal for easy reference. After completing a unit, you will select and submit a few journal entries to your teacher. It is imperative that your journal entries reflect the unit content and its applications to your own life. This is not the time to write answers you think your instructor wants to hear. Be honest in your responses and make them personal. God will work deeply.
- Complete the unit assignments and submit them to the professor as outlined on the syllabus handed to you during the residency. Your professor, available as a listening friend, will do everything possible to help you apply what you are learning.
- Consider ways you can use this material to train others.

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Assignments

Near the beginning of each unit is a checklist reviewing the required readings and assignments to accompany that unit. The list will serve as a homework guide as well as a place to check that you've completed everything assigned for a particular unit.

Here is our suggestion for the order of your study:

1. Begin by reading the listed textbook selections (*Devotional Classics*) carefully. When you come across a particularly penetrating passage, respond to your reading in your personal journal.
2. Next, read the material found at the very end of the unit in the "Reading" section. This material is background reading for your workbook lectures. You will notice the Reader section usually discusses a specific Spiritual Discipline. Begin now to practice the discipline. Again, write brief journal entries about your experience with the discipline.
3. After completing your background reading, you should be prepared to learn from the lectures printed for you in the Workbook unit. Read and study the workbook, being sure to answer the "Think About It" questions interspersed throughout the material.
4. Finally, only after completing all of the above steps, answer the Email Assignment found at the end of the lecture section of the workbook.
5. Send the assignments your professor specifies on the syllabus by email.

Your written assignments and journal entries should demonstrate to the professor that you understand the materials and themes from the textbook, the workbook Reader and the

workbook lectures and questions. In addition, your assignments and journal entries should reflect that you have *practiced* the spiritual disciplines each month.

A. Reading

Always consult the list at the beginning of each unit that tells you what selections to read.

1. The required text for this course is ***Revised and Expanded Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups***, edited by Richard Foster and James Bryan Smith, published by HarperSanFrancisco, 2005. ISBN: 0-06-077750-0. The text is a compilation of material from each of a wide range of classical Christian writers that gives you a flavor for what the writers experienced during their innermost experiences with Christ. Some selections will be familiar favorites. Others will be completely unknown to you. One of the nice things about this textbook is that it offers an additional bibliography for further reading if an author or topic especially appeals to you. Foster and Smith also tell you a bit of the biography for each writer and offer questions for reflection and discussion. Plan to use these questions occasionally for your personal journaling.
2. Other required readings are included in the Reader found at the end of each individual workbook unit.

B. Personal Journaling

The personal journal is a foundational requirement of this course. A personal journal involves writing exactly what you feel and think—as well as what you are hearing God say to you. Your journal entry should be a personal response to a particular reading, workbook exercise or heart matter you are facing as a result of practicing the spiritual disciplines. Your journal is a record of God's deep work in your spirit. Throughout history, many Christians have found journaling extremely helpful in clarifying what is happening in their lives. Some believers write in their journal most of their lives and we hope your experience with this course will cause you to develop the habit of journaling.

Write in your journal *three times* or more each week. As previously stated, the workbook and textbook will provide resources to work with as you journal. In addition, there are questions found in the Reading section following the unit that you can answer. Be completely frank and honest in your written journal as this is your chance to invite God to deal directly with matters of your heart. The journal is not the place to preach a sermon or write what you think the teacher wants to hear. In journaling, you are documenting a heart conversation with God. Expect great new revelation and transformation as you open the depths of your heart to the work of the Holy Spirit.

C. Spiritual Discipline Exercise

You will find notes at the end of each unit reflecting on the spiritual discipline assigned with that particular unit. Each of the disciplines has several pages of material and instructions about what to do with that discipline. We are not asking that you substitute the focus on one discipline for the things you are already doing to nurture your spiritual life. Rather, we want you to find sensible room in your life to actually practice the discipline enough so that you have some initial sense of what that discipline offers in opening us to God's transforming work. If you are a beginner at the discipline, you will want to take it easy and slow. If you are well practiced in the particular discipline, we ask you to schedule time to renew and repeat that discipline in a way that is deepening for you.

For example, Unit I begins the process with the discipline of Solitude and Silence. We chose this beginning point for Christian leaders because of our suspicion that many leaders are overworked, stretched beyond resources, frantically busy in ministry and facing daunting challenges. The first thing we want you to do is to quiet down—spend some time slowing down and stilling the clamoring voices that descend on you and rise from within. Solitude is a means to still these voices—and to wait quietly before and upon God.

D. Final Assignment: Reflection

Every unit also asks you to write a one or two page response after you have completed all of the reading, writing and journaling exercises, along with practicing the specific spiritual discipline in a given unit. Again, maintain your integrity. Do not attempt to write a reflection paper unless you have read all of the assigned reading, practiced the discipline and completed the pages of the workbook.

Steps to Complete this Course

1. Read and understand all of the information in these introductory pages and participate in the residency and discussions of the module units.
2. Complete all textbook and workbook readings assigned in this course. Use your journal to respond to your reading.
3. As you work through the workbook for the course, answer, in writing, all of the "Think About It" questions, even though some of these answers are not to be submitted to the professor. Again, use your journal to respond to thought-provoking passages as they come up in the workbook, or Bible reading.
4. Practice the spiritual disciplines several times each week and throughout the month. Your facilitator will provide guidelines. Once again, journal as a response to your spiritual discipline practice.
5. Answer, in writing, the final email assignment for a given unit. Submit all email assignments on the date indicated by the assignment sheet given to you by your course facilitator. No late papers are accepted without advance permission from the professor. In order to pass this course, students must turn in each assignment before going on to the next unit.
6. Complete all of the above instructions with integrity. Do not plagiarize materials, but rather give credit where credit is due. In the same way, commit yourself to spending the needed time each week to complete the many exercises and practices required for this course.
7. Plan ahead for the extra time you will need in order to complete the second half of this course in a timely manner. Remember, *Spiritual Formation* is a 12-month study.

Format for written assignments:

- Begin each assignment by including a "header" with your name, the date, your cohort, and the unit number and name of the assignment.
- Complete all assignments using word processing. Use a standard 10 or 12-point font, with single-spaced pages.
- Submit the assignment as an email attachment to the professor.

The authors of this Module



Dr. David Fraser (Co-author and module facilitator) served as Provost as well as Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at Eastern University. He was the founding Dean of SILD, delivering business, leadership and economic development programs in partnerships with NGOs and developing world universities. This involved strategic academic planning, faculty hiring and development, and representation of SILD to Eastern University's Board of Trustees.

Dr. Fraser is co-founder and Executive Director of the Center for Organizational Excellence at Eastern University and has previously served as Professor of Sociology, and Biblical and Theological Studies. Before coming to Eastern in 1986, Dr. Fraser gained significant exposure at the grass roots of the world in two capacities. First, he was a member of the senior staff of the MARC Division of World Vision International with responsibilities for Unreached Peoples. In addition, he served with the Mission Training and Resource Center for three years, helping to develop curricula and models for more effective equipping and orienting people called into cross-cultural ministry. He is ordained in the Presbyterian Church USA and has had pastoral experience in four congregations.

Dr. Fraser's teaching experience includes teaching fellowships at Harvard and Vanderbilt Universities. He served on the faculties of Columbia Bible College and Seminary, Eastern

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Dr. Fraser holds undergraduate honors degrees from Columbia Bible College and Seminary (Bible) and Stanford University (anthropology). His graduate degrees are from Harvard University (sociology), Fuller Theological Seminary (theology and missions) and Vanderbilt University (theological ethics).

Dr. Fraser's recent publications include *Planning Strategies for World Evangelization* (co-authored with Ed Dayton) now in its second edition, and *Sociology Through the Eyes of Faith* (co-authored with Tony Campolo). Current research and writing focus on the cultural world of the New Testament as a model for contemporary issues in incarnating Christian faith in the diverse cultural worlds incorporated in the world Christian movement.

David is married to Dr. Elouise Renich-Fraser, Associate Dean at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary and author of *Making Friends with the Bible*. David and Elouise have two adult children and two grandchildren.



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Dr. Hall has served in the pastorate overseas (France, 5 years) and in Canada (British Columbia, 2 years). He also served as Director of Pastoral Care at New Jersey's only state gero-psychiatric hospital. He has ministered in Asia, Africa, South America, Europe, the Middle-East, Canada, and the United States.

Dr. Hall is author and editor of a number of books including *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: The Gospel of Mark*, with Thomas C. Oden, (InterVarsity Press, June, 1998), *Reading the Scripture with the Fathers* (InterVarsity Press, September, 1998), *Realized Religion: Research on Religion and Health, with Theodore Chamberlain* (Templeton Foundation Press, Fall 2000), *Ancient and Postmodern Christianity*, with Kenneth Tanner (IVP, 2002), *Studying Theology with the Church Fathers* (InterVarsity Press, 2002), *The Trinity*, with Roger Olson (Eerdmans, 2002), *Worshiping with the Church Fathers* (InterVarsity Press, forthcoming), and *Does God Have a Future: A Debate on Divine Providence*, with John Sanders (Baker Academic, 2003).

Dr. Hall is an editor-at-large for *Christianity Today*, is associate editor of the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* series (IVP), and has published articles and reviews in *Christianity Today*, *Catalyst*, *Christian History*, *inMinistry*, *Books and Culture*, *Christian Scholars Review*, *Modern Theology*, and *Crux*.

Dr. Hall is a member of the Episcopal Church (Anglican), and is married. He and his wife Debbie have three children, Nathan (28), Nathalie (26), and Joshua (20).

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Spiritual Formation
Unit 1
Thirsty for God:
Restoring our Spiritual Passion for God



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Unit 1

Thirsty for God: Restoring our Spiritual Passion for God

Contents

- Learning Outcomes and Steps to Complete Module 1
- Lecture Notes and Workbook
- Email Assignment
- Reading: Discipline in Focus: Solitude

Learning Outcomes

- Learn what “Making Room for God” is about: components, requirements and goals.
- Explore the nature and depth of longing for God and a more vital, effective life in Christ. Assess your own longing.
- Be reminded of the complex reasons Christians experience “mid-life crises” in their spiritual lives.
- Experience the discipline of Solitude as a way of stilling the voices and stress in our lives as leaders.

Steps to Complete Unit 1

Read and Journal:

- Textbook, *Devotional Classics*: pp. 80-86 (Nouwen); pp.101-107 (Laubach); pp.369-376 (Lawrence)
- Reader at the end of this unit: “Solitude”
- Respond to your reading in your personal journal.

Respond:

- Practice the spiritual discipline, Solitude.
- Read and complete all of the workbook assignments.
- Complete specific journaling assignments: p. 374-375, Questions numbers 1-5., p. 84-85, Questions numbers 1-5, p. 106, Questions numbers 1, 3, 4, and 5.
- Use the journaling exercises and questions in the “Discipline in Focus: Solitude” section of this unit’s Reader to help you reflect and write in your personal journal.

Write:

- Complete the final email assignment for Unit 1.

***Note: For each unit, you will read the textbook and respond in writing, as well as write a short reflection paper. At the end of each unit, you will send three of your journal entries to your facilitator, along with your reflection paper (see final email assignment).**

Lecture Notes and Workbook

[Chris Hall]: We begin our study, “Making Room for God: Spiritual Formation for Christian Leaders.” Over the next year you will engage with us and your facilitator in a process of reshaping and renewing key elements of your spiritual life and practice. This course is designed for Christian leaders who:

- have settled many of the basic issues of Christian discipleship,
- find themselves longing for increased depth and authenticity in their relationship with Christ, and
- are willing to take costly steps to open themselves in new ways to allow God to transform them.

Why Such a Course?

You may wonder WHY such a course? As Christian leaders, aren't spiritual growth and our relationship with God THE most basic realities in our lives? Of course. Yet many of us long for much more than we have experienced so far. We have met some seasoned veterans of Christian ministry who actually say—“If this is all there is, I'm ready to give it all up.” Listen to the following statements and ask yourself, “Is there an echo inside me saying, ‘Yes, I know exactly what they're talking about!’” Here are a few typical comments:

1. I must admit I'm tired—tired of running to so many meetings, trying to carry so many needs. I have been working so hard for so long that, frankly, I'm numb. I haven't felt really close to God for months. Reading the Bible has become stale and dreary. I can't remember the last time the words leapt off the page as though they were a word of God directed right at me.
2. Where am I with God? On a plateau, I think. God isn't far away—but I can't say I have any sense of significant change in my life for the last four or five years. I keep struggling with the same emotions and temptations, the same old arguments with my spouse, the same conflicts over ministry priorities and style with my board and team. It is just not like it was when I was converted and everything seemed new and different.
3. When I'm with others in a big meeting singing and praying, I feel great. It is wonderful to feel the glow of others. But when I am back at home, I feel alone, dull, ineffective, drifting. My marriage has been ok—well, maybe not even that good. We have settled down to having the same problems, the same arguments, the same dead-ends for the last decade. I am almost always glad when I can leave on a ministry trip, and I dread coming back home. Sometimes I wonder if I'm married to the right person.
4. It is time to stop the presses and get rid of the public relations of Evangelicalism. As far as I'm concerned we've oversold the spiritual life—made it shine so bright in our testimony and books, in dozens of new techniques and secrets to the Christian life, that the real humdrum of Christian living looks like a dead corpse in the morgue. I don't care whether it is the Pentecostals, the Deeper Life people, the Spirit-filled emphasis, twelve-step spirituality—none of it works very well. We've got to get real, to be authentic, to stop kidding ourselves that there is a formula—and you can have what you want if you buy my book or attend my seminar.
5. I don't know. I think I'm ok. I can't say that things are bad right now. I've had some good results in leading Bible study lately—and in our evangelism program. But there isn't really much appetite or hunger for God in my life. I struggle with knowing what God wants me to do—really wants ME TO DO. Things seem so murky and uncertain. Usually I feel like I'm in a fog.

Over the past four years I have regularly taught an undergraduate course titled “Foundations of Christian Spirituality.” A disturbing, shadowy side of the evangelical world has opened up to me as I have read the journals kept by students, a central course requirement in “Foundations.” I ask students to record and reflect upon key individuals, groups, perceptions, questions, struggles, barriers and life experiences that have shaped their understanding of God and themselves. For example, I might ask a class to note in their journals the good and bad habits that nourish or strangle their spiritual lives. Another entry might explore how their surrounding culture has “squeezed them into its mold,” recalling Paul's words in Romans 12:2

(Phillips Translation). Further entries could investigate how relationships with parents, siblings, pastors, and other significant mentors continue to shape their understanding of God or their relationship with Christ. As the semester progresses, this process of spiritual exploration and discovery continues.

To my surprise and dismay I have learned that the level of pain, tragedy and sin that my students had experienced, not infrequently at home or in a church setting, was elevated far beyond my unsuspecting expectations. The first set of journals I read spoke of incest, child molestation, rape, abortion, greed, materialism and widespread, deep-seated spiritual confusion and disillusionment. Not all journals presented this picture of spiritual infection. Some students were clearly growing spiritually and demonstrated a healthy and expanded self-understanding. Many, though, freely admitted a radical disjunction between what they confessed with their minds, believed in their hearts and experienced in their daily patterns of living. As shocking as this first experience in journal reading was for me, I comforted myself with the thought that perhaps my initial students were particularly troubled folk who did not represent a fair sample of the evangelical student population.

As time passed, however, the same pattern consistently reduplicated itself. In fact, I have come to the point where I fully expect that within a group of 40 to 60 evangelical students many will be sexually active, struggling with substance abuse, alienated from parents, victims of rape or incest or confused in their sexual orientation. Many of my African-American students speak of continuing encounters with racism in the white evangelical church. Some students, particularly women, recurrently relate their distrust of pastors because of the emotional and occasional sexual abuse they have suffered from their church leaders. Other women share the frustration of leading a marginalized existence as their home church and Christian community remain blind to the gifts and abilities these women long to offer to Christ and exercise within their church communities.

Maybe the students who attend my college are uniquely crippled in their life experiences and level of spiritual health. As I have shared my experiences with colleagues who teach at other Christian colleges, though, my misgivings have been confirmed. Other professors share with me similar horror stories. The same themes reappear. Students battle struggles with or exposure to sexual sin and abuse on a broad scale, substance abuse, racism, loss of purpose, vision, and call, self-absorption and self-indulgence, self-righteousness and mean-spiritedness. The list could easily be lengthened. What is happening? Has a virus entered the evangelical bloodstream, a bacterium that threatens to undercut our ability to present a viable witness for Christ to what Francis Schaeffer coined “a watching world?” Or to play off J.B. Phillip’s translation of Romans 12:2, is the pressure of the surrounding North American cultural consensus squeezing the evangelical world into a foreign mold?

In summary, the reason we got involved in this course is because of the evidence on every side that there is a contemporary need for something different than we have been experiencing in most evangelical circles. If you have a similar hunger or thirst, then you’ve come to the right place.

Course Structure

[David Fraser]: This course is made up of thirteen modules designed so that a person will need up to 12 months to complete the readings and practice the specific spiritual disciplines. The course involves thoughtful engagement with written materials, writing in response to the teachings and consistent reflective writing in a personal journal.

Course Expectations

What can you hope for from this course?

To practice the spiritual disciplines and to encourage habit patterns that open us to God and promote spiritual health through weekly reading, study and response. At the end of the course students will have devised an action plan based on their own life situation and experience with the

spiritual disciplines that will move them forward in their next years of spiritual formation.

We encourage you to become more intentional, to take definite steps to change the way you are allowing your life to move forward. Christian leaders often find it difficult to retain control over what they spend their time doing—and yet it is that time that allows them to nourish their lives with Christ, to grow strong and vibrant after bruising and exhausting ministry struggles.

We assume you already are doing things to nurture your life with Christ. Therefore, we are not starting at the beginning—but rather in mid-stream. We want to enhance what you are already doing right. The last thing we want to do is to kill off what is vital and living in order to get you to complete our course! We’re counting on you to act wisely—work with this course to build upon what is already strong.

We also believe you will find areas of new experience that need to be engendered, some for the first time, others after a long time of neglect. It is our conviction that disciplined habit patterns that open us up repeatedly to God’s Spirit are foundational in developing and retaining spiritual health and strength. This course will give you a chance to complete an inventory of your own habits and weekly practices. We want you to see what you need to change. What are you doing that can be reaffirmed; what needs to be newly learned? We need to be practicing the sorts of things Christians through the centuries have found essential in being brought to maturity in Christ.

Who Are We?

We are not accomplished, perfect Christians who have all the answers and who have learned all that God wants for us.

[Chris Hall]: Let me tell you about my own spiritual journey. I grew up in a nominally Christian home. My mother was a strong Christian but my father was not a strongly spiritual man. Growing up I received mixed signals from my parents regarding who God is and how I can come to know and experience God’s love for me in Christ. And as I grew older I started to carefully observe how people who claimed to be Christian were living and remember that this was really hard for me to do, particularly as I became aware of the cracks in people’s lives. I had a number of experiences encountering people who I admired in one way; yet I was so disappointed that their lives didn’t match up with what I understood the Christian life to be.

Many people knew about Christ, but few were able to come to me and explain to me how someone like me, with my struggles and problems and difficulties and sins, could find his way into the Kingdom of God. Looking back, by God’s providence, I found myself at UCLA (The University of California in Los Angeles) as a student. It was at UCLA that I ran into a group of people who were struggling with the many of the same issues with which I struggled. Unlike my earlier experience, these folks were able to explain to me the wonder of who Jesus is. This group was part of the Jesus movement, and they explained to me how God had shown his love to me in Christ and how I could come to know God through Christ. They simply explained to me the simple Gospel message. It was surprising to me what a relationship with Christ could accomplish, the changes that relationship could bring about.

I studied at UCLA for four years, planning on becoming a lawyer. I had done well on my law school aptitude tests and was accepted into the University of San Diego Law School, fully expecting to go down there and become a lawyer and, from my perspective at that time, make a lot of money. After coming to Christ and studying the Bible, the next thing I knew I called University of San Diego and said I’m was not coming after all. They asked why and I told them that I wanted to study the Bible for awhile, “Oh, where are you going to be studying?” Answering the question was difficult because for the next three years I studied at an unaccredited Bible school called the Light and Power House, part of the Jesus movement of the late 1960’s, early 1970’s. I learned Greek and read lots of books about the Bible.

After Bible School, I went to Fuller Theological Seminary, where I played basketball with a Christian team. We often played overseas. We played in South East Asia, Africa, and Europe. After graduation from seminary I had a short stint as a teacher in one of the seminaries with

which I had been associated in the past, but my teaching was just too thin. It was thin because I had never been involved in the pastorate. I felt God was saying, “Chris, if you’re ever going to teach in an institution in the future, you’ve got to stop teaching now and head out into the pastorate.” What had happened was I had a group of friends in Geneva, Switzerland who had said to me and a couple of other friends, “Would you come over here and plant a church.” And so we did in 1980. My wife and I and two other close friends traveled to Geneva and planted a church in France right across the border. I stayed and ministered there for five years.

After five years I had a strong desire to go back and teach but didn’t have all those degrees one needs to teach in a college or seminary. So I returned to Regent College in Vancouver, studied for a couple of years, and got another master’s degree. By God’s grace I was accepted into a doctoral program, and after a number of years of study at Drew University in New Jersey received my doctorate in systematic and historical theology. While I was at Drew, I ended up being director of pastoral care at one of New Jersey’s state psychiatric hospitals. Then I ended up coming to Eastern College where I’ve been for 18 years, teaching systematic theology and classes pertaining to the spiritual life. So I have experience overseas, am concerned with issues having to do with spiritual formation and spiritual leadership, and desire to help people who from time to time struggle psychiatrically.

[David Fraser]: I became a Christian as a teenager in high school 50 years ago. My own conversion took place over a six month period, a slow process for me. I knew before I entered that period of my life that, though I attended and had joined church, God was a stranger to me. But I was changed from the inside out. A youth pastor took me under his arm, loved, encouraged and helped me study the Bible. I knew that regardless of what God was calling me to do or to be, I needed to understand the Bible.

At the young age of 16, I entered Bible College, hoping to acquire basic ministry skills. During that time, I spent a summer in Guatemala with Latin American Mission. At the end of that time I went on to work in anthropology, get married, do graduate seminary study and some teaching. After seminary I worked for four years with World Vision International, traveled in 15 to 18 different countries looking at how World Vision was sharing the gospel. Finally, I pastored, unexpectedly, a few different churches for four and a half years while my wife pursued her doctorate degree and our children grew.

When my wife was offered a position at Palmer Theological Seminary (formerly Eastern Baptist), I began teaching sociology and biblical and theological studies at Eastern. By 1990 my life had really run its course; the basic prayer, study, and witnessing skills I had learned as a young Christian no longer nurtured me. In January, 1991, I began to sit still in God’s presence saying, “Lord, I don’t know what is going on, but I feel distant and dry. Everything has come to a halt.” All of the ABC’s I had been using in my spiritual life no longer worked.

A new hunger for God soon emerged. I began *reflective writing* on the scripture, not just reading it and praying through it, but actually *writing* a page or two each day as I read scripture. And I came to realize that I stood at the edge of an ocean of Christian reality that I had never before explored. I needed to open myself to a wider range of Christian experience.

I met Chris during this time at Eastern. A number of us gathered together weekly in a prayer group to encourage and pray for one another. God began to do new thing in me, for which I am grateful. Both Chris and I have been brought us back to the basics of Christianity, back to the point of longing for more room in our lives for God. In many ways, what we bring to you in this course is autobiographical as well as biblical.

A Short Case Study of a Christian Leader

Below you will find a brief account of the experience of a Western missionary. Take time to read it. Then reflect, in writing, on the question asked. When you have done so, continue on with the workbook.

The Testimony of a Missionary

“In my early days as a Christian, I became deeply discouraged about my inability to break free from a sin-confession-forgiveness-sin behavior cycle. Where, I wondered, was the reality of Romans 8 to be found? I only knew the defeat of Romans 7, that is, frequently

committing spiritually weakening actions. During this time I came into contact with the ‘deeper life’ movement. Its teaching concerning the wretchedness of self and the total adequacy of Christ sent a piercing ray of hope into my battle-fatigued soul. Quickly, I stretched forth my open hands of supplication. How I hungered for a higher level of consistent spiritual experience. In a dramatic manner, I was filled to overflowing. For three months my wearied heart found rest. What a blissful and enriching experience. Prayer was like conversing with my best friend. The Bible came alive. Witnessing was a joy.

“But slowly the emotions faded. Evil thoughts began to assault me. A chill wind began to blow across my innermost being. Inwardly I cringed. It seemed I had stepped on an express elevator that moved rapidly and relentlessly between the roof of victory and the basement of defeat. Why was there not a gradual climb to spiritual victory? What did scripture mean when it spoke of a Christian life that is always triumphant? How does one appropriate the abundant life of John 10:30? Are the gushing springs from within bringing forth cool, fresh, cleansing water, or is the flow often adulterated and polluted?

“Is spiritual victory an elusive phantom, much like the phenomenon I observed while on a safari in Kenya? In the dust and heat of our van, how refreshing it was to look off in the distance across the miles of bush land and fix my eyes on a beautiful lake. The sun’s rays danced across the tranquil surface of this great body of water. Soon, however, it became obvious we had only seen a mirage. Is spiritual victory no more than a desert illusion?”

(Taken from The Cross and the Crescent, by Phil Parshall, p. 16)

Think About It

Reflect on P. Parshall’s experience. In what ways does it correspond to your experience? Have you found that what you hoped would be settled once for all, what would be defeated and done with, what would be supplied in strength and abundance did not turn out to be the case?

In any event—what would you say to Parshall? What do you think Parshall needs to do to answer the questions raised—and to find an experience where he senses he is moving more consistently and deliberately toward Christlikeness? Or is his experience the best he can hope for?

Finding All God Wants to Give Us

[David Fraser]: Parshall’s experience is neither unusual nor unique. Many of us have felt something very similar, even if we have not contacted the deeper life movement. Perhaps we experienced a charismatic infilling of the Spirit or a dramatic conversion that cleaned us up and healed many old wounds. Nevertheless, after a year or a decade, we found ourselves struggling—sometimes with old issues reappearing, sometimes with issues at a much deeper level. We sense something was missing, something was not right, the old nature was not losing much strength or maybe it was even stronger than we ever knew it could be.

What can Parshall hope for? Is there more to the spiritual life than he is experiencing? If so, how can he appropriate and make it a central part of his life experience? This *Spiritual Formation* course seeks to answer some of Parshall’s questions providing a path to new ways to experience God’s transforming work.

God has promised to make us like Christ—but God has not promised to make the process instantaneous. Spiritual formation is a process of being shaped into the likeness of Jesus Christ in II Corinthians 3:18, “All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image, from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.”

We are far from reflecting Christ’s image. God uses a long, painful process to remove our old nature and energize our new nature. How can we put ourselves in the place where God can reshape us to be like Christ?

The Complexity of the Issue

[Chris Hall]: Christians come from vastly different backgrounds, with vastly different starting points, experiences, temperaments.

Think About It

Take a few minutes to think about yourself and those around you. If you were to paint a picture of the Christians you know well, what are the major reasons people struggle spiritually? Some remain immature, some fall into avoidable sin, some never confront personal, un-Christlike traits. Some grow weary, give up, or burn out; some leave the faith, others push on heroically but never find basic peace. Respond in writing.

Spiritual Struggles: Diagnosing the Causes of Difficulties

Why do you think people around you struggle spiritually? What are your observations about why people do not mature more rapidly? Why do they fall into sin after they follow Christ? What causes people and communities of believers to lack Christ-likeness? What is your experience? Is something standing in front of you, like a mountain, blocking your path to spiritual vitality?

[Chris Hall]: These reflection exercises are important! If you didn't stop to reflect and write about the question, please do so now before reading further. We will suggest our own answers—but we don't want you to lose your own perspective or contribution.

Here are some things we have experienced:

- 1) Some leaders struggle because they are not very wise and are not affirming the goodness of the limits we humans have. They may not sleep enough. They overextend themselves for months and years in exhausting activity. They lack balance and proper priorities, neither taking care of their spirit nor their body.
- 2) Other leaders struggle because they bear the weight of years of bad habits built into them from the time before they became Christians. Some were abused as children and have painful, unhealed wounds that continue to fester within. Some simply have oversensitive temperaments, are prone to depression or high levels of fear and anxiety.
- 3) Some leaders are lonely and isolated. They do not have a small, accepting, affirming community of fellow believers with whom they can be totally candid. They need mature friends who will help mentor and model better patterns of living. They have no place where their struggles and longings can be expressed and supported in confidential prayer and confession.
- 4) Some leaders don't know what's wrong. They simply move through life without any notion that God wants something deeper, broader, more vital than what they have seen so far. Some are trapped by secret sins whose grip seems so strong they have never been free from those sins for long.
- 5) Some have inadequate ideas of what it takes to become Christ-like. They've thought employing the spiritual disciplines is a matter of 'works-righteousness' rather than grace. To them, grace means no effort, no risk, and no activity.

For many reasons Christians function far below what God desires.

In Unit Four we discuss “Obstacles: Why Aren't We Making It All the Way?” where we think more deliberately about what hinders us from taking hold of all the resources and power God offers. Christ-likeness is not a shimmering ideal, an unreachable goal, or a wishful dream. It is what God desires and destines for us. We are claimed by the grace of God—and empowered by the Spirit of God—to realize substantial healing in our hearts. This healing fosters substantial growth, matures us, bringing us to Christ-likeness, although our likeness in Christ is limited.

Email Assignment

A Note to all Students:

Before completing the final email assignment for Unit 1, spend some time reviewing the homework requirements for this course, listed in the introduction. Be sure you have completed all of the reading, journaling and module workbook steps required before beginning your email assignment. Remember, you will select journal entries to send your teacher. By now, you should have ample entries from which to choose. Do not save journaling for the last week of a unit, but be sure to write in your journal on a regular, ongoing basis throughout the month.

Part One

Write a personal, one-page paper, single spaced, answer to the following question from from page 84 of *Devotional Classics*. Use the formatting guidelines described in the class syllabus.

“3. Solitude, according to Nouwen, creates space for God, but it also removes our protective distractions, forcing us to deal with our inner chaos. We engage in the spiritual disciplines... in order to ‘prevent the world from filling our lives to such an extent that there is no place left to listen.’ What things currently fill your life and prevent you from listening?”

Part Two

On a second page, write your major expectations for this course. What do you hope to learn, and what do you hope will happen in your life because of this course? Do you think you will have any major challenges in completing this course? What are these challenges? Express your hopes and goals for this Spiritual Formation course. Identify the difficulties you expect to face. How do you hope to meet these challenges?

When your answer is completed, send a copy to your facilitator as an attachment via email before the date indicated on your syllabus. Remember to include three journal entries with this assignment as well. The journal entries should reflect the course content. What is God saying to you personally through the materials presented?

Unit 1 Reader: Solitude

A Note to Students:

The Reader is placed at the end of the unit for easy reference. You are to study the Reader section of a unit before completing the workbook or email assignment. This Reader is background material for the workbook module. After studying the Reader, we hope you will have a better understanding of the spiritual discipline you are to practice this month.

What is Solitude and Silence? Following are suggestions for how you might think about solitude, as well as a number of possible exercises to write in your personal journal. The suggestions will help you begin the practice of solitude and silence during the next few weeks.

We will mention a number of books that also provide discussions of solitude and can give you more detailed wisdom. The place of solitude is between the imperatives “to flee” and “to pray.” As you will discover, none of the spiritual disciplines stands alone. Each discipline is part of our larger effort to move into the presence of God, providing more room for God to transform us.

As you work on Unit 1, set aside several times each week to practice solitude. We suggest that you practice one or two short times each day, perhaps 5-10 minutes of silence and solitude per day to practice. Perhaps you will want to practice more lengthy periods of solitude (an hour or more) during the next week. You will find that journaling will extend what you learn about yourself and God as you practice solitude and silence.

References

- Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines* (pp. 159-165)
Foster/Smith, *Devotional Classics* Rev. ed. (pp. 80-86; also pp. 369-75)
Holt, *Thirsty for God* (p. 13)
Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, Chapter 7
Nouwen, *Sojourners*, Vol. 9, #6-8, “The Desert Counsel to Flee the World” (June 1980, pp.15-18); “Silence, the Portable Cell” (July 1980, pp. 22-26); “Descend with the Mind into the Heart” (August 1980, pp. 20-24).

Solitude and Silence

Why begin with the discipline of solitude and silence? Perhaps because these combined disciplines are foreign to us. People who grow up in North America and Europe, for example, quickly learn that activity rather than character is praised. “Doing” is valued more highly than “being.” One of the first questions Americans ask a new acquaintance is, “What do you do for a living?” The ability to perform and produce well often shapes Americans’ self-definition and self-awareness. What about your culture?

Many feel uncomfortable with inactivity. Vacations, a time for rest, relaxation, and reflection, are for many in North America a time of frenetic activity. Americans replace the frenzied pace of their jobs with vacations logged full of activities from morning to night.

Much of this cultural outlook is spreading to other parts of the world, especially in urban areas. A high level of activity is a quality valued in many mission and church organizations, as well. Seemingly, what you do, what you get accomplished, counts most highly.

Why are we driven? What are we afraid to hear if we lower the activity and noise levels of our lives? How many of us are “burned-out” servants of God—or close to burning out? Somehow, we have accepted the idea that we must meet every need at the moment of crisis. We’ve served, studied, ministered and even prayed hurriedly. Effective servants of God, we tell ourselves, are busy. Soon we discovered we always had too much to do and never enough time to do it. Now, after five or ten years in active involvement, we find ourselves exhausted, disillusioned. We have tried to do much. We gave and gave but failed to replenish our resources. Is there a wiser, saner, healthier way for us to help others and help ourselves?

Henri Nouwen has wise advice in “Making All Things New” (see *Devotional Classics*, Rev. ed., pp. 80-84). Nouwen speaks of the necessity of discipline in a healthy spiritual life. Why? For one reason: so that we can hear the voice of God.

A spiritual life without discipline is impossible. Discipline is the other side of discipleship. The practice of a spiritual discipline makes us more sensitive to the small, gentle voice of God. (Nouwen, *Making All Things New*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, p. 80)

The high noise level in most of our lives troubled Nouwen. Why?

We have often become deaf, unable to know when God calls us and unable to understand in which direction he calls.

Nouwen notes the intimate connection between learning to listen and learning to obey. Have we too quickly connected action with obedience? How often in the past have we acted without first listening? How can the discipline of solitude and silence help us to regain our spiritual sanity? In the life of Jesus, Nouwen shows us, listening, prayer, obedience and ministry were invariably interrelated.

Jesus’ life was a life of obedience. He was always listening to the Father, always attentive to his voice, always alert for his directions. Jesus was “all ear.” True prayer is being “all ear” for God. The core of all prayer is indeed listening, obediently standing in the presence of God. (Nouwen, *Making All Things New*, p. 81)

Richard Foster also has observed this rhythm of solitude, listening, prayer, and ministry in Jesus’ life. Note carefully this pattern in the following passages from the gospels (cf. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, p. 97):

1. Matthew 4:1-11. Jesus’ temptation experience in the wilderness. Might the silence and solitude of the wilderness have strengthened Jesus’ ability to withstand the attacks of the evil one?
2. Luke 6:12. Before Jesus selects the twelve apostles, he spends the night alone in prayer.
3. Matthew 14:13. After learning of the death of John the Baptist, Jesus withdraws to a lonely place.
4. Matthew 14:23. Shortly after feeding the 5,000, Jesus goes up into the hills by himself.
5. Mark 1:35. After a long night of work, Jesus goes off to a “solitary place.”
6. Luke 5:16. After healing a leper, Jesus “withdrew to the wilderness and prayed.”
7. Matthew 26:36-46. Jesus withdraws to Gethsemane to prepare for his greatest work.

In these passages, we see a distinct rhythm of ministry—withdrawal—ministry. Jesus seemed to realize that he could only accomplish the work God had called him to do with people if he was consistently away from people. That is, Christ gained in silence and solitude the strength he needed to effectively minister to others. If solitude and silence were necessities for Jesus’ life and ministry, how much more is this true for us in our more troubled condition?

What Is Solitude?

Willard writes that solitude provides us with the space and silence necessary to free us from “the normal course of day-to-day human interactions.” These interactions lock us into “patterns of feeling, thought, and action that are geared to a world set against God. Nothing but solitude can allow the development of a freedom from the ingrained behavior that hinders our integration into God’s order.” (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, p. 160)

Nouwen describes solitude as creating a time and space for God. “If we really believe not only that God exists but also that he is actively present in our lives – healing, teaching, and guiding – we must set aside a time and a space to give him our undivided attention.” (Nouwen, *Making All Things New*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, p. 81)

Joyce Huggett illustrates the necessity of solitude through a story passed down in the monastic tradition.

One of the desert fathers expressed it simply but powerfully. He poured water and sand into a jar. As he shook the jar, the water became murky, but as he allowed the jar to rest, the sand settled to the bottom, and the water became clear again. Using this visual aid, he taught his disciples that the pace at which people live their lives normally clouds their spiritual perspective. Those who dare to settle themselves into God’s stillness find that the water of perception becomes clear again. (Joyce Huggett, *The Joy of Listening to God*, 185)

Think About It

On a scale of 1 to 10 (1=snail’s pace (slow), 10=light speed) how would you rate the activity level in your life? If you think you are too busy, consider why have you chosen to fill your life with so many activities. What is the noise level in your life? When you are alone, do you tend to turn on the television or radio? Would you welcome or would you avoid an extended time of solitude if it were a viable possibility? Why? Write your answer.

“We engage in the spiritual disciplines,” Nouwen wrote, in order to “prevent the world from filling our lives to such an extent that there is no place left to listen.” What things are currently filling your life and preventing you from listening? (See *Devotional Classics*, p. 84, #2)

Purposes and Functions of Solitude

Solitude has many functions. For some, solitude simply provides needed rest and the opportunity for reflection. Others discover in solitude a deeper awareness of how the “corporate flesh” of the world has warped their understanding of ministry and discipleship. Character flaws we have avoided facing rise quickly to the surface when the distractions of career, friends, the media, and our ecclesiastical community are removed from us.

Writers such as Richard Foster, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Thomas à Kempis agree that healthy community life and solitude are inseparable. Bonhoeffer puts it this way:

“Let him [her] who cannot be alone beware of community. . . Let him [her] who is not in community beware of being alone. . . Each by itself has profound pitfalls and perils. People who want fellowship without solitude plunge into the void of words and feelings. Those who seek solitude without fellowship perish in the abyss of vanity, self-infatuation, and despair.” (Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, quoted in Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, p. 97)

Foster comments, “Therefore, we must seek out recreating stillness of solitude if we want to be with others meaningfully. We must seek the fellowship and accountability of others if we want to be alone safely. We must cultivate both fellowship and accountability if we are to live in obedience.” (pp. 97-98)

What is the central principle? We need solitude to minister to people. When we practice solitude, we will come away with something that we can safely offer people. Thomas à Kempis was particularly aware of this principle. He warned against placing people in positions of leadership solely on the basis of giftedness and personality.

“No one can safely appear in public who does not enjoy seclusion. No one safely talks but he [she] who gladly keeps silent. No one safely rules but he [she] who is glad to be subordinate. No one safely commands but he [she] who has learned well to obey.” (Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, Blaiklock ed., p. 47)

In silence and seclusion, Thomas taught, a self-awareness of our sins and foibles leads to repentance and increased understanding. It is a painful process, but essential for those who are going to minister to others safely.

“In silence and stillness the devout soul makes progress and learns the hidden things of the scriptures. There it finds streams of tears in which each night it washes and cleanses itself, that it may be more familiar with its creator, according as it dwells apart from all the tumult of the times.” (Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, Blaiklock ed., p. 48)

How does solitude relate to the discipline of silence? Foster speaks of solitude as related to an “inner attentiveness.” What is his point? How can I be attentive to what another person wants to say to me if I am doing all the talking? As long as we are the speakers, we remain in control. We are the center of attention. We can orchestrate the conversation according to our needs and our agenda. Silence demands that we trust other people with whom we are in relationship.

Foster writes, “One reason we can hardly bear to remain silent is that it makes us feel so helpless. We are so accustomed to relying upon words to manage and control others. If we are silent, who will take control? God will take control, but we will never let him take control until we trust him. Silence is intimately related to trust.” (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, p. 101) Perhaps this statement tells us why we can be silent with people we love and trust. Our speech patterns teach us much about what we trust, dislike, envy, admire and fear.

Think About It

Consider how you have used words over the past week. What patterns appear in your manner of speech? In what situations do you tend to use words inappropriately (i.e., to manipulate others, exploit others, control others)? Are there situations where you have remained silent for the wrong reasons, (i.e., fear of the opinion of others, fear of making a mistake, fear of looking foolish, fear of going against the grain)?

Balancing Schedules and Solitude

“Fine,” you might reply. “I can understand how the disciplines of solitude and silence would help me. However, my schedule doesn’t allow for solitude. As much as I might like to find space and time to be alone with God, it isn’t possible. I work hard, and my job places many demands on me. My family needs my time and attention. “Your ideas seem helpful, but I do not have time for them. I am too busy.”

Fair enough. What advice might our spiritual mentors offer us? Foster suggests taking advantage of the “little solitudes” that fill the day. Guy Brinkworth advises us to fill the pauses of the day with short, direct prayers: “Holy Spirit, think through me until your ideas become my ideas.” John Wesley’s favorite arrow to God was, “Jesus, strengthen my desire to work and

speak and think for you.” In the Eastern Orthodox tradition we have the “Jesus Prayer”: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

Catherine de Hueck Doherty speaks of the “little pools of silence” which punctuate the day. Joyce Huggett tried to specifically note the junctures and activities of the day that still provided space to commune with God:

When taking paper out of my typewriter or making myself a cup of coffee or waiting at traffic lights, I would turn my mind God-wards quite deliberately. Often God would communicate his presence to me in some way that I could feel. Whilst washing up, ironing, hovering, dusting, gardening, walking to the post, driving to the shops, or traveling by public transport. Therefore, I would try to listen to God as intently as in my place of prayer. As I work, a Loved Presence over my shoulder, as I drive a Loved Passenger beside me. In my reading, cooking, studying, whilst teaching, nursing, accounting: in the maelstrom of the supermarket or waiting for the bus or train—ever the loving sense of a Presence—always that nostalgia for my Creator. (Joyce Huggett, *The Joy of Listening to God*, pp. 171-173)

Huggett teaches us that we can find solitude in the midst of activity. One’s focus (Foster’s “inner attentiveness,”) appears to be the factor that transforms unlikely situations and schedules into opportunities for communion with God. At first we will have to be quite deliberate in building this God-consciousness into the rhythm of our day. Perhaps some will find Frank Laubach’s “experiment of filling every minute full of the thought of God” a helpful exercise (cf. Frank Laubach, *Letters By a Modern Mystic*, in *Devotional Classics*, pp. 101-107). Laubach speaks, for example, of learning to keep two things in mind at the same time.

We can keep two things in mind at once. Indeed we cannot keep one thing in mind more than half a second. The mind is a flowing something. It moves back and forth. Concentration is merely the continuous return to the same problem from a million angles. So my problem is this: Can I bring God back in my mind-flow every few seconds so that God shall always be in my mind as an after image, shall always be one of the elements in every concept and precept? (Laubach, *Letters by a Modern Mystic*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, p. 104)

Laubach’s ideas might scare some people. However, we should try an exercise suggested by Foster and Smith. They suggest putting “some reminder (e.g., a note, a cross, a Bible passage) in the place where you work that will trigger thoughts of God’s presence when you glance at it throughout your workday.” (*Devotional Classics*, p. 107 #3)

In addition to working to develop a consistent sense of communion with God, find a specific time each day for solitude and silence. This discipline is important. An essential approach to success is to start with small steps, perhaps only five or ten minutes a day set aside for complete focus. Nouwen suggests writing this time for silence on one’s daily calendar. He noted that the length of time we allot depends on our “temperament, age, job, lifestyle, and maturity.” Still, some time, if only a few minutes, needs to be set apart for total silence and solitude. Nouwen stresses how important this discipline is:

But we do not take the spiritual life seriously if we do not set aside some time to be with God and listen to him. We may have to write it in our daily calendar so that nobody else can take away this time. Then we will be able to say to our friends, neighbors, students, customers, clients, or patients: I’m sorry, but I’ve already made an appointment at that time and I can’t change it. (Nouwen, *Making All Things New*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, p. 82)

Inner Distractions

What about distractions? Nouwen notes that the new experience of solitude and silence can bring hidden thoughts and feelings to the surface in a disquieting manner.

One of the early Christian writers describes the first stage of solitary prayer as the experience of a man who, after years of living with open

doors, suddenly decides to shut them. The visitors who used to come and enter his home start pounding on his doors, wondering why they are not allowed to enter. Only when they realize that they are not welcome do they gradually stop coming. (Nouwen, *Making All Things New*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, p. 83)

Some people have found that writing down distractions as they appear—without taking time to analyze them—shrinks those distractions’ power. Bring along a pad and pen to times of solitude for this very purpose. In time and with practice, distractions will be less of a problem. Nouwen comments that distractions are “the experience of anyone who decides to enter into solitude after a life without much spiritual discipline. At first, the many distractions keep presenting themselves. Later, as they receive less and less attention, they slowly withdraw.” (Nouwen, *Making All Things New*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, p. 83)

We have stressed that learning to “listen” to God is a vital aspect of solitude. No doubt this phrase is frightening to some students. Most of us have encountered people who insisted that God had given them a specific message or instructed them to carry out a distinct action. Many of these messages or actions have left us confused, irritated, anxious or skeptical. How can we discern whether we are hearing the voice of God or only experiencing the after effects of last night’s spicy dinner? We should keep a number of safeguards for spiritual sanity in mind as we explore the disciplines of solitude and silence.

First, the Holy Spirit will never contradict what the Spirit has already revealed in the pages of scripture. If, for example, God has already forbidden premarital or extramarital sexual relationships, God will not later tell me that the most “loving” action I can show my dating partner is to sleep with her [him]. We must test all messages from God by the grid of the Bible. Therefore, we need to know the scriptures well (See the disciplines of study and meditation.)

Secondly, what we believe God is saying to us in solitude must be brought to our community and tested there. The same Spirit that lives in the individual also dwells in Christ’s body, the church. Search out people in your church community—friends who know you well and who are themselves leading disciplined spiritual lives—and tell them what you think God is saying to you. Take their discernment seriously.

Think About It

1. Have there been specific times in your life when you felt God was speaking a specific message to you? When? What were the surrounding circumstances? Why did you think the message was from God? Were you right or wrong?
2. Plan a time of solitude for two to four hours. During this limited retreat structure a period of confession, reevaluation and renewed commitment. Huggett suggests focusing on the following questions:
 - Does anything in my life stand between God and me?
 - Is anything preventing me from giving myself freely to fulfill God’s plan for my life?
 - What have I been doing for God?
 - What am I doing for God at present?
 - What ought I to be doing?

Practical Suggestions and Steps

What practical steps can we take into our practice of solitude and silence? We have already mentioned looking for the little “pools of silence” that are part of each day. Foster also suggests:

- Find or develop your own “quiet place,” your particular location or hide-away for silence and solitude.
- Discipline yourself so that your words are few and full.
- As an experiment (not a new law) go an entire day without speaking.
- Withdraw for three or four hours four times a year to reorient your life goals. What do you want to accomplish one year from now? Ten years from now? “Set realistic goals but be willing to dream, to stretch.” (Cf. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, pp. 105-109)

Unit 1 “Thirsty for God: Restoring our Spiritual Passion for God”

- Take a retreat once a year simply for solitude. Joyce Huggett suggests four central aims for a longer retreat:
 - to realize the presence of God more clearly,
 - to assess more clearly our responses to the “loving offers” that God has been making to us since our last retreat,
 - to discern what God’s will is for us in the here and now,
 - to readjust our lives in the light that God gives
(Huggett, *The Joy of Listening to God*, p. 189).

As a final note on solitude and silence, remember: The goal of these disciplines is not simply solitude and silence. The goal is transformation of our hearts, to love and compassion. Foster writes:

A happy by-product of becoming the friend of God is an increased compassion for others. Once we have seen into the abyss of our own vanity we can never again look at the struggles of others with condescending superiority. Once we have faced the demons of despair in our own aloneness, we can never again pass off lightly the quiet depression and sad loneliness of those we meet. We become one with all who are hurt and afraid. We are free to give them the greatest gift we possess—the gift of ourselves. (Foster, *Study Guide for Celebration of Discipline*, p. 5)

Spiritual Formation
Unit 2
Images of Spiritual Formation:
What is the Goal of Life in Christ?



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Unit 2

Images of Spiritual Formation: What is the Goal of Life in Christ?

Contents

- Learning Outcomes and Steps to Complete Unit 2
- Lecture Notes and Workbook
- Email Assignment
- Reading: Discipline in Focus: Study

Learning Objectives

- Explore several passages and authors of the Bible to sharpen your understanding of what is essential for a healthy spiritual life.
- Master some of the many metaphors of the Christian life, indicating implications of those metaphors for spiritual formation.
- Begin to test elements involved in Christian living by risking concrete action to nurture openness to God more responsibly and actively.

Steps to Complete Unit 2

Read and Reflect

- Reader for Unit 2: *Discipline in Focus: Study* (found at the end of this unit)
- Textbook: *Devotional Classics*, pp. 41-47 (Bernard of Clairvaux); pp. 129-135 (Rolle); pp. 281-287 (E. Stanley Jones).
- Respond to your reading in your personal journal. You may want to use some of Foster’s questions following the textbook reading for reflection and journaling.

Respond

This unit’s discipline focus is study. You have spent the first unit in a discipline for slowing and quieting down, opening up to listen and be quiet before the Lord. Now you will want to find intentional ways of hearing God through study. You might journal about your delights or frustrations. The journal might also include your difficulties with the process of study as well as your discovery of new study patterns. The “Discipline in Focus: Study” article in the reader has ideas to help you practice the discipline of study.

Remember: you are to journal at least three times each week. The *Devotional Classics* readings have helpful reflection questions for your personal journal.

Write

Complete the final email assignment for Unit 2.

***Note: For each unit, you will read the textbook and respond in writing (your journal), as well as write a short paper. At the end of each unit, you will send three of your journal entries to your facilitator, along with your reflection paper (see final email assignment).**

Lecture Notes and Workbook

[Chris Hall] Unit 2 looks at “where we are going.” It assumes we are involved in the variety of good things Christians are supposed to do, including Bible study, prayer, admonishing one another, singing hymns, celebrating together, going on retreat, evangelizing or church planting, teaching, team building or raising funds for ministry. What are these things all about? Where do they lead?

Do we have a clear understanding of what God wants as the end result of all this activity and hard work? *If spiritual formation has the effect God intends, what will be the results?* We approach these questions from several directions. What do these questions mean as we think about applying them to our lives?

Think of a wheel. The center is the hub of the wheel. The spokes of the wheel are the various facets that communicate the power of the axle to the wheel itself. The rubber meets the road at the rim of the wheel. This rubber meeting the road is the wholeness of our character and action as it is experienced by others and as it relates directly to the real world. We will begin with the center of the wheel.

What is the goal of life in Christ? What does God have in mind? What is result of taking us through the processes of growth and transformation?

Think About It

What is the goal of life in Christ? What is the goal of spiritual formation? What does God have in mind in taking us through the time, the struggles, the effort, joy and pain of actually living in Christ? Respond in writing in your journal.

[Chris Hall]: Sometimes we are so focused on all the details of Christian ministry and living that we forget the primary goal. Let me give you four key words that might summarize this for you: *Love, Image, Maturity and Finished*. Each one of these is a possible way of thinking about the heart (hub) of spiritual life and growth.

Goals of the Christian Life

Love

One answer to the question, “What is the goal of life?” is *the goal of the Christian life is love*. Roberta Bondi’s introduction to the early church fathers and mothers gives a simple answer in the title of her book, *To Love as God Loves*. Jesus told us the whole of God’s law is summed up in loving God. We love God with all we are, loving our fellow humans as we love ourselves. God’s intention is to remake our characters so we are capable of freely loving in this way. In becoming like God, we are becoming creatures capable of the selfless love of God. We learn how to relate to God and to our fellow humans in loving ways. We learn not to resort to ways of indifference, hostility or selfishness.

Image

Another good answer would be to say we were *created to be imagers of God*. We are to resemble, reflect, portray and trace the profile of God within creation. Our actions, attitudes, relationships, and words are thus to be parables of the character and activity of God. Christian action repeats on a human level the kind of action God is carrying out. Action is good or bad inasmuch as it repeats the prior actions of God. If God loves, we portray what God is like when we are loving. If God preserves and cherishes life, then we reflect God’s actions when we care for and protect life against death. If God seeks justice and righteousness in society, then we become small parables of God when we establish justice in some small way in our society. One answer to the question is, “The goal of spiritual formation is to equip us with the capacity to image God’s character and action within creation.” Often we describe this by the short-hand phrase—“Christ-likeness”.

Maturity

Another good answer would be to say *the goal is maturity in Christ*. The goal, as Paul put it, is an outcome seen in the up-building of the whole body of believers. He wrote, "until all of us come to the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ." (Eph. 4:13). Maturity has to do with a well-rounded, fully developed character. It characterizes a person with wisdom as well as knowledge. It results from experience in distinguishing good and evil in real life situations. It continues with understanding how people in different cultures work to live pure and compassionate lives that express God's ways. This means the goal is not simply learning a certain set of moral rules or conforming our lives to an established ministry style. It also does not mean passing an exam that shows we have mastered large amounts of information about the Bible and Christianity. Maturity is more than all these accomplishments.

Finishing

Finally, we might say *the goal is finishing the course*. We fight the good fight, and we receive God's approval. The goal is to be pleasing to God on that great day when we stand before the Great Throne and our works are tested. We want to be the Bride who is pure and unblemished at the marriage feast of the Lamb. We want to be among the sheep the Shepherd brings into the fold. We don't want to be the goats. The goal is to be worthy in Christ to receive the full pleasure and reward of God in God's Kingdom, to have our treasure laid up in heaven. We want "stars" in our crowns!

Thus, we see four ways of describing the "center of the wheel", or goal of Christian growth: loving as God loves, imaging God on earth, maturing into the fullness of Christ and finishing the race with excellence.

The Complexity of Spiritual Formation

Spiritual Formation is finishing the course well, coming to full maturity in Christ. It is learning to love as God loves. But what is involved in getting from where I now am to where God wants me to be?

Reading the Bible shows us quickly that the Christian life is portrayed with a number of different metaphors or word pictures. A metaphor aids us in seeing what something is like by suggesting certain points of similarity to something that is familiar. When I say "The Lord is my shepherd...." I am instantly involved in a metaphor, a figure of speech that helps me sense more of how God means to relate to me and take care of me. I am like a dependent sheep. God is like a good shepherd who looks after the sheep's needs.

All of the metaphors for the Christian life point to the life we can experience only in relationship with God by the power of the Spirit. This is the life in which Jesus Christ himself is present within us and we are conformed to his will.

Images of the Christian Life

[David Fraser]: Let's look at *images of the Christian life in the New Testament*. The New Testament gives us a variety of images of the Christian life in an attempt to capture the many dimensions involved in the Christian life. If we are to understand the nature of the life to which we are called, we must make sense of these metaphors.

Consider Ephesians 6:10-20. The metaphor is warfare. The Christian is like a soldier, struggling against enemies who can do mortal damage. The Christian life is seen as a fight against principalities and powers, against Satan and the powers of darkness. Spiritual formation is seen as a hardening for warfare, a process of putting on the whole armor of God provided to give us capability to succeed in that struggle.

Think About It

Metaphors, Pictures of the Christian Life

What images of the Christian life can you recall? List on a separate paper those images, along with the Bible reference. Write what the pictures suggest about the nature of the Christian life. What does the image say about the process of spiritual formation? See our example, below:

Warfare—found in Ephesians 6:10-18. The Christian is like a soldier, struggling against enemies who can do mortal damage. The Christian life is seen as a fight against the principalities and powers, against Satan and the powers of darkness. Spiritual formation is preparing for warfare. It is a process of wearing the whole armor of God that is provided to give us capability to stand firm in that struggle. (See II Corinthians 10:3-5.)

[David Fraser]: Once we begin to think about the biblical images of life in Christ, we realize how many there are. This is partly a reflection of Christ's good communication strategy, using many pictures to help ensure that the images will touch someone's experience. It is partly a reflection of the reality that spiritual formation is a complex process.

We tend to become preoccupied with only one or two images, forgetting the others. Yet, each image is only a partial picture—true, but limited. When we consider the variety of images, we remind ourselves that there are a number of important truths that we must not lose. If we lose them, our understanding of our faith becomes unbalanced and distorted.

Below, you will find a list of a number of such metaphors. Maybe you will find some of your own. Take a few minutes to review the list. Ask yourself, "Which of these images are fundamental to the way I think about Christian growth and spirituality? Which images are only parts of my personal experience?"

Other Images of the Christian Life: Selected from the Bible

1. **Biological growth:** John especially likes this image. The Christian life is seen as a slow process of development that is relatively automatic—taking proper nourishment (spiritual milk, meat as Paul would say). The goal of the Christian life is full maturity, the stature of the fullness of Christ. This imagery is rather "passive" in that growth is the by-product of health and life. Spiritual formation is a matter of maintaining that health by "abiding" in the Vine, the source of life. Other parts of the Bible portray us as a tree. Scripture also portrays us as a seedling that needs rooting in good soil and adequate water. The nutrients must continue through us as we live in the light and bear fruit. (Psalm 1; Colossians 2:7; Philippians 1:11, John 3, 15)
2. **A Race:** Paul gives us this image in I Corinthians 9 and Philippians 3. The Christian life is like a competitive run, a striving for a future goal. The goal is the attainment of victory. Spiritual formation, like athletic training, is highly disciplined, routine and repetitive. We repeat the practice of skills with the help of "coaches" so that we become excellent and automatic in those skills. Paul sees this as necessitating the submission and strict control of the body. This "active" image of the Christian life sees it as a matter of "habit" formation, the by-product of great discipline and practice. (Hebrews 12:1-14)
3. **Ambassadorship:** The Christian's life is like diplomatic service. We are to represent a kingdom's intentions and interests before those who have different intentions and interests. Spiritual formation is a matter of a thorough acquaintance with the affairs of the two kingdoms—the heavenly one we represent, and the earthly kingdom within which we represent the heavenly. It means careful study of the structure, make-up, communication patterns, signs and symbols of those we come to know. It means learning languages, learning how to relate to people who may not share our values or "customs" in a way that commands respect, learning how and when it is best to speak of the interests of the King we serve. (II Corinthians 5:30)
4. **Slavery:** The Christian life is like being "owned" by a Master. The goal is the ready and willing carrying out of the desires of the Master. The Christian has no time or resources that "belong" to him or her. Nothing one "possesses" belongs to oneself since all of these powers of one's Master are to be used within the intentions and directions of that Master. Spiritual formation is a matter of growing sensitivity to the wishes of one's Master, learning by experience what this Master demands and claims from us who are slaves. It means having no "career" separate from or different than enhancing the position and fortune of one's Master. This image is again a very

- passive one. The initiative comes from our Master. (I Corinthians 4:1; Ephesians 6:5-9; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:1; James 1:1; II Peter 1:1)
5. **Stewardship (Trusteeship):** The Christian is one entrusted with the property of another. According to Paul the property is the “mystery of God,” i.e., the revelation of truth given in Jesus Christ. The steward’s basic goal is the proper administration of that property. One might deduce two basic responsibilities—maintaining the original capital and adding new wealth to that capital. In Christian life terms, this involves faithfully guarding the tradition we have received from the prophets and apostles (thus not going off after vain speculations or diluting their message with additions) and passing on this “deposit” of the faith to others. The more persons who embrace the Good News and the mysteries of God, the more (as Acts expresses it) God’s Word grows. Spiritual formation in this metaphor is growth in knowledge and skills: understanding the faith enough to maintain its integrity, to recognize what ideas dilute it and threaten it as “another Gospel,” and skills in passing it on to others so that more and more find that life important to affirm, embrace and pass on to others. (See Matthew 13:52-53: As a Master of the household bringing things new and old out of the treasure house.) (1 Peter 4:10; Titus 1:7; Ephesians 3:2; I Corinthians 4:1-5).
 6. **Liturgical Service:** The Christian is like a priest who serves in a temple, offering worship to God. This image stresses active involvement of the Christian in making spiritual sacrifices of praise, thanksgiving, hymns and songs, prayer. Spiritual formation in this context would be the daily practice of the “liturgical” disciplines: learning to pray to God, spending time worshipping God, etc. (2 Timothy 4:6; Romans 15:16; see also the picture in Hebrews 10:19-25; I Peter 2:4-10)
 7. **Childhood:** The Christian is like a child in a family. This image develops the idea of growth in a more “human” direction. We are set into a relationship with God as heavenly “Father.” Growth to maturity is not a simple by-product of health. Here the question is one of staying in relationship with God, experiencing God’s guidance and chastisement, viewing the “modeling” of the Father in terms of attitudes and behavior expected. In this instance, the Christian life is a relationship between beings who communicate with one another. Spiritual formation is a matter of adopting the role of a child and relating to the Father out of implicit faith and love. (We might generalize this to the metaphor of family, since the church is the spiritual family to which we belong. We have responsibilities to our “brothers” and “sisters” as well as to the “mothers” and “fathers” in the faith.) (I Peter 1:14-16, 1: 22-2:3; 1 John 3:1-3; 5:1-5). An additional related image here is of the child who has inherited the estate of the Father. (Ephesians 1:11, 14, 5:8; Colossians 3:24)
 8. **A Branch in a Vine:** John 15 gives a dramatic portrayal of the Christian life as a matter of being connected to a living vine—with God as the vinedresser, Jesus as the vine, and we as the branches.
 9. **Warfare:** Ephesians 6 portrays the Christian life as being readied for warfare, equipped with all the armor necessary to resist the tactics of the evil one. (I Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 2:3-4; II Corinthians 10:3-5).
 10. **Animal husbandry:** Psalm 23 and John 10 portray God as a shepherd and we as the sheep, suggesting a range of ideas about what is essential in trusting relationships between sheep and their shepherd. The focus is strongly on what the Great Shepherd does for the sheep, rather than on what the sheep do for themselves, for others or for God. (1 Peter 2:25).
 11. **Skilled Master Builder:** Paul uses this imagery for the Corinthian community—as it was building on the only foundation, Jesus Christ. The language is plural, recognizing that the Christian life may involve individuals, but it is not individualistic. We build a relational network, a community of people who share life and tasks together and either put up wood, hay and stubble (poor buildings) or gold, precious stones and silver. Spiritual formation involves more than what I do as an individual. It involves what I do with fellow Christians who are in community together. (I Corinthians 3:10-17)

12. **Pots and Pans:** 2 Timothy 2:20-23 portrays a large household with many utensils of various sizes and intended uses, some very common, others highly precious and used only for the most significant occasions. Paul's point is that the common and unclean is not used in the same way as the special, pure vessels. Christians who cleanse themselves of all the various practices and attitudes he lists are told they will become special vessels, dedicated and useful to the Master of the household (God). Here the life of discipleship is seen as a matter of discovering what sorts of things render one "unclean" and taking steps to cleanse oneself of them.
13. **A Boat Anchored in Swirling Waters:** Hebrews 2:1 suggests this image. We are to pay great attention to the message that God gave us in Jesus Christ, lest we drift away from it. The picture is an anchor coming loose and a boat being pushed by the currents away from the safety of its harbor. Hebrews goes on to suggest that this falling away can happen by neglect, by hardening of the heart or by repudiation of our former commitment.
14. **A Journey on a Path or Road:** Jesus speaks of the narrow way and the Christians themselves are called followers of the "Way." The picture is of the Christian life as a journey towards a destination. 2 Peter 2:15 reads, "They have left the straight road and have gone astray, following the road of Balaam son of Bosor, who loved the wages of doing wrong...." 1 John 1:6-7 contrasts walking in darkness with walking in the light.
15. **A Bride:** The church is the Bride of Christ, ready, pure, faithful and unblemished. (II Corinthians 11:2).
16. **A Body:** We Christians are portrayed as an interconnected, specialized and differentiated set of parts or members of a body connected together and receiving our life from a common head. (II Corinthians 12:12-31).
17. **Clothing:** We put off the old clothes we used to wear and put on the new (taking off the old nature and putting on the new). (Ephesians 4:25-32; Romans 13:12-14; Colossians 3:5-17)
18. **Resident Aliens:** (1 Peter) Believers are exiles. (Greek: *paroikos*, exiles, resident aliens)
19. **A Yoked Animal:** (Matthew 11:29)
20. **A Corpse:** We Christians are raised from death to new life. (Ephesians 2:1-6)
21. **A Student:** Believers are disciples undergoing training. (Matthew (see below), Galatians 6:6)
22. **A Guard:** Christians protect a sacred treasure. (I Timothy 6:20; II Timothy 1:14)
23. **A Mirror:** Christians reflect the reality of God. (*imago Dei*, Romans 8:29; Colossians 3:29; II Corinthians 3:18)

We have listed several metaphors of the Christian life. They include the following: birth and growth of a child, running of a race, readying of a bride for marriage, ambassadorship to a foreign land, anchoring of a boat in swiftly running currents, putting off of old clothes and putting on of new, grafting in and constant abiding of a branch in a vine, liturgical service of a priest in a temple, a journey along a path, stewarding and managing an estate, being a student with a tutor, being yoked to another animal and pulling a burden, farming, etc. We have not tried to list all the images—just enough to remind you of how many there actually are!

Think About It

What does understanding metaphors of the Christian life have to do with helping us understand spiritual formation? We are prone to becoming unbalanced in our lives if we look at only one aspect of the Christian life. The variety of images helps us see that there is more to spiritual formation than our own tradition may have taught us. Spiritual Formation is no less complex than the numerous images of the Christian life we see in the Bible. We may be stressing one aspect of what is involved in moving to maturity while completely neglecting equally important yet complementary truths. Think about it. You do not have to write your answer this time.

An Image in Detail

Let’s spend time working on one of these images in detail. This activity will provide an example of how we might develop the implications of any image. What becomes apparent as we study various authors in the Bible is that they have their favorite way of portraying the Christian life. This is certainly true of the Gospel writers. The wholeness of truth comes from paying attention to all of the images.

John’s Gospel contrasts in crucial ways with the other Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke. In some ways, it is very different in its perspective and language. The central expression in Christ’s teachings in the first three gospels is the Kingdom of God. In John’s gospel, the phrase “The Kingdom of God” occurs only several times. In John the theme of Christ’s teaching is stated primarily as eternal life (and the Gospel is written so that people might experience that life—John 20:31). The world below is in darkness, in the lap of the evil one, fostering living through the Flesh (John 8:23, 16:11; 11:9; 1:5; 1:13, etc.). The emphasis is on the conflict between the life that is possible to ordinary human experience and the life that does not have biological continuity. This life comes “from above” and is eternal. For John, the entrance to the Christian life is a matter of faith. It is through faith that we have “knowledge” of God, of the truth. Having such knowledge is what enables us to partake in eternal life and receive the promise of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. The counsel of the Holy Spirit will enable us to separate truth from falsehood, and to see the significance of the signs which Jesus performed in order to point us to the only source of eternal life.

The overwhelming image of the Christian life in John is *the imparting of life by the power of the Spirit*. The Christian life is being born from above or born again and engaging in the process of growing and developing until that life reaches its fullest mature expression. We are born into a new family with many brothers and sisters whom we are to love as God loves us. However we express the message of John about Christian living, that message will center around *the concept of eternal life*.

John uses other images, including branches abiding in the vine in John 15 and the sheep hearing the voice of the true Shepherd in John 10. But no image is as pervasive as the notion of birth and growth to maturity. *John teaches us to be the children of God*. We are to be born again. We are to grow and develop. Christ calls us to abide in him, to partake of the “manna of heaven” (the flesh and blood of Christ). We are also to live in a fellowship requiring that we love the “brothers and sisters”, etc. The fullness of life is the basic metaphor in a number of the “signs” of the Gospel. We are to come to understand the many dimensions of this eternal life: it overcomes “blindness” (John 9), heals “soul” sickness (John 5), satisfies the deepest “thirsts” (John 7), etc. Comparisons between physical life and eternal life serve to suggest the various central components that make living the Christian life.

Do you see how pervasive an image of the Christian life can be in a writer’s thought? We could take time to do something similar for the thought of every New Testament writer, but that is not our purpose here.

Look now at the question below, and see how you might fill out the focus that Matthew’s gospel uses as its central picture of Christian living. Read sections of Matthew as well as some brief notes about Matthew in the Reader for this unit. The notes give you the outline of Matthew so that you can see how it is organized as a teaching or catechetical document. Matthew takes the Christian life primarily as a life of discipleship. What is a disciple?

Think about it

Matthew: Discipleship as the basic picture of life in Christ

What is involved in being a disciple? What is the difference between a genuine disciple and a false one? What is involved in spiritual formation? Why is spiritual formation essential to discipleship and to making disciples of all nations? What happens to disciples who become mature? How do they become capable of relating to God, and able to teach a person to love as God loves? Write some of your own observations on paper.

Begin with Matthew 25:18-20. Following in this notebook are some short notes on the outline and structure of Matthew to help you analyze.

[David Fraser]: Matthew gives us a distinctive theology of the Christian life.

1. His basic metaphor is discipleship.
2. The activity of the disciple is "following", i.e., learning the content of the Teacher's viewpoint, adopting the lifestyle and "path" of the Teacher, doing what the Teacher commands, suffering the same fate as the Teacher.
3. The explication of discipleship is especially given in the five major teaching discourses in Matthew:
 - a. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) gives the style of life, attitudes and behavior marking an authentic disciple, teaching the ethical and spiritual heart of Jesus. Jesus teaches we are to live life with a righteousness that surpasses that of the Pharisees and scribes. To do righteousness is to obey the words and commands of the Master teacher, Jesus Christ.
 - b. The Mission of the Apostles and Persecution (Matthew 10) tells us that we disciples have a job to do in the world, bringing the good news of the Kingdom of God and the power of the Spirit in healing as well as confrontation with the powers of evil. This passage teaches us about the ministry of the true disciple.
 - c. The Disciples and the Kingdom of God (Matthew 13) instructs us in the nature of the Kingdom of God. Normally we think of a Kingdom as a controlling power. Yet the Kingdom of God comes humbly, quietly, in a form that can be rejected. Its followers still suffer in this world. Its coming does not banish all evil or evildoers. Everything depends upon our response to the word of the Kingdom given in Jesus Christ. If we have good ears, we need to listen and understand the message of Jesus about the Kingdom's presence and its priorities.
 - d. Brotherhood and Sisterhood in the Community of Disciples (Matthew 18) Here we have teachings about managing relationships within the Community of the King. What do we do when Christian brothers and sisters do not live by the Sermon on the Mount? What about corruption among the disciples, particularly when they fall into serious moral or doctrinal error? What about disciplining other disciples?
 - e. Discipleship and Watching in Light of the Coming Judgment. (Matthew 23-5) Jesus is coming again. True disciples watch for that coming while remaining faithful. They serve the poor and continue to preach the message of the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ to all the peoples of the earth. Then will this age come to an end and the triumphant, visible Kingdom come to earth.

Matthew. 28:18-20 presents the climax of the Gospel, emphasizing the disciple's work: doing or observing God's law given through Jesus as the true Teacher, as opposed to simply knowing and talking about it. Jesus is the positive example. The Pharisees and the false disciples are the negative examples.

This explanation is only a sketch, a beginning. We will need to spell out discipleship more thoroughly than this if we are to understand its implications for Christian living and spiritual formation. Chris will develop the notion of discipleship as part of the basic foundation of spiritual formation in Unit Three. The main point is that Matthew's central picture is that of the student, the disciple, engaged in a life-long process of learning. This contrasts with John's basic portrait of eternal life, the fullness of life as the central picture. Life is imparted to us by the new birth, by nurturing and growing that life and coming to maturity. We have two different pictures, but the same spiritual reality.

So far we've looked at learning to love as God loves, imaging God, maturing in the fullness of Christ, running the race to the very end, and finishing well. We've considered a variety of images of Christian living, and we have thought about their implications for spiritual formation.

Polarities and Tensions

Now we want to look at one implication that follows from this analysis. The process of spiritual formation involves a balance between key polarities or tensions. A polarity refers to two

realities that are like opposites, yet, in life you find you do not have one without the other. Examples of polarities are male and female, light and darkness, and hot and cold. Let me give you examples from the images of spiritual formation:

- The polarity between activity and passivity
- The image of the Christian life as a race.
This image stresses the activity we must undertake in order to run well: Training; putting aside inessential activities and weights; putting off the sin that can hinder us. Then running long, running well, finishing strong, keeping our eyes on Jesus. This image stresses how active and disciplined we must be.
- The image of biological birth and growth—
This image stresses the simple reality of health and eating. Time will produce growth if we are healthy and well-fed. There is very little we can do—we are born as the unique person we are. We cannot add inches to our height by trying harder or praying more. The same passivity seems implicit in the vine abiding in the branches.

You will remember we suggested that you think of this unit’s lesson as though it were describing a wheel. The center of the wheel is the hub around which everything turns. That hub is the goal of spiritual growth, the unity of all the activities and attitudes that make up Christian living. Then we looked at the complexity, the circumference of spiritual life. We found that there are many pictures of what is involved in spirituality. Now we want to capture the themes that run through those pictures. If we think of the wheel, these are like the spokes that balance the wheel. Each polarity is like a set of spokes, the one balancing the other. We have given you activity and passivity, one example of a spoke in the wheel. In some ways the Christian life is completely receptive, a matter not of what we do but what God does in us. The life simply unfolds without our effort as we feed it and let time go by. In another way, the Christian life is hard, hard work. Another “spoke,” or example of the Christian life, would be the way God’s grace and human works balance each other.

Think about it

Polarities in Spiritual Formation

Your second assignment for this unit (see above) was to write metaphors or images of the spiritual life. Do you see various tensions or polarities as you examine the various images of spiritual formation? If we take the pictures as complementary and not contradictory, what different attitudes do they suggest? We have given you examples to help you get started. How many other distinctions can you see? Please write them on a page of your own to capture all of them. We give you one with which you can start:

Active vs. Passive (the image of the vine abiding vs. the racer training and running)

Examples of Polarities

[David Fraser]: We see the polarity [between *God’s activity and our activity*]. On the one hand, everything depends upon God. We have the strange and miraculous event of a person like John the Baptist being filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb. No witness is effective without the work of the Spirit. Yet on the other hand, we are told in Hebrews not to neglect so great a salvation. We are to be alert and active, to labor hard and long, just as Paul did as the result of the working of the Spirit and grace within him. It looks sometimes as though everything depends upon us and what we do. The image of the Christian life as a corpse brought back to life stresses how impossible it is for us to do anything to produce health and vitality. We are dead in sin and trespasses. It is all a gracious work of God.

We see the polarity between *process and event*. Conversion or birth is an event for many of us. Yet daily and yearly growth after that is a process, slowly unfolding with changes at times so small we can barely discern what is happening. These are polarities or spokes on this wheel. The image of the new birth stresses an event. The image of the race stresses a process.

Unit 2: "Images of Spiritual Formation: What is the Goal of Life in Christ?"

Look at the image of our own initiative and freedom vs. God's initiative and freedom. This image contrasts between the Christian as a slave of Christ vs. the Christian as a steward of the Kingdom. Or, one might contrast the picture that we are sheep vs. we are disciples who must take initiative and work hard to learn. Consider the following contrasts:

- *Individualized vs. communal living*: running an individual race vs. being part of a body or team.
- *Loving God and loving fellow humans*: How do we decide how much time and emphasis to give to spending time with God as opposed to the tangible time spent with helping fellow humans? What is more important in being a disciple, evangelism or social justice ministries? Prayer or giving out cups of cold water?
- *Struggle and fighting as opposed to the Sabbath rest we have in Christ*: The Christian life on some of its sides is serene and peaceful; on other sides it requires suffering, struggle, and sleepless nights of agony.

I will stop my list of the balancing spokes of this wheel of the spiritual life here. You might have also included a number of other very important spokes that you may well have included in your list in the workbook. The goal of this unit has been to remind ourselves of the goal and center of life in Christ and to discover some of the complexity that accompanies that center. As we move forward, we will find Christians who talk about the Christian life in ways that differ from our own. They might even seem to say things that we find unbalanced. When we encounter them, we need to ask, "What facet of biblical truth are they stressing?" Are they giving a balanced picture? They may be overstressing a truth in order to correct a defect they sense in the body of Christ.

Be sure you finish the readings, practice the spiritual disciplines in Modules 1 and 2 (Study and Solitude) and write a minimum of three times each week in your personal journal before proceeding to the final email assignment below.

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Email Assignment

The two parts of this assignment are to be sent to your facilitator following the schedule in your syllabus. Please complete the readings, journaling, and the spiritual discipline exercises before doing this assignment.

Part One

Answer for yourself question #5 on page 286 of the text, *Devotional Classics*: "According to Colossians 2:6-7, our life with Christ is like a tree. How would you describe the tree of your spiritual life? How are its roots? Its branches? Its fruit?" Write a one-page answer.

Part Two

On a second page, prayerfully express the major areas where God is speaking to you about your own commitments and habits. What is God saying about you nurturing a strong spiritual life with Christ? Where are your current vulnerabilities? Where are your current strengths? What do you think needs to happen if you are to move decisively forward to new levels of spiritual health and strength as well as balance?

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Unit 2 Reader: Study

Notes on Matthew—an example of Study

Matthew appears to be written in a time of persecution. This opposition might lead to stifling of evangelism because Christians were tempted not to confess Christ publicly or to receive fellow persecuted Christians into their homes. (Matthew 10:34-42) Matthew focuses on the nature and meaning of discipleship. True disciples are distinct not only in that they say "Lord, Lord" or do miracles, but also in the fact that they obey all Christ has commanded and make the Good News known despite persecution. (Matthew 7:15-23; 25:31-46)

Unit 2: “Images of Spiritual Formation: What is the Goal of Life in Christ?”

Matthew also appears to be constructed to serve the purpose of instruction of Christians (catechumens). It has a structure that aids memorization within an oral community. While the structure is still complex, the major part of the book is an alternation between a narrative section (which might have some brief discourses) and a larger discourse or sermon section. In between these major sections is a transitional sentence that is the same, “When Jesus finished saying...” (Matthew 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1)

The book might be best read by starting with its ending and seeing how everything leads up to that ending point. The Great Commission gives the theme: the disciples are now to make more disciples from all peoples on the earth. The material prior to the Great Commission shows Jesus making disciples and in various ways gives an exposition of what a true disciple is.

Peter Ellis (*Matthew: His Mind and Message*, Liturgical Press, 1974) suggests the book be ordered by a “chiastic” form. In this sort of arrangement, sections correspond with each other (A with A’; B with B’). The central turning point is in Matthew 13:35 where Jesus turns from false Israel to the true “Israel.” Until that point he spends time with all people. From then on he concentrates mainly on those who have responded and become serious disciples. Ellis’ chart is as follows:

Discourse		(F)	Ch. 13	(F’)
Narratives	Ch. 11-12	(E)		(E’) Ch. 14-17
Discourse	Ch. 10	(D)		(D’) Ch. 18
Narrative	Ch. 8-9	(C)		(C’) Ch. 19-22
Discourse	Ch. 5-7	(B)		(B’) Ch. 23-25
Narrative	Ch. 1-4	(A)		(A’) Ch. 26-28

Whether Ellis is right or not, the material does break down into units similar to what he suggests as portrayed by the chart below:

- A. *Narrative*: Jesus, Son of David, Son of Abraham, Messiah, New Moses (Chapters 1-4)
 Small discourse: John the Baptist on the One Coming after him (3:8-12)
- B. **Major Discourse**: Surpassing righteousness of the true Disciple (5-7)
- C. *Narrative*: The authority of Jesus shown in ten miracles (8-9)
- D. **Major Discourse**: Persecution inevitable in the work of the disciple (10)
- E. *Narrative*: Jesus opposed and persecuted (11-12)
- F/F’. **Major Discourse: Parables of Kingdom—understanding separates false and true disciples** (13)
- E’ *Narrative*: Jesus is understood and misunderstood (14-17)
- D’ **Major Discourse**: True disciples bound together in community by mutual acceptance based on humility and forgiveness (18)
- C’ *Narrative*: Acceptance of various groups (unmarried, children, the handicapped, the publicans and sinners, Gentiles) and rejection of the Jewish leaders by God (19-22)
- B’ **Major Discourse**: Warning: Judgment will fall on false disciples when the Son of Man returns (23-25)
- A’ *Narrative*: Judgment falls on Jesus—Crucifixion and resurrection (26-28)
 Small discourse: Make disciples until the end of the age (28:16-20)

In this brief outline, note the discourses generally sound a particular note in their teaching. Only the Sermon on the Mount varies from this general note. However, the sermon ends with the multitude astonished. Jesus taught as one having “authority” with his “I say to you...” set against the understandings of the law and righteousness common in his day. The narrative following each discourse section tends to pick up that teaching theme and gives stories that have a somewhat similar point. Thus, Chapter 10 stresses conflict and persecution that awaits the disciples who are sent out to preach and heal. The stories in Chapters 11-12 tend to be stories about opposition or potential opposition: from John the Baptist and his followers, from Chorazin and Bethsaida, from the “wise and understanding,” from the scribes and Pharisees.

One other interesting facet of Ellis’ theory of the structure is to see what continuities and contrasts might exist between his various corresponding parts. On his theory the first Major Discourse (5-7) is matched with the fifth Major Discourse (23-25). They both are about the same length, both associated with a mountain, with Jesus taking the seated position of a teacher. The

one has beatitudes; the other has woes. Both close with a judgmental scene in which the condemned address Jesus as “Lord, Lord.” Similar sorts of parallels and contrasts can be drawn between other sections.

Study and Inner Transformation

The spiritual disciplines are essential for our spiritual maturity, but it is possible for us to practice them in a spiritually defeating manner. For example, if we undertake study for the discipline’s sake only—that is, we study for the sake of study—we defeat the purpose of study. We study because studying is part of our pilgrimage toward personal transformation. This transformation is both internal and external. The spiritual disciplines influence both our inner and outer selves.

Study is one discipline that lends itself to discernment. Paul tells us we are transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2). We are commanded to “think on...things pure, pleasing, commendable, things with excellence and worthy of praise” (Philippians 4:8). We are to “keep doing the things we have learned and received, and heard and seen...” (vs. 9). Study must always be connected with godly living and action.

Study as a spiritual discipline is not abstract learning or even study for its own sake. It is concentrated thinking, focused on intentionally developing habits that are essential for spiritual health, habits that empower us to grow into maturity. It requires us to strip away our illusions and false notions and helps us to understand the visible and invisible worlds. Our understanding of the world around us depends on what we think about and focus upon. What we ponder, read and listen to shapes us and determines how we perceive the visible and invisible worlds.

We are liberated, said Jesus, by the truth. “You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free.” The truth is not simply book knowledge. It is the knowledge of our spiritual reality. The truth is reliable, regardless of the appearances that surround us. Study is a discipline that attacks the sin of falsehood (in one major theologian’s account, falsehood is one of the three great sins). Through study, we penetrate the fog of our culture’s ideas and attitudes. We study in order to replenish our minds and hearts with the truths that structure the character of God as well as all created things.

This renewing of the human mind is a transformation of destructive thought patterns—thoughts that allow our thinking to be controlled by matters that are contrary to the good and perfect will of God. Humans are always thinking. The issue is *what* are we thinking and *how* are we thinking. What controls our thoughts? When I think about God, on what aspects do I focus? What about my thinking about others? What are the habitual thought patterns that structure my inner life?

Gaining New Eyes

One proverb claims that we do not see the world the way it is but we see the world as we are. We approach the world—and think about it—according to what we are. Jesus teaches us that what we see is very much dependent upon what we are. What we see depends not only on what is in front of our eyes, but also on what is within our minds and hearts. To the pure all things are pure!

I remember my son Scott returning home after taking an extensive ornithology course from the environmental biology center at Au Sable, Michigan. Ornithology is the study of birds. One morning he said to me, “Dad, I didn’t realize we had birds in our back yard!” He ignored birds until he learned to recognize the various species and listen to their songs. The birds had been there all along.

Various aspects of reality surround us, and we do not realize they exist. The geologist looks at a rock, and sees far more than the average person sees. Likewise, a chess master looks at the board and sees far more than a random distribution of pawns, knights and rooks. The skilled physician taking a pulse and noting skin tone sees more of a patient’s health than you or I can see. Experience and knowledge make a difference in ‘seeing’.

Study is one method by which we renew our inner person. Through study, we gain purity of heart and clarity of vision to see ourselves, God, history, the Bible and others aright. We do not see aright if the impurities of our hearts prevent us from seeing the world clearly.

Jesus makes this point to us in the Sermon on the Mount. If you allow your heart to be full of sexual desires and longings, you will look out at others and see them as sexual objects and possible sexual partners. If you allow ambition and pride to control your thoughts, you will see every situation as a threat to your status, every success of your fellow human as a slur on your own importance. In addition, you are likely to lose interest in events unless you they pay you adequate attention. If greed governs your heart, you will view the world as a place to exploit, a ladder to wealth and security.

How do we get to the place spiritual transformation becomes effective and powerful in our inner person? Study is one of God’s gifts to us. We use Study to become well-grounded, able to perceive correctly.

The New Testament includes accounts of Jesus’ life and the letters and documents of the apostles. The New Testament writers’ intricate, comprehensive knowledge of the Old Testament should stun us. They memorized, reflected upon, thought about, considered, meditated upon, and discussed the scriptures. No matter what the situation, Jesus and the apostles knew the appropriate scriptures to guide their thinking and judgments—or to correct the inadequate and immature notions of others.

While we are not suggesting we are as well-grounded in the scripture as the apostles, we do acknowledge our need for far more time, and encounter with scripture, if we are to be “renewed” by the transformation of our minds, we must receive the good seed of the Word of God again and again if we are to hold that scripture in our hearts, and give ourselves the time and space needed to become fruitful.

Furthermore, we are not restricted to the scripture as the only important study of what can and will have a transforming impact upon us. We can incorporate the study of all things into a spirituality that takes seriously the body and its placement in this world. Study may include the study of nature, of great literature, of the arts, or of the techniques that lead to mastery of a given area.

How do study and meditation differ?

Let’s make an important distinction now. Study is an analytic exercise, involving taking something apart and turning it over and over to learn the various aspects we can know about it. (See the example of study in this module.) Study is not the same thing as meditation. Meditation is devotional, contemplative. Meditation studies appreciatively, seeking to enjoy and celebrate something. Study seeks to take something apart, to explicate and explain. Study and meditation overlap each other; both are transformational. I often find myself captivated by the wonder of something I am studying and find myself no longer analyzing but meditating. I may find myself puzzling and contemplating as I take something apart. Nonetheless, the distinction is helpful.

There are other things people do that are not the discipline of study such as the:

- ordinary activity of listening to a sermon on Sunday mornings;
- devotional reading of scripture;
- memorizing scripture or the words to a hymn, apart from analysis and comprehension;
- learning new facts or facets about spiritual things, or about the Bible and theology;
- casually reading a book for enjoyment or recreation;
- watching of a film or video—or listening to an audio CD.

Why aren’t these activities study? They are not study because the dominant mode of involvement is not active analysis joined with comprehension. They do not incorporate the steps necessary to unite new knowledge with existing knowledge. We might be gaining knowledge in these activities, and this knowledge might be transformational. However, study is a discipline requiring more intentional, energetic, focused involvement.

Listening to a sermon on Sunday can become study if we are intentional about making it study. We need to prepare ourselves to listen to the sermon, and make some effort to retain the knowledge in the message (perhaps even listening again to a recording of the message). The sermon becomes a means of study when we prepare for it, retain the knowledge we gained from it and use that knowledge as this basis for deeper study. Some people take notes during

sermons, discuss the ideas in the sermon with other Christians, and then study the passages more deeply on their own in order to learn deeper truths about their faith.

We can also combine devotional reading of scripture with study. Devotional reading frequently does not grapple with a text’s finer points and details. Devotional literature does not ask the reader to consider the original meaning of the text. However, careful study of the Bible can *lead* to devotional reading, as well as to reading the Bible more devotionally. After we understand the meaning of the texts, they become a delight to hear, speaking their distinctive words freshly. Although devotional reading does not necessarily lead to study, it is useful for developing our spirituality because devotional reading can lead us into texts that catch our eye and curiosity for later study.

Memorization is an effective way to make room in our minds and hearts for the Word of God. Through memorization, scripture becomes second nature; memorization brings scripture to mind in particular situations, especially when you need it. Memorization allows us to have the “ahas” that occur when we see the relevance and importance of a promise, a command, an insight or perspective. There is too little memorization of scripture in contemporary Christian practice. However, despite the value of memorizing scripture, (many Christians memorize lines, paragraphs, and even books of the Bible), memorization is not study unless one gets behind the words to the meaning of those words. For example, memorization may become a part of study when you join it to the words of creeds, hymns, prayers, verses or paragraphs. But we must not only recite words; we must know why they are significant.

Learning new facts and facets of the Bible and theological truth happens when we study—and sometimes even when we are not particularly alert or focused on learning. We are not, however, saved by our knowledge of facts (though salvation involves knowledge and experiential involvement in that knowledge). Knowledge alone is not transformational because it is not adequate to help us fully understand the various points of view or the many different interpretations of scripture.

Casually reading a book for enjoyment is not study. Again, the issue is how we engage the scripture or reading, and whether we analyze it in a significant way. We might read a book for enjoyment and find ourselves surprised by the joy of God transforming us. We might also find a book significant enough to read a second time and be moved into a study and mastery of elements that shaped our thought-patterns in that book.

This situation is not either/or. You already have a sense of the different levels at which we might read a book. Recreational reading is valid. We probably need to do more of it, especially if we are employed in positions that require us to engage in large doses of study, such as teaching, preaching, medicine, journalism or publishing.

The important issue about watching films or listening to CDs is how these activities influence our lives. Do analytic processes enable us to reflect upon the videos or films, to discern their larger meanings within the culture we serve? Some of the best study for the transformation of our minds is discerning and understanding the world view patterns and cultural themes evident in media. We must understand and control how media influences our thinking and worldview patterns in order to be transformed.

All the ecstatic experiences of our spirituality, including “getting high on Jesus,” will leave us undiscerning and unprepared for the tough struggles of life if we do not intentionally engage in study. Study is engaging the information, images and symbols that surround us. Study must become a vital part of our discipleship in the Word of God. Without study we will not acquire the discernment needed for transformation.

If we fail to study properly, the surrounding culture will sweep us into its mold. We will become victims of the newest fads, whether cultural or theological. Paul cautioned the Colossians, “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ.” (Colossians 2:8)

Faithful and Diligent Exercise of the Mind

The discipline of study calls us to stability and maturity through the faithful and diligent exercise of our minds. Foster writes,

“We must once again emphasize that the ingrained habits of thought that are formed will conform to the order of the thing being studied. What we study determines the kind of habits that are formed, which is why Paul urges us to focus on things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and gracious.” (*Celebration*, rev. ed., p. 64)

Study, like all spiritual disciplines, is hard work; we do not need to be reminded of this truth. Thinking about things that are truthful, honorable, just, pure, lovely and gracious seems delightful. The reality, however, is that we grow weary rapidly, and our efforts to discover truth can become drudgery.

Richard Foster suggests four essential elements of study:

1. **Repetition:** We learn things by repeated exposure. New thinking habits will imprint themselves on our minds if we continually think them, and analyze them. Moses followed this in the law, commanding that the people be continually surrounded by the law (on their gates and door posts, bound to their wrists and foreheads. (Deuteronomy 11:18) “These commandments I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you lie down and when you get up.” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)
2. **Concentration:** Center ourselves and focus our attention on what we’re studying. Here is an overlap between the discipline of study and meditation. Meditation teaches us how to concentrate, focusing ourselves so that all our energies are given to one object of contemplation. Study draws upon that ability so we can engage and analyze the object of study with a singleness of purpose.
3. **Comprehension:** The initial goal of all study—insight, discernment, meaning, and significance—is comprehension. Analysis is meant to lead us to the point where we see the meaning that structures the object we are studying. If we study a book, then we begin to understand the subject matter from the point of view of the author, to see the basic principles that underlie the argument and arrangement of the author’s materials. If we study an artistic production, we begin to catch the spirit and vision of the creator of the work. If we study nature, we make connections that enable us to understand the intricate mechanisms and patterns that characterize a particular part of our world. Without understanding what we are studying, true discernment and evaluation of significance is impossible.
4. **Reflection:** After we have understood what we are studying (not before), we must ask the following questions: What significance does this have? Is it important? Is it true? Is it valuable? Is it beautiful? Is it honorable? Only at this level of reflection can we take up an appropriate relationship with what we have studied—whether it is to avoid it, advocate it, pursue it even further, or incorporate it into a larger set of principles and perspectives that govern our approach to life.

The Study of Books

Adler and Van Doreen, in *How to Read a Book*, offer a thorough account of how to read books—what to look for, along with the difficulties one encounters in achieving a mastery of a book. They focus on what individual readers need to do in order to be considerate readers, that is, readers who give the necessary time and effort to achieve the level of comprehension required to engage the author’s claims and propositions.

Foster calls these ways of reading “Intrinsic rules.”

Intrinsic Rules of Reading

First, the reader must understand the author’s key terms or vocabulary. In reading Paul’s writing, for example, one encounters terms like ‘justification by faith’, ‘spirit versus the flesh’, ‘the law’, ‘the gospel’, etc. One must understand a book’s terminology before proceeding to the next reading step

The second intrinsic rule is reading synthesis. The goal of all reading is to first, *understand* what an author says. (If you can say in your own words what the author means by what he or she has written, you understand what you read). Once you are sure you understand what you have read, you can then try to put together different passages in the text to draw

conclusions or see how an author’s ideas relate to one another. You interpret the text’s various passages to understand the author’s main idea or thesis, look to see how the author supports his argument, and discern what the author intends to claim about the book’s subject matter.

The third intrinsic rule of reading is evaluation, determining why a book was worth writing or reading—what difference does it make that such a thing has been said? Is the book important? Or could life go on pretty much the same without it? Is this book creative, saying something new? Or, is the author saying something already well known and understood from books better written?

What about the truth factor? Are the claims the book makes or the vision of life the book presents ‘truth’? Are parts of the book deficient or do they say something valid? Or is the book partly true—but the claim of the book as a whole does not give us something that is true? Can we say what is true and what isn’t true in the book? In our evaluation, we must be charitable and generous readers—willing to understand an author’s assumptions and limitations. It is not sufficient to criticize a book or an author for not writing a book they never intended to write. That criticism is like complaining because Paul didn’t write a narrative gospel or Luke didn’t write a book of proverbial truths.

We may decide a book is important and true if we stay within the assumptions and commitments of its author. Nonetheless, we may then step outside the world view and assumptions of that author, which we may not share, and suggest a different point of view, suggesting alternative ideas that capture more of the truth or express the truth in a less distorted manner.

Book study cannot be restricted to our own knowledge base. A number of additional aids may help us comprehend and reflect upon written material. Foster calls these resources “extrinsic aids.”

Extrinsic Aids for Reading

Experience: Some books cannot be understood without experience. A simple example is reading about the sharp burst of flavor from biting into a ripe papaya. Those who have never experienced a papaya will have little idea of how the fruit looks or tastes. If I tell you I’ve discovered a new fruit in Vietnam, previously unidentified, that tastes like a papaya, you will not have much of an idea of the fruit’s taste. Books cannot be understood without the proper experience base.

Other books and resources: Dictionaries, encyclopedias, other works by the same author, and works on the same subject by different authors, videos or computer programs may help us understand what we read. As new Christians, we might find it difficult to understand some literature, such as the book of Hebrews’ complex images and symbols. However, a good commentary can help us discern more adequately a passage’s meaning. Furthermore, many books are part of a larger conversation. For example, I can understand Hebrews better if I have some acquaintance with the Pentateuch, especially the parts dealing with the tabernacle and the priesthood. I will understand Martin Luther’s commentary on Galatians more fully if I have read his biography and know the issues that swirled around that great German Reformer of Christian faith and practice. Other books can be valuable reading aids.

Live discussion: With discussion, we share our own understanding, along with what puzzles us, with others. Often the very fact that I am planning to meet with a group to discuss a chapter of a book motivates me to read more carefully. In the discussion and dialogue (even debate), I may discover points I missed. I may have misunderstood the main point—and then evaluated the text wrongly because of my inadequate interpretation. Live discussion is a valuable way to learn cooperatively and move together with a group of fellow Christians toward the mind of Christ.

The Study of Nature and Art

Even our study of God’s world can bring us spiritual benefits. Much depends upon our readiness to branch out into more than simply watching the beauty of the sunsets, although that, too, is helpful. Many contemporary and earlier scientists practiced their research as an act of

worship. See the book by Wesley Granberg-Micaelson, *Tending the Garden: Essays of the Gospel and the Earth*, especially essays by Jegen and Rasmussen.

Studying both art and performance arts provides energy and inspiration of a sort not gained from the verbal, book-oriented world of study. One example is Henri Nouwen's *Return of the Prodigal Son* where he describes the effect his study of Rembrandt's painting by that name had on his appropriation of the parable for his own spiritual life. Art reaches beyond many of our defenses and tugs at parts of our inner being that otherwise lie neglected and undernourished. Also see H.R. Rookmaaker, *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture*, especially Chapter 9, "Faith and Art." There is far more that could be said here as an invitation to the visual and performing arts.

The Study of Scripture

We must deal with scripture's entirety in a systematic, disciplined fashion. Too often we are familiar with only one segment or a few favorite books of the Bible. We have given ourselves only a partial perspective. Be aware of the importance of having scripture flowing continually through our minds. Scripture is one of the ways God cleanses us from the pollution we pick up in everyday life. Commit to reading and memorizing scripture. Our commitment may involve intentional effort to set aside four or five hours a week to dig into specific parts or books of the Bible, using commentaries and other aids, or it may amount to only a few minutes daily. We must start somewhere.

Perhaps try studying a small book of the Bible such as Ephesians by reading it through everyday for a month. Or you may have a digital recording of the Bible. Try listening through a given book repeatedly until its words become familiar friends. After reading the book many times, study with a commentary on the book.

Structure a private retreat to focus on study, perhaps for several days or a week. Your retreat may involve six or eight hours a day, dedicated to concentrated study on an issue or a book of the Bible that you have always wanted learn in more depth. I have discovered that the most difficult problem is not finding time but convincing myself this extended time is important.

Alongside the scripture, become acquainted with a number of the "great books" that have withstood the test of time and, apart from recreational reading, spend time with those books. Expend your efforts on books that have proven themselves. The fact that the classics have lasted so long provides us with a way of distinguishing chaff from wheat. C.S. Lewis writes, "A new book is still on its trial and the amateur is not in a position to judge it. It has to be tested against the great body of Christian thought down through the ages, and all its hidden implications (often unsuspected by the author...) have to be brought to light." In other words, in theology, older books that have proven their reliability and worth provide "a standard of plain, central Christianity... which puts the controversies of the moment back into their proper perspective." Every age has its own outlook. Lewis writes, "It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. And that means the old books." The older books are not any more infallible than modern ones—but they did not make the same mistakes as the current group.

Be selective in your reading. When facing a critical issue, read on that issue. Modern issues will demand modern writers—even when the perspective of older writers has much to offer. Allow room for God to help you make your selections. For example, if you are a teacher assigned to teach a given subject, read relevant books. Perhaps choose a given topic to work on for a whole year—something you know has importance to your life and ministry, something where you need depth and strength. Combine reading on specific areas of interest with a broader attempt to fill in the gaps of your own background.

Couple your study of the Bible with the study of literature: novels and poetry inspired by the Bible, nature, advertising and the whys and wherefores of current politics. You will be surprised at how the Bible becomes more vital as you study it. Similarly, the story of the Bible has relevance to all other stories. We never see that relevance until we are immersed in those other stories as well.

Spiritual Formation
Unit 3
The ABCs of Spiritual Formation:
Reviewing the Foundation



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Unit 3

The ABCs of Spiritual Formation – Reviewing the Foundations

Unit 3 Contents

- Learning Outcomes and Steps to Complete Module 3
- Lecture Notes and Workbook
- Email Assignment
- Readings: Discipline in Focus: Prayer

Learning Objectives

- Review important exegetical foundations for Christian spiritual formation.
- Write a significant history of your own spiritual formation.
- Review key metaphors or models of spiritual formation encountered in Unit Two.
- Analyze the call to discipleship by focusing on key areas where Christ calls us to continue development and change (i.e., a willingness to leave certain things behind, to journey as a pilgrim, to be taught, to be led.)

Steps to Complete Unit 3

Read and Reflect

- Reader at the end of this module: Discipline in Focus: Prayer
- Textbook, *Devotional Classics*, pp. 7-12 (Lewis), pp. 13-18 (Willard), and pp. 33-40 (John of the Cross).
- Reflect upon your reading while writing in your journal entries.

Respond

- Complete the various workbook assignments in the space provided.
- Complete the journaling assignments. By now you have had significant journaling experience. You should be discovering what works best for you to sense God’s voice in the midst of this process of spiritual re-examination and re-tooling. During this unit we ask you to pay close attention to both the questions in the text, *Devotional Classics*, and to what God is saying to you as you continue to practice disciplines of study, solitude and prayer.
- Our concern this unit is with your spiritual history—how and when you became a Christian, what tools you were given, and how you began to nurture your spiritual life. Spend time reflecting on your spiritual history.

Complete the final email assignment and send your work to the professor.

Lecture Notes and Workbook

[David Fraser]: We are beginning the ABC's of spiritual formation, not because you are ignorant of them, but because we want to refresh our memory of the essential foundations of the Christian life. With that in mind, let's begin with the exercise found below.

Think About It

The Elementary Things of Faith

Read slowly and carefully Hebrews 5:7-6:12 and 1 Corinthians 2:1-3:23. What do Paul and the writer of Hebrews consider the foundations of the Christian faith? Why do you think the audience of the letter to the Hebrews and the Corinthian church are still drinking milk when they should be eating meat? What is milk? What is meat?

List three specific areas where God might be calling you to deepen your own faith, moving "from milk to meat."

Write your answers on separate paper.

The Weak and the Strong

[David Fraser]: One of the interesting things in a study of Hebrews and I Corinthians is the distinction between the mature and the immature believer. Clearly, there are several distinctions in the New Testament.

For example, in Paul's writings we meet the "weak" and the "strong" in Romans. The distinction is between those whose understanding of the faith is mature and well-rounded, and those whose faith-understanding is inadequate. Both are able to stand and live before God. In Romans Paul's advice concerns how the two groups can relate without rancor or scorn. The strong should not lure the weak into undertaking actions that their conscience condemns as sinful. The weak were not to despise the strong as unfaithful or sinful.

In I Corinthians we see the distinction between the "spiritual" and the "unspiritual," a parallel distinction to the mature vs. the immature believer. Chapter 3 elaborates the immature as the "people of the flesh" and "infants in Christ." Here the issue seems to be more than simply faith-understanding, but also the basis upon which one's everyday life in Christ is grounded. Some are still in the situation not only of immaturity but also of continuing to be responsive to the flesh. Impulses and fleshly desires dominate their minds, rather than the Spirit. The immature were beginners. They and the mature could not receive the same sort of knowledge and teaching.

Hebrews distinguishes between beginners and mature believers in even greater detail. The Hebrews were people whose faith was seriously endangered by the temptation to repudiate their Christian identity. They were tempted to return to a purely Jewish identity to avoid the persecution the Emperor Nero was giving those called Christian. Yet, they needed to know that part of their struggle was related to arrested growth, to the sin of sloth or spiritual laziness, and to fear. The writer to the Hebrews had given them, in Chapter 6, an affirmation, expressing confidence that they would not turn back. They had to go beyond the elementary principles they knew in order to mature in the Lord.

You will find more notes about the mature and immature in the Reader for this unit. Pay attention to the Reader as it will give you a biblical framework for what we are going to explore later on.

Think About It

Please be sure you have read and reflected upon the notes on Hebrews located in the Reader for this unit.

Three Broad Conclusions

Immaturity and Experience

Hebrews and I Corinthians both teach us it is possible to be immature, and still have a great deal of spiritual experience, even spiritual gifts and abilities. We can be immature, fleshly, and subsisting on milk rather than meat if we have good foundations, but those foundations are not sufficient for the tasks God calls us to do. (One thinks of the Judges as examples of such figures).

Time and Maturity

Time alone does not produce maturity. We are not born into the kingdom of God as mature Christians. Maturity takes time. Yet, it is possible for people to be Christians for decades, even in active, committed organizations such as your own without coming to maturity. We can retain many of the qualities of the immature and unspiritual even after decades.

Beyond a Beginning

We need to get beyond the beginning principles. We spend so much time with them because it never seems that those who surround us ever get beyond the beginnings of Christianity. The bane of much of Christian community is the repetitious drumming in of the same messages and practices year in and year out. Christians hear again and again beginning matters. We need to ask what comes next. What do people do who have been living on the basis of their initial foundations for years, and yet find themselves empty, hollowed-out, hungry, or in difficulty? What happens when they do not have the inner resources to match the outer demands in their lives? How do we move to a new level of maturity, to new depths of spiritual discernment and life? These are the questions Hebrews and I Corinthians force upon us.

Think About It

Your Personal History of Spiritual Formation

Write a brief personal history of spiritual formation in your own life. What were crucial turning points in shaping your present understanding of the Christian life?

You might include such things as: What were the key foundational elements you were taught when you first became a Christian? What were you taught about the spiritual life, i.e., concerning the appropriate behavior, the role of community, what a Christian does and does not do, how one prays, studies, worships, confesses, etc.? Who were your key teachers, mentors, and models? Write a list of books (other than the Bible) that have shaped your understanding of Christian spirituality. If you are working for a Christian organization, what does that organization teach regarding the basics of Christian formation? What have you learned about the basics of Christianity? How did you learn those basics? Write your answer on separate paper.

Consider...

Sometimes we need to be quiet and simply abide. Other times, we need highly disciplined, intense activity. The rhythms and balance of our lives continually shift, and we need to keep up with those changes.

[David Fraser]: I want to say three things out of my own reflection on this exercise.

When I was a newly born-again Christian as a teenager I had a youth minister who led an active youth group. We met every Friday for fun, food and Bible study. We worked our way through I John during the first year I was a Christian. I was taught to read the Bible, to pray to God, to attend church events and to share my faith. I did more of the first three. It took me longer to share Christ with my fellow high school students. I came away thinking that was all that was needed to grow strong in Christ. But I discovered these foundations were not enough,

although they were good. After nearly six years of being a Christian, I found myself in a hostile environment. I knew I needed far more maturity to face the tasks that needed to be done.

Second, one thing that impressed me was how many of the turning points in my spiritual life came from being mentored by another, more mature Christian. Most of my basic understandings of the Christian life have been forged in conversations and long term relationships with an older Christian—my youth pastor who was my spiritual father, some of my college teachers, my boss at World Vision and now a small group of colleagues at Eastern University.

Third, I’ve discovered over the years that nothing lasts forever. The things that nourished and strengthened me at one point in my life grew thin and wearisome after a few years. I must be sensitive to the spiritual disciplines--and how I am appropriating them—to remain fresh and vital. Too often, I’ve gotten stuck in a rut and supposed there was something wrong with me. Instead, rather than striking out in a new direction, and reinventing my study time, I remained in a pattern that no longer helped me. I need to ask what is nourishing here and now—within this season or time of my life?

In part, this reflects the diversity of aspects that make up spiritual formation. Sometimes we need to be quiet and simply abide—other times we need highly disciplined, intense activity. The rhythms and balance of our lives continually shift—and we need to keep up with those changes.

The Images of Spiritual Formation

Review the key images of spiritual formation discussed in Unit Two. Which images particularly address the issue of spiritual growth? Which images seem most closely related to your own experience? Which appear strange or foreign to your past spiritual history? Why? Finally, which images focus on discipleship as a “call to change?” That is, which biblical images or pictures seem to issue a very direct call to transformation in Christ?

Think About It

Four Areas of Change

One image that comes to mind speaks of change in the spiritual life. Think of Jesus’ imagery in John Chapter 15 where you see a picture of a branch joined to a vine. The branch grows, develops, is nourished, rooted and changed as time goes on. The call to discipleship is a call to change in at least four areas:

A willingness to leave certain things behind: Most Christian leaders understand “leaving” as an integral aspect of discipleship. For the first disciples (as for many of us) “leaving” meant a radical change in vocation and livelihood. Peter, Andrew, James and John were explicitly asked to leave their fishing nets behind as Jesus called them to follow him. “Leaving” also entails, however, the loving and firm call to surrender deep emotional, spiritual, or physical behavior patterns to the healing touch of Christ. Many Christian leaders, for example, remain trapped by fear. If they are not in control of every aspect of their ministry, anxiety mounts. Other leaders are enslaved by ingrained patterns of behavior or attitudes that have been consciously or unconsciously nurtured for years; examples include anger, ill-temper, laziness, envy, greed, working too much, or sexual addictions. On a cognitive level, we understand Christ has called us to freedom from these traits and behaviors, but we are unable to break free. The frequent result is spiritual discouragement or self-deception.

Think About It

Discipleship as Leaving Behind

What specific attitudes or behaviors is God asking you to leave behind? Write your answer on a separate paper.

A willingness to journey with the perspective of a pilgrim rather than permanent resident. Strikingly, the earliest designation of the first generation of Christian believers is people of the “Way” (Acts 9:2). The early Christian community viewed themselves as pilgrims on a journey. They had not arrived at their destination, but were continually moving toward home. How should the image of believers as pilgrims on a journey influence our own perception of who we are and what we are called to be as Christian leaders? Would Christian leaders who view themselves as pilgrims moving toward home view their task differently from those who are setting up permanent camp here? The terrain of the land looks different to pilgrims than to settlers. That is to say, our present status as pilgrims or resident aliens should significantly influence our perception of God’s purposes and actions in forming us into Christ’s image and sending us in mission to the world.

A favorite story comes to mind about St. John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantinople in the late 4th century. He was struck by the incongruity of people who proclaimed the future resurrection of the dead and the reality of eternal life, yet lived as though this world was all that existed and mattered. “Stop nailing yourself to this earth,” he frequently exhorted his congregation. Why? Because Chrysostom realized Jesus had called the Christian community to be a pilgrims, people who were journeying home but had not yet reached their destination. “Surely”, he reasoned, “if this is the case why are we trying to set up permanent camp here?”

Think About It

Pilgrim or Permanent Resident?

In what way am I still “nailed to this earth?” First answer this question simply as a Christian believer. Then approach the question from the perspective of a leader. For example, are my leadership perspectives and practices those of a pilgrim or of a permanent resident? How might the two differ? If I’ve yet to move into the life of a pilgrim, what is holding me back? Why?

A willingness to be taught. As Christian leaders, how well do we listen, not only to Christ, but to family, friends, acquaintances, and the suffering rhythms of the broader world around us? Is it particularly difficult for leaders to listen? Jesus often exhorted his audience to have “ears to hear” (Matt. 11:15, 13:9, 13:43). How might the noise level in our lives prevent us from hearing what God desires to say to us? Have we become so busy, even in the good work of the kingdom, because we are afraid of what Jesus might say to us if we slowed down to listen? As we have already seen in unit one, the spiritual disciplines of silence and solitude purposely slow us down and quiet us – so that we may have the peace and silence to learn the lessons God has been longing to teach us.

Think About It

Hearing the Voice of Christ

Ask Christ to show you the specific lessons he might be attempting to teach you, particularly regarding your role as a Christian leader. How well are you hearing what Christ is trying to teach you? What factors might be interfering with your ability to hear and follow Christ’s voice in these areas?

A willingness to be led. At the core of Christian spirituality rests a fundamental question: Who is in charge here? For both beginners and veterans of the Christian life, this remains a question to be asked and answered on a regular basis. Jesus insists on the centrality of this issue in his use of the imagery of the ox and the yoke in Matthew 11:29. “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.” The fundamental stance of both beginner and leader, then, is that of an ox or cow who submits willingly to a yoke for guidance. Why? Because we routinely tend to wander off in the wrong direction.

Unit 3: "The ABCs of Spiritual Formation"

Our wandering nature has been aptly demonstrated over the past twenty-five years as we have witnessed the tragedy of numerous Christian leaders' fall into sin. The gap between the message powerfully preached and the life lived by well-known pastors, evangelists and missionaries has discouraged many. In our more honest moments, though, almost all of us have experienced the disjunction between what we know and how we live. With our minds we comprehend the gospel, but in action we struggle to practice its realities in our daily experience. The results are a gnawing sense of discouragement in our spiritual life. Our words and lives are increasingly split.

Thomas à Kempis taught that only those Christians who had first learned to follow could be trusted to lead. What specific instances from your personal spiritual history where Christ or others in your Christian community called you to follow or submit. What was your response? Why? Would à Kempis trust you as a leader?

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Email Assignment

When you have finished all the reading, the workbook exercises and your journaling, as well as practicing the discipline of prayer, finish this unit by writing two pages dealing with the following assignment:

- You have been involved in Christian ministry for a number of years. Describe your present state of spiritual health. How well has your foundation held up over the years?
- Here we are asking that you look back at the ABCs as they were passed on to you. What sort of foundation was laid for building your Christian life? What was stressed? What was neglected? How far along are you in your Christian journey with Christ? Is your foundation getting frayed? Do the disciplines you were taught then still nurture you now? Or do you find yourself trying to run a marathon race with only 100 meters of training and capability? Have you overshot the ability of the habits and perspectives provided to you in the past to keep you going and growing? Assess the viability and vitality of your origins in spiritual formation. How are you doing now? Is there more that needs development if you are to have the capabilities, by God's grace with the power of God's Spirit, to meet the calling and challenges you face each week?

Complete a draft of only two pages, and email the assignment to the professor by the date indicated on the syllabus.

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Unit 3 Reader—Notes, Prayer

Notes on Hebrews 5:11-6:12

Hebrews 5:11-14

About this we have much to say that is hard to explain, since you have become dull in understanding. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food; for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.

This passage addresses growth and maturity. Jesus learned from his sufferings and obedience. The author believed the Christians were under pressure, yet in a state of arrested growth. They had been Christians for years, but they were still babies, on a diet of spiritual baby-food. There's nothing wrong with a child. We all have to be one at one time or another. Yet tragedy occurs when growth is halted too soon. How tragic would a fifteen year old be who still is as small and as dependent as a toddler.

The marks of immaturity are listed in this passage.

First, the immature are *dull of hearing*. They have lost the ceaseless quest for more knowledge about Jesus Christ. There is no remaining eagerness for hearing things that will aid in the pursuit of God. Gathering with Christians is a round of boring and dull events. It is like the father showing his son through the church one day. They came to a large memorial plaque and the boy looked up and asked, "What's that, Daddy?" The father said, "Oh, this is a plaque listing the names of church members who died in the service." The son thought a minute and asked, "Which service, Daddy, the morning or evening service?"

Second, the immature are *unable to help others*. By reason of time and experience, these Christians should be able to teach others. Yet they are unable. They had not assimilated what they had heard, and they were not able to say the appropriate things to others who were struggling. They were such strugglers themselves that they wandered in confusion and apathy. They may not even have sensed the desperate needs of those close to them. They may have read the scripture, but they had no sense of progress or deepening of their relationship with God. Their knowledge of faith and their understanding of the doctrines of Christian theology did not produce a useful knowledge that empowered them to live an effective and normal Christian life.

Third, the immature are those *in need of being taught the ABCs of the faith once again*. They were portrayed as those whose spiritual nurture was still based on the "milk" of the Word, rather than the solid meat. The basic elements of the oracles of God needed to be set before them once again. In the healthy child, a nourishing diet is all that is needed for moving through the stages of growth from the milk-drinking babe to the meat-eating youngster. Solid food comes only after a child is weaned. But these Christians were not healthy.

The key thing singled out was their lack of skill in the Word of righteousness. The message of salvation is not an impractical abstraction unrelated to real life. Some of it is difficult to assimilate. Yet if we pay heed to it, we will find the clues for distinguishing good from evil. The fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil brought us confusion and death. In its place, we have a new source for our knowledge of good and evil. It is the living and written Word of God.

Yet this Word is not inert or magical. It yields its benefits only to those who grow and mature. It is the Word that brings us to the source of righteousness. It also displays the principles and goals of righteousness. Yet, the ability to distinguish good from evil comes to the Christian whose faculties are trained through practice. The Word of God may be living and sharper than any two-edged sword, active and penetrating. Nonetheless, those who take up this sword can whack and hack like bloody butchers, acting as killers of the spirit and destroyers of innocent life. Used without proper strength and skill, the Word of life can be death-dealing and community dividing.

The difference between immaturity and maturity shows itself in these words. Those skilled in the Word, who are able to assimilate even the "meat" of the Word, articulate that Word. It cuts away at the evil that has fixed itself like a parasite. The immature, feeling the pain caused by its attack on their own sin, complain that the Word is death-dealing and community dividing. This Word of "God," they say is not true, cannot be true, is judgmental and intolerant. They are not skilled in the Word of righteousness, and they even need to be taught the basis of any relationship with God: repentance from dead works and faith toward God. The Word of righteousness is death-dealing to sin, and it divides the human community ultimately into the obedient and the disobedient.

Hebrews 6:1-8

Therefore let us go on toward perfection, leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ, and not laying again the foundation: repentance from dead works and faith toward God, instruction about baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And we will do this, if God permits. For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, since on their own they are crucifying again the Son of God and are holding him up to contempt. Ground that drinks up the rain falling on it repeatedly, and that produces a crop

useful to those for whom it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless and on the verge of being cursed; its end is to be burned over.

The ABC's of the Christian faith are listed in brief form in this passage. There is question whether the introductory section preceding it is irony. If so, the author seeks to sting the reader's awareness of the loss of courage and the regression back to infantile responses on the part of these Christians. If it is irony, he is asserting that it will not really be a problem for them to continue forward toward maturity. They can build on the foundation that has already been well laid. This written sermon itself is a form of meat, not milk. Those addressed are **milk-drinkers**.

Yet irony is not obvious from the context. Without doubt there is a problem in this community. Even if the writer is ironical in force, there is a reality indicated by that irony. These are Christians who have had years of training and experience. They are not ignorant or unknowledgeable about the central teachings of the Christian faith. The problem seems to be that they are not following through on the implications that are part of the elemental principles of the Christian faith. The potential present in those first teachings is not coming to proper fruition.

This list appears to be divided into three sets. **The first set** is *repentance from dead works and faith towards God*. This is the beginning point of any life in Christ. For those who were Jews, the beginning point of life in Christ was a matter of discovering that the Levitical observances of rituals and spiritual etiquette did not bring them spiritual life. To the contrary, rituals and spiritual etiquette could become the noose around one's neck, legalistically choking all life out of one's spirit. There were also the actions of disobedience to the law of God. These works were death-dealing because their end result was separation from God. These dead works needed to be terminated and turned from.

Faith towards God is the positive side. It makes no sense to diagnose the disease, and not take the curative medicine. Reform of habit and character is a positive step. However, reform must be matched by placing trust in God as the only One whose power can remove guilt. Only God can remedy the effects set loose in one's life and in the lives of other people, bringing about the right conclusion to our messed-up affairs. Salvation may be personal but it is not individualistic. What we have done deadens others and may well lead them into dead works. When we believe that God can save, we believe that God's power is sufficient for the whole package of death-dealing consequences that flow out of our sinful actions.

We lay the foundation of the Christian life with these two responses, repentance from dead works and faith in God. There is a sense in which we never move beyond these two responses; we only build on them. We do not move to a more adequate or advanced spirituality that no longer requires repentance and faith. All that the Christian life requires is wrapped up in faith and obedience. We cannot build toward these responses either. They are the door into the Kingdom of heaven. They are the bridge over which we cross to enter God's promised land of blessing. Yet having done so, we must then be instructed as to the significance of our religious practices and hope. So we have **the second set** of matters: *baptisms and laying on of hands*.

"Baptisms" is plural and seems to refer to the various ritual washings practiced by the Jews to ensure ritual purity when coming before God. The baptism (washing) of repentance for the forgiveness of sins practiced by Jesus and John may be included in this. It would require a redefining of these actions for the typical Jew to understand the new inclusive community of the Lord Christ. They might continue practicing the rituals of purification while their Gentile brother or sister in Christ did not, and yet both could be right before God.

Laying on of hands may have something to do with the acknowledgment of new Christians, bringing them into the community with the imparting of the gift of the Spirit. There may also been other reasons for the laying on of hands; perhaps people sought the spiritual gifts. They could also have been seeking the acknowledgment of the community (I Corinthians 11) to be authorized to serve as prophets and prophetesses.

The **final matters** are about: *resurrection of the dead and judgment*. After all, people who were cowering in the catacombs needed courage to hope for the resurrection and the assurance of justice that was in the hands of God. The end of this life is not the end of life or relationships. It is the beginning of life that is eternal, abundant and effective.

Next, the passage portrays the peril of falling away. This is an awful possibility. It also presents us with a puzzle. How is it that someone can experience all that is described and not

be a Christian? And if there are those who have become Christian and entered into these spiritual realities, how can such persons fall away from God without hope of any restoration? If we have been considering the characteristics of milk-drinkers, now we confront **the still-born** in this picture.

The still-born "have once been enlightened." Their eyes were opened to their own desperate, personal need. They have seen that Jesus Christ is God's offer for the peril of judgment their sin brings. They "have tasted the heavenly gift." God's unspeakable gift of God's Son, the love expressed in the incarnation and crucifixion, had become part of their living experience.

They "have shared in the Holy Spirit and have tasted the goodness of the word of God." This is not a description of an external or nominal relationship to the central powers of the gospel. Their inner lives had been changed by the incoming of the Holy Spirit. The thrill of the word of God had touched them, and they rejoiced. They recognized the applicability and glory of what the Word promises to faith.

In summary, they had experienced "the powers of the age to come." These qualities of internal participation in the objective realities of God's reigning and liberating power mark their affairs. In the overlap of the ages, they had entered that zone where the powers of this age were countered and overcome by the powers of the coming age.

Yet the sentence stands: "It is impossible to restore again to repentance [these who]...then have fallen away." How can anyone who had such a God-involved beginning fall away with no hope of restoration?

Can it be that we often confuse conception with birth? If the spiritual life follows the physical life pattern, then we know that life does not begin with birth. It begins with conception. Is there in the spiritual life a gestation period as there is in the physical? Perhaps there is a period when the new Christian more resembles an embryo, forming little by little in the womb, fed by the faith and vitality of others. In this case, Spirit-given life may result in a still-birth. Perhaps Paul has this picture in mind when he writes to the Galatians: "My little children, I stand in doubt of you. I am travailing in birth again until Christ be formed in you."

If this is so, then the moment of conception is only one of the critical moments. Conception occurs when the Word of God first meets with faith. The possibility of new life begins. Another critical moment arrives when the individual realizes that discipleship means following Christ at the cost of one's own desires, ambitions and purposes. We have a similar picture in the parable of the different soils. Jesus calls us to "deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him."

In this case the call and conditions of the Kingdom of God are so powerful and costly that a person may turn back and not persevere. The grace of God has brought a person along the path, through the narrow gate, and now they turn back to exit out the way they've come in.

At the end of this warning is an analogy of two plots of ground. Hebrews gives the picture of the rocky soil where people receive the word with gladness, but when persecution comes, they fall away. This is compared to re-crucifying the Son of God. They re-crucify the Son of God when they resist the demands of God often enough and long enough. This happens if their spiritual growth is arrested for too long a period, and if they refuse to be disciplined by the Heavenly Father who disciplines all his authentic children.

This is most openly seen in those who repudiate their Lord. Judas did this, even though he probably worked miracles and proclaimed the Kingdom of God along with the other Apostles. Simon the Magician in Acts 8 is another case. Later church history portrays him as a bitter enemy of Christianity. One thinks of Chuck Templeton, whose rather prominent ministry turned later into a repudiation of Christ. He took up a TV career during which he ridiculed the idea that Jesus can do anything for modern predicaments. It is possible to have deep, real experiences with God and then to turn away.

If we can describe ourselves by all those experiences and qualities and yet still fall away from God, then we need to pay intense attention to the conditions which prevent such a disastrous course of action. The road to maturity is marked out in this passage as well.

What does *not* produce spiritual health and maturity?

1. *Time spent does not produce maturity.* By reason of time spent these Christians should be mature. Yet they retrogressed and were acting and thinking in ways characteristic of spiritual immaturity. One cannot become mature without time. Yet time alone will not suffice. We can be like the person in the same job for twenty-five years. He didn't wind up with twenty-five years experience, but one year's experience twenty-five times. Growth and maturing is not an automatic by-product of time.
2. *Trying harder does not produce maturity.* How often we think that the solution to a problem we have is trying harder? We intensify our actions by praying harder, singing louder, working faster, or reading the Bible more. It is a plague to have some preacher or teacher whip us up into frenzy by telling us the key to spiritual maturity is to magnify our efforts. Children do not grow physically by trying harder.
3. *The simple gospel does not produce maturity.* This is the writer's point in telling his hearers to get on with those things in the faith that are not elementary. They are to allow the elementary principles of the faith to stand as they are--and go on to the difficult depths of the “meat” of the Word. Paul wrote the same to the Corinthians, wishing he might communicate to them some really substantial matters, but could still only give them the beginning matters of the faith.
4. *More religious experiences do not produce maturity.* How often we are told we lack some spiritual experience. The Corinthians are good examples of this. They had all the gifts of the Spirit and all the conflicts of the flesh. They spoke in tongues, prophesied, preached and sang in the power of the Spirit. Yet they did not have love. They united their practice to false perspectives and distorted doctrinal emphases. They stopped growing and started fighting. They were babes despite all the religious and moral experiences of which they boasted.

What, then, produces maturity—and generates the sorts of Christian who stand tall in the midst of persecution? Hebrews suggests a number of things, not all of them in this immediate context. Certainly the primary thing is endurance. Hebrews urges a patience that maintains loyalty to Christ without wavering, along with an enthusiastic faith to the very end, even if it is the martyr's end. Yet how does this sort of courageous persistence get built into our lives? We have already encountered several of the necessary ingredients:

1. *We must become skillful in using the Word of righteousness in everyday living.* We must spend time and effort to build the knowledge necessary for the skillful use of the Word. Too many of us have such superficial awareness of the content and intent of the Bible, causing us to have no idea whether or how it can be relevant to our settings and issues. We must let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly.
2. *We must have practice in distinguishing right from wrong in our lives.* We will not suddenly awaken to a world purged of temptation. We cannot ask for and expect an exemption from the pressures of this world. So we must regularly put that discernment and decision into living action through which we actualize God's guidance in the steps we take in life.
3. *We must step away from the familiar ground of elementary doctrine and move toward the deeper things of God.* This is risky for many of us. We have such a tenuous grasp of the elementary things that we do not want to move forward to a faith that is as complex as the complexities of our world.

God calls us all to a deeper walk with God, to a new deliverance from sin and disability, to a new degree of maturity, to heightened responsiveness to God's will. We are not to be tossed about by every new wind of teaching or every new experience. We are to be anchored to Jesus Christ and stabilized by a mature and settled set of habits of the heart. We are no longer to be satisfied with partial truth, partial consecration, partial obedience, partial love and partial maturity. We are to seek the fullness of Christ's stature.

Hebrews 6:9-12

*Even though we speak in this way, beloved, we are confident of better things in your case, things that belong to salvation. For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your **work** and the **love** that you showed for his sake in **serving** the saints, as you still do. And we want each one of you to show the same **diligence** so as to realize the full assurance of **hope** to the very end,*

so that you may not become sluggish, but imitators of those who through **faith** and **patience** inherit the promises.

There are a series of crucial words in these paragraphs that together portray central components of the Christian character:

1. **Work:** Liberation from enslavement is not release to a restfulness that knows no activity. It is freedom for the labor that brings forth the fruitfulness that receives the blessings of God. There is work that is futile and Sisyphean. There is toil that breaks the spirit and destroys the body. This is not what grace frees us to do. The grace of God energizes purposeful self-activity, devoted to producing effects that correspond to the continuing activity of God in redemption.
2. **Love:** The sum of that work is found in love, but not any sort of "love." Rather this is love "for God's sake." It is love that is modeled by Jesus Christ and infused into us by the entrance of the Holy Spirit. It is love that subverts our false loves and attachments. It is unnatural love because we were not marked by it or moved to display it before we became friends of God through the act of God's salvation.
3. **Serving:** The expression of that love is concrete. It is not simply an inner set of feelings, warmth of spirit and identification with the plight of others. It is found in specific actions which extend real help to the saints, first of all. The temptation to draw back from brothers or sisters in the faith was strong at this time. To be identified with them when Nero was pressurizing the Christian community by killing the saints was to risk death and persecution.
4. **Diligence:** Persistence is essential when obstacles and discouragement confront us. The constancy of purpose, the resolution and tenacity with which we go after what we know is God's will and way, is to mark our actions.
5. **Hope:** Often what we need to free us for self-sacrificing love in diligent service is the firm conviction that God stands behind and before us. We are confident that the prospect that lies before us is absolutely positive. Whatever the punishment meted out by human opposition, whatever the devastating losses inflicted upon our earthly property, whatever we renounce for the sake of God, we know God will restore abundantly. Our persistence is not rooted in the empirical events of a career path dictated by our society. It is rooted in the confident expectation of the coming triumph of God. A force of this world cannot bend our history or the history of this world so thoroughly as to warp it out of its eventual destiny. God's holy diligence will finally defeat the gross evil in and about us.
6. **Faith:** To be faithful is to sustain our loyal commitment and confidence in God through to the very end of our pilgrimage and path. We never know for certain what will happen to us. In all circumstances we can only turn to God as the sole guarantor of our destiny. God's promises do not change with our moods, our misfortunes or fortunes, our disappointments or distresses. God's promises remain the same because God remains the same.
7. **Patience:** This is not to say that we see, here and now, the outcomes or realities of those promises activated and present in our concrete situation. Patience is necessary because of the delay in time between what we hear as God's promise and the actualizing of that promise. For Abraham it took more than twenty-five years from promise to the baby that fulfilled the promise. In the meantime, the possibilities for the fulfillment of the promise were gradually extinguished. By the time the promise was realized, Sarah was way past menopause and Abraham was as good as dead. Patience asks that we have faith for a very long time. Saving faith is not the flash of trust in a positive and encouraging setting. It is the ever-intensifying, long-haul tenacious clinging to the Word of God as true, though all else seems to discount it.

To claim the name of Christian, to be assured that we are the good ground that bears fruit and receives the blessings of God, to go on to maturity, is to acquire and display these characteristics. These are the "better things" the writer is confident will mark the lives of this community of believers.

The great peril to the Christian life is listed in this paragraph as "**sluggishness**," classically called *acedia* or sloth. We are given a concrete assignment as part of salvation. We are not left simply to carve out an identity or create a novel style of life that in no way corresponds to what we see in the scriptures. Yet we can neglect so great salvation by immobility, by passive inaction or a busyness with things that preclude the God's proactive nurturing.

Part of our misery in sin is sluggishness. We can continue to live as unaltered persons even after we have felt the impact of the presence of the Kingdom. We can continue to plead the inevitability of sin despite the reality of Jesus' overcoming of sin. Sluggishness is our determined refusal not only of salvation but of the things that accompany salvation.

Sloth means stupidity and folly. It is inertia of mind and reasoning. It can even hide under the guise of worldly wisdom. We are given a vast cornucopia of advice—thick tomes of "reasonable" conclusions for the handling of our affairs. Few of them take as their basis God's coming triumph in the age to come. Rather than renew our thinking, building on the premise of the actuality of Christ's universal Lordship, we can slothfully conform to the patterns we have been given by our culture. There is little that is more difficult than to think differently and more deeply than most around us.

Sloth means useless inactivity and inhumanity. Rather than respond to the demonstrable oppression, exploitation and resulting distress we see about us, we turn away from or even deny its gravity. Or we declare both victims and victimizers to be without responsibility. A sociological determinism and a psychological naïveté can whitewash the active co-participation in the anguish of the human condition. We can even conceal our uselessness and inactivity under the cloak of philanthropy. We give minor amounts and celebrate our grand generosity, while remaining safe in our havens of affluence and security.

Sloth means dissipation. Rather than nurturing our own best powers and capabilities, we engage in self-destructive patterns: smoking, bad eating habits, lack of exercise, chaotic scheduling with neglect of sleep, drinking to excess or working beyond exhaustion. The ways in which we choose to ignore clear knowledge of the destructiveness of certain patterns is an indication of our sluggishness. We may hide our dissipation under the mask of "freedom" and naturalness. We claim the right to unprotected sex whenever, wherever, with whomever it strikes our fancy. We claim the right to do with our bodies whatever, believing our "self" is our one true "possession."

Sloth means futile care or anxiety. We do not trust the duration of our life to God. We worry that the future will carry uncontrolled forces into our experience that will take away our securities and expectations. We are anxious and afraid that the face of death might come before we are ready. Heroic effort or resignation are used as denials that our fundamental needs and our future are in the hands of God. We wish to gather the various threads of our destiny into the nexus of powerful techniques that will assure the outcome and guarantee the comforts we seek.

Sluggishness means we neglect the things that accompany salvation. We focus on dozens of tasks other than the diligent work of serving others in a love that springs out of our relationship with God. We lose our grip on the divine hope and thus feel threatened by the unknown future. The promises of God may be on our lips and in our heads, but we do not hold them firmly with the patient grip of faith. We are passive rather than active, unprincipled and without purpose in our activity. We are pushed by every wind of urgency and shaped by unexamined assumptions that we brought with us into the Kingdom.

The writer notes that our beginning in the faith is marked by a deliberateness that we can lose as time and experience move us forward. What we need is the same diligence, earnestness, and acceptance of response-ability which marked our entrance into the Kingdom of God. How we began this race of faith is how we must continue it. Sluggishness can end it.

Unit 3 Reader: Prayer

Reflection on Christian prayer, as you will already realize from your readings in *Devotional Classics*, is extremely rich and varied (cf. *Devotional Classics*, 63-120). Richard Foster lists at least twenty-one different types of prayer in his book, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*. Philip Yancey's book, *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference*, details the issues and paradoxes of prayer in a practical manner. For most of us, prayer is one of the most actively cultivated disciplines.

Having worked on the disciplines of solitude and study, we now want to turn to one of the foundational elements of the Christian life. You never leave foundations behind you. Instead, you build upon them, deepen them, and return to them. Pay attention to the ways and times you pray. Think about expanding and broadening your prayer activity and attitude into new realms.

To start, we take you back to beginnings, to return to prayer as it acknowledges what you said to God at the very beginning of your life with Christ. We want to return to prayer as it reaffirms the expression of dependence upon God's initiative and mercy. We want to take you back to prayer that is a simple expression of repentance and faith in God's forgiving mercy, and active love for us.

The call to discipleship involves change, a reorientation of values, priorities, goals, and direction in the light of Christ. Richard Foster suggests five "practiced prayers" that you might find helpful as you sense Christ calling you to a renewed life of discipleship:

The prayer of self-emptying: "Meditatively pray through Philippians, Chapter 2," a chapter describing the willing self-emptying of Christ. "Bid the brooding Spirit of God to apply your prayer to the specifics of your day. Wait quietly. Listen carefully. Obey immediately." (Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, 55)

The prayer of surrender: "Using any of the synoptic Gospels, go with Jesus into the Garden. Stay awake and watch. See his sorrowing soul. Let your heart be saddened, too. Struggle as He did in seeking other options, hoping to avoid the cup. Now, speak his words as your own, 'Not my will, but yours be done.' Invite the resurrected one to interpret the words into your life, your family, your vocation." (Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, 55)

The prayer of abandonment: Henri Nouwen writes of the struggle and joy of abandoning himself to God. "This morning during my hour of prayer, I tried to come to some level of abandonment to my heavenly Father. It was a hard struggle since so much in me wants to do my will, realize my plans, organize my future, and make my decisions. Still, I know that *true joy comes from letting God love me the way God wants*, whether it is through illness or health, failure or success, poverty or wealth, rejection or praise. It is hard for me to say, 'I shall gratefully accept everything that pleases you, Lord. Let your will be done.' But I know that when I truly believe my Father is pure love, it will become increasingly possible to say these words from the heart." (Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak*, 120; my emphasis)

Think About It

Both Foster and Nouwen mention Charles de Foucauld's prayer of abandonment:

Father, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will.
Whatever you may do, I thank you; I am ready for all, I accept all. Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures -- I wish no more than this, O Lord. Into your hands I commend my soul; I offer it to you with all the love of my heart, for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself, to surrender myself into your hands, without reserve and with boundless confidence, for you are my Father. (Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak*, 121; cf. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, 55)

What specific issues or needs is Christ asking you, as Foster puts it, "to lay at his feet?" (Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, 55).

The Prayer of Release: "First, lift up into his arms your children, your spouse, your friends. Next, place into his loving care your future, your hopes, your dreams. Finally, hold up to him your enemies, your angers, your desire for retaliation. Give it all into his hands and then turn and walk away. He will care for everything as he sees fit." (Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, 55-56)

The Prayer of Resurrection: Here we ask Christ to bring back to life those things that please him and advance the cause of his kingdom. "Let it come in whatever form you desire. Let it be in your time and your way." Foster reminds us that certain "things will remain dead – it is better for you that they do. Others will burst forth into new life in such a way that you will hardly recognize them. In either case, rest in the confidence that God is better than you are at resurrection." (Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, 56)

You might find these five prayers handy channels for the disciples' petition to Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray." Among the many sorts of prayer, Protestants (in our experience) seem to gravitate to only a few of them. For those engaged in ministry, petitionary prayer is central (as it is in the Lord's Prayer) after the prayers of praise and celebration of the Lord's reality and goodness. The following notes focus on petitionary prayer as a way of examining our dependence upon God. This section draws deeply on the insights of Richard Foster.

The Prayer of Petition: A number of questions immediately arise in any discussion of prayer of petition. "Why should we ask for specific things when God already knows our needs?" "Is God really interested in the petty details of my life?" "What about unanswered prayer?" "How is sin related to prayer?"

Foster suggests that answers to these questions need to be framed in the wider context of personal relationship. That is to say, how might the context of a personal relationship help us to understand the reason of petitionary prayer? Foster comments:

...Jesus keeps drawing us into the most basic relationship of child and parent, to asking and receiving. ...Petition, then, is not a lower form of prayer. It is our staple diet. In a childlike expression of faith we bring our daily needs and desires to our heavenly Father. None of us would give our children a stone if they asked for bread, says Jesus. None of us would give them a snake if they requested fish. No, even we who are filled with our own self-centered agendas respect the most fundamental codes of parent-child relationships. All the more, then, does God who lovingly respects us and joyfully gives to us when we ask. (Matthew 7:9-11) (Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, 180)

The relationship between a parent and child will not answer every question we might have about prayer, but it does illustrate an important distinction. Why should we ask God for things when God already knows what we need? Foster answers, because "God likes to be asked." We are not in relationship with a divine computer or a divine bellhop. Rather, in prayer we relate to an infinitely personal and loving being who desires our best but within the framework of personal relationship. As we have experienced in our own relationships with our parents or children, "the very asking enhances and deepens the relationship... Love loves to be told what it knows already.... It wants to be asked for what it longs to give." (Foster, *Prayer*, 181)

[Chris Hall speaking] Is God genuinely interested in the petty details of my life? I'm the father of three children. I remember a time when my youngest son, Joshua, was six years old. Generally speaking, I'm well-aware of his needs, desires, joys and sorrows. Josh seems to realize this, too. He knows Dad loves him and is there for him. A short while ago our church had scheduled a special family conference. While the adults listened to the main speaker, separate activities had been carefully planned for the younger folk. At the end of the first night's session six year old Josh ran up to me excitedly.

"Dad," Josh said, "tomorrow night I have to bring a flashlight. We're building a teepee in our classroom. When we're all finished we're going to turn out the lights and get inside with our flash lights."

"That's great, Josh," I said somewhat absent mindedly. Then I caught Josh's expression. His eyes radiated excitement as he envisioned sitting in a teepee with a flashlight. At that moment nothing could have been more important to him.

The next evening, I remember walking with a little six year down the hallway toward his classroom. One tiny hand clutched my hand. The other firmly held a flashlight. As we turned into Josh’s classroom he looked up at me and said, “Dad, this is going to be great!” Earth-shaking? No. And yet that moment remains frozen in time for me. Why? Because that was my little boy who had opened his life up to me and wanted me to be part of his joy. The adult part of me could have stepped back, coldly analyzed the situation, and perhaps thought, “how childish.” Another part of me, what Jesus might have called the “Abba part,” delighted in my son’s joy. At that moment, nothing could have been more important.

In the same way, Foster reminds us of the “Abba heart of God”:

In one important sense nothing is more important to him than the anxiety we feel over the surgery we must face tomorrow or the exasperation we feel today over our child’s irresponsibility or the desperation we feel over the plight of our aging parents. These are matters of great magnitude to him because they are matters of great magnitude to us. It is a false humility to stand back and not share our deepest needs. His heart is wounded by our reticence. Just as we long for our children to share with us the petty details of their day at school, so God longs to hear from us the smallest matters of our lives. It delights him when we share. (Foster, *Prayer*, 181)

Think About It

Journal Questions

How has your relationship with your parents distorted or enhanced your ability to experience the father or mother love of God? Are there other metaphors of God in scripture that you more readily relate to? Are there specific areas of your life that you have neglected to share with God, perhaps because you simply felt God would not be interested? What might they be?

What of the heartfelt prayers that have remained unanswered? Have we not all prayed fervently for a relationship to be restored, a marriage to be healed, a disease to be cured, only to have our request seemingly fall on deaf ears? Yes, we have all heard the glib response, “Oh, there are no unanswered prayers. God sometimes says yes and sometimes says no.” But is such a response helpful? Is it broad enough to assuage the pain of a marriage run amok after twenty-five years; of a cancer that devours the brain of a six year old? As C.S. Lewis writes:

“Every war, every famine or plague, almost every death-bed, is the monument to a petition that was not granted.” (Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm on Prayer*, quoted in Foster, *Prayer*, 181-182)

Foster warns us, then, against the folly and cruelty of glib or flippant responses to the mystery of prayer. At present we “see in a glass darkly.” Foster counsels:

The first thing we must say is to confess that we have a genuine, not an imagined, problem. Any supposed solutions that I or anyone else gives are only partial and will not make the problem go away. I do not know why the heartfelt petition of a terminally ill or a homeless person goes unanswered. Frankly, I wish it were otherwise. We stand here under the mystery of the ways of God, and we are peering through a glass darkly. (Foster, *Prayer*, 182)

James Dobson makes much the same point in his book, *When God Doesn’t Make Sense*. Dobson argues that Christians too often overlook the ambiguities of life, leaving them ill prepared for the horrific accidents, terminal illnesses and sudden deaths that come with shocking regularity. As Dobson says, “In a matter of moments the world can fall off its axis.” When it does, Dobson contends, Christians frequently experience a deep sense of betrayal as God seemingly fails to answer their deepest prayers.

Both Foster and Dobson provide helpful signposts to guide us as we attempt to make sense out of prayer of petition. Dobson, for example, gently calls his readers to a deeper

reverence of God as *God*. God is not our genie. God is accountable to no one and owes no explanation for God's actions.

This is a difficult word to hear, particularly for those who have experienced the harsh bite of pain or the lonely night of grief. But, as Dobson writes, when God seems to "defy human logic and sensibilities," Christians must allow his infinite love revealed in Christ and witnessed in scripture to carry them through.

Further, Dobson warns that human beings lack the intellectual ability to sustain a prolonged debate with God. As Dobson sees matters, Christians have two choices: to demand answers from God, which they might not welcome, or to trust in a God who is God. Insisting on answers to inexplicable events, he asserts, will result in creeping bitterness toward God and life.

Dobson advises Christians to formulate realistic expectations shaped by an immersion in scripture and an acceptance of God's yes and no. At times God answers prayers in a remarkable fashion. At other times, God appears to say "nothing at all." If we fail to form conceptual boundaries broad enough to encompass the realities of God's responses, eventually God will appear "whimsical, untrustworthy, unfair, or sinister."

One day, both Foster and Dobson teach us, resolution will be given to the questions that find no answers this side of heaven. But for the time being, believers must continue the journey faithfully, trusting God in the midst of the mysterious, storing away "our questions for a lengthy conversation on the other side." In fact, P.T. Forsythe contends, it might well be that the future holds the answers to the perplexities of the present. "We shall come one day to a heaven where we shall gratefully know that God's great refusals were sometimes the true answers to our truest prayer." (P.T. Forsythe, *Soul of Prayer*, quoted in Foster, *Prayer*, 182)

What does Forsythe mean? Might it not be true, Foster asks, that our own lack of discernment or "shortsightedness" causes us to ask for things harmful to us or to others? Perhaps the answer to our prayer would prevent the answer to an even greater need. I have seen this dynamic present in the prayers of my own daughter.

Nathalie, at twelve years old, did not question whether God was interested in the small details of her life. She knew God cares about her concerns and desires. Often in the winter, though, she would pray for snow as she was going to sleep. Perhaps she was right to do so. One evening, though, I asked how the homeless folk in downtown Philadelphia would feel if it snowed that night. I did not ask the question to quench Nathalie's confidence in God's willingness to answer her prayers. Instead, I wanted to remind her that answers to her prayers might well mean that other, more pressing requests, would be left unmet. She seemed to understand and slowly, within the comprehension and worldview of a twelve year old, she began to expand the boundaries of her awareness as she prayed. Our petitions, then, encompassed more needs, hopes and dreams than simply our own.

Is it not also true that at times we ask for things we are not prepared to receive? As Foster notes, "sometimes our prayers, if answered, would do us in. We simply are not yet prepared for what we have asked. In such cases, and many like them, it is God's grace and mercy that prevent our prayers from being answered. God withholds his gifts from us for our good. We could not handle what might come if our requests were granted. . . .C.S. Lewis writes, 'If God had granted all the silly prayers I've made in my life, where should I be now?'" (Foster, *Prayer*, 182)

Sometimes our prayers are logically and spiritually inconsistent. "Lord, teach me patience quickly." "Lord, teach me to trust you, but (don't stretch me beyond my safety zone)." "Lord, build humility in me, (but please make my family and friends easier people to serve)." "Lord, reign in my life, (but according to my time table and agenda)."

Discernment is an essential element in petitionary prayer. Might it not be true that God is answering the truest intent of our prayer, but we lack the eyes to see the answer? Foster contends that this is often the case.

God understands the deeper intent of our prayers and so responds to this greater need, which, in its time and in its way, solves our specific prayer concern. We may ask for greater faith so that we can heal others. However, God, who understands human need far better than we do, gives us greater compassion so that we can weep with others. A part of

Unit 3: “The ABCs of Spiritual Formation”

our petition must always be for an increasing discernment so that we can see things as God sees them. (Foster, *Prayer*, 183)

I began to learn the lesson of discernment while serving as a pastor in an international church near Geneva, Switzerland. I had become increasingly interested in healing and had read a number of books on healing and prayer. I felt God calling me to pray for the sick in a new, more intense and intentional manner. I was extremely excited about this new turn in my ministry and fully expected dramatic results to occur rapidly. The reality was just the opposite. The people I prayed for seemed to get worse rather than better! Not only this, I soon became sick myself. During the first year, as I prayed for others to be delivered from their illnesses, I was sick much more often than healthy. For many months I couldn't understand why. As you might imagine, I was extremely discouraged. “After all, Lord, I'm praying that people get well and they get sicker. And I'm sick of being sick myself. All I've been doing over the past six months is suffering from one virus or another one. Maybe I was wrong to begin to pray like this. Maybe I don't have the gift of healing. Maybe you're calling somebody else to this kind of ministry. Maybe I should just give up.”

What was God trying to teach me? Had God been ignoring my prayers? I don't think so. In reality, God was responding to the “deeper intent” and need of my petitions. I expected God to heal through me. Quite evidently, God felt it was more important for me to understand existentially what it was like to be sick day after day. I wanted to see God heal, but God saw a deeper need in me. He saw the need for a soft, compassionate heart, a heart willing to identify with the suffering of those I longed to see healed. My deeper need, at least in this juncture in my life, was for compassion, not a successful healing ministry.

It took time to discern God's true response. I was expecting a different, more immediate answer to my prayers. However, I was so deeply involved in the process, and I lacked the clarity a neutral bystander might have possessed. I was the sick party! It was very difficult to distance myself from the immediate situation to refocus my vision of what God might genuinely be doing in response to my prayers. Foster reminds us that “we are not disinterested parties.”

It is far easier to pray with clarity regarding matters that have no direct impact upon us than regarding our infected toe. This must never keep us from praying for our own needs, for we are commanded to do so, but it should remind us that we are capable of infinite self-deception. (Foster, *Prayer*, 183)

In what way might sin hinder our prayers? We will deal with this question in greater detail when we analyze specific obstacles to prayer. For the moment, though, we should note that sin produces a kind of spiritual static or interference that impedes our ability to discern the will of God. Why? Sin inevitably disturbs our relationship with God. As Foster puts it, sin dulls “our spiritual sensitivities.” The result is an asking that is “askew.”

God tells me, for example, to act lovingly toward my neighbor, perhaps inviting him over for dinner. I decide against it mainly because I am mad at my neighbor because his tree dropped leaves in my yard! God reminds me about my resentment toward my neighbor more than once. I do nothing. In time, I do not hear God speaking to me about my neighbor any more, and I think to myself, ‘Good, I got away with that one!’ Oh, no, I didn't. Deafness has come, in part. Blindness has come, in part. The dulling of our spiritual sensitivities is something I hope we will come to fear. (Foster, *Prayer*, 184)

Think About It

Journal Questions and Exercises:

List past prayer requests you have made. Which requests did God appear to answer? How quickly? What were the broader circumstances? Why did you feel led to pray about these particular circumstances, people, issues and events? What requests seemed to go unanswered? Might the “deeper intent” of your *requests* actually have been met?

The Lord’s Prayer as a Pattern Prayer (from Luke 11:1-13)

The following pages are an example from David’s study journaling in 1992. He was working on capturing the meaning of the Lord’s Prayer as a pattern for our prayer. Study journaling pays less attention to self-reflection and expression of inner life and more attention to what God is saying when we study scripture in depth.

These pages are offered to further your own understanding of what God provides for us when we seek to become equipped to pray as Jesus taught us to pray. The interesting thing is that we can pray the words of Jesus (as we are taught here in Luke: “When you pray, say....) or we can use that model prayer to channel our other prayers (in Matthew 6:9 the Lord’s Prayer is introduced with the words, “Pray then *in this way*...).

The parables on prayer that follow in Luke 11 teach us the spirit and attitude in which we are to pray. They unfold to us the character and nature of the God to whom we pray—and thus provide encouragement and stimulus not to grow weary in prayer.

August 29, 1992 **(a) Luke 11:1-4**

Priorities and proportions for life are difficult for us to get straight given who we are and the sort of pressures that bear in upon us in this fallen world. The first necessity (and the best choice we can make for our lives) is spending the time and energy essential to having the Lord speak to us. Before we can begin to expect the Lord to listen to us, we must sit at his feet and listen to him. How else will we know the One whom we approach in prayer? How else will we know what we ought to ask for – or what we can expect a positive response about?

Jesus teaches his disciples *both a model prayer and the proper approach* when we come to God to pray. In this prototype for prayer we discover a bit of what governs the priorities of prayer as well as the sorts of issues that should preoccupy us as we ask that God listen to us.

We must pray. Not as a substitute for exercising wisdom and prudence (as though the only time to pray is when we find ourselves pinched in some crisis of our own making). Not as a palliative when nature levels our puny achievements and exposes once again how tiny are our powers and vulnerable our existence. Prayer is not a sort of spiritual thumb to suck when we find ourselves insecure and tired of the struggle for existence.

We pray because the heart of the universe is a personal God who created us to be companionate beings who share in his goodness and glory. We pray because we wish to give an active expression of our desire for a relationship with the God who has given us the gift of life and all the other good things that come with being intelligent, living human beings on the planet earth.

The Christian answer to the question as to why this sort of world surrounds us is that God willed to communicate personally with companionate beings. In God’s exceeding goodness, he determined to bring into existence creatures with whom he might share his benefits and glory. God’s goodness would be less good if it were not showered on another being. God’s power would be less powerful if it were not shared in the gentleness of love. God’s joy would be less joyful if there were not others who could share the depths of that joy. God created the world in order to show the fullness of his being. God created a world with personal beings in it so that God’s goodness might be shared through a history of relationship known as the covenant.

Though this is not the “best of all possible worlds” (conceivable in an abstract sense), it is a world that reflects the goodness God sought to impart by creating us. It is a world of diversity and multiplicity, with an astonishing profusion of things. It is a world where God communicates to us as much of his goodness as we, limited in intelligence, emotion and physical capabilities, can receive.

Our creaturely life is imparted that we might “glorify God and enjoy him forever.” We do so when we reflect God’s glory in our own limited, temporal, finite fashion as his imagers within the larger creation. God created us for an ordered and limited happiness, proportional to our natures and the sorts of goods we can create within the purposes of the covenant. It is the purpose of God to make all life blessed, to permit happiness to abound insofar as it is grounded in and directed toward the One who is happy in the fullest sense.

We are capable of sharing in the happiness of our Creator, but only in a way that occurs through the exercise of our limited, creaturely freedom and powers within a risk-laden creation. The world we find about us is one within which God's name is no longer properly revered, within which God's will and ways are violated, within which inequalities create hunger, the wronging of fellow humans and the enticement to do evil. It is not a world in any sense that appears to produce naturally and obviously the glory of its Creator and conjointly the happiness of the human creature.

We pray because many of the issues involved in the "realities" of our world are not resolvable by our own individual or even corporate planning or action. If the Creator does not re-create the people and conditions of this world, the glory of God and happiness of his creatures is destined to be eradicated. God is set on the task of such salvation and renewal. By prayer we participate and seek the transformation of our small worlds.

August 29, 1992 **(b) Luke 11:1-4**

The first petition is for the hallowing of God's name. Our world hallows many other things besides the name and reality of the living God.

This name is preeminently "Father." Behind such a name is One who is personal, who exercises full responsibility for the creation and continuity of the life of the creature. When we hear what God authentically says about himself, we discover a loving, caring, personal God who seeks to share with us the fullness and joys of life for which we were brought into being. "Father" gives us specific content to give to that empty and ambivalent word "God." Who is this "God" we are invited to address in prayer? "Father" tells us who.

The naming of God as "Father" is an analogical statement. Yet it is not merely analogical for it is derived from more than human experience with fathers. The whole reality of fatherhood derives originally from God's own inherent character (Eph. 3:14-15). God is called "Father" because that is what God is originally and properly. We call God "Father" because that is the name Jesus used to address God.

It means we must come to God as children. Yet how can we think ourselves the children of God when we have so royally resisted God in our world? We do not show ourselves worthy to be called the children of God. Our behavior belies that. In fact we show our actual and controlling "father" to be the father of lies, the Evil One, the Devil himself. Insofar as we are enabled truly to call upon God as "Father," it occurs because we come by means of the one true Son of God. Christ is the only authentic Son who, in perfect obedience, honored and respected God as his Father.

We are children of God only by the gift of grace. We have no other option here. It is not something we have forgotten or misplaced along the byways of history. It is a relationship we repudiated and repudiate daily. If we come to God as a child, we do so only because we cling to the power Jesus imparts for us to become (now, today) the children of God.

As children we find ourselves entering the presence of God as the inexperienced, the inept, the unskilled and immature – as children. Our need for the grace and strength of God as Father never ceases. We do not finally arrive at the place where we no longer need call upon God as those who are sufficient, no longer needing guidance and grace, no longer facing dangers too great for our strength, no longer needing wisdom and direction. The notion that we are to become autonomous, "mature" beings who outgrow the infantile need for "religion" and "God," is a modern repudiation of the true and living God.

To be sure, we to be childlike without being childish. By calling God "Father" we acknowledge a distinction in being and order. We are not our own "Father," and only in a derived sense the "Father" of our own children. God is finally and fully the One who is the true "Father." We can trust and lean upon him to do that which only a heavenly "Father" can do. We cannot treat God as Santa Claus, as our best "buddy," or as some indifferent, distant tyrant. God takes a caring, nurturing, parental-like relationship to us (in intention God's attributes and actions can be as well portrayed as "Mother.") When we pray, we are first of all invited to speak to One whose reality is epitomized by those qualities.

"Father" conveys with it the notion of intimacy and distance. Jesus referred to God as "Abba," the term little children used to address their daddies (though unlike "daddy" Abba remained in use by adults). It is a term of dependency, trust, love and affection. At the same

time there is a distance. The "Father" was responsible for the child, acting as guardian, protector and lord. There are connotations of strength and respect which go beyond what a "Father" in our day means. The child's future continued to be dependent upon the sponsorship and blessing of the "Father" even after adulthood.

August 30, 1992 **(c) Luke 11:1-4**

For some the "gift" of "Father" as the name by which we speak of God is simply another deficit of a hopelessly patriarchal religion. It is, along with the male gender of Jesus as Savior, a permanent and insurmountable proof of the sexism at the heart of Christian faith. The claim is that it is one of the ideological foundations of the sexism that has been maintained in the West for centuries and continues to gain vigor and new life from such a way of naming God.

This is a complex issue and one that cannot be settled easily. There are those who rightfully note that scripture provides for us a normative revelation of God. We cannot speak of God without using the language of scripture. On the other side, we have those who rightfully note that all our language about God is analogical, even that of scripture. For that reason we have freedom to use analogies of scripture in new ways and to invent new analogies to maintain the meaningful intent of revelation.

The fundamental reality is that God is beyond the sexual types, beyond "he" or "she." Neither adequately expresses the personal nature of God which transcends gender. The fullness of the divine being goes far beyond what is true in the naming of God by personal pronouns. In English there are no pronouns suitable to speak of personal being without specifying the gender of the person. This is not the case with many other languages which have generic pronouns. Part of the problem is created by the evolution of given languages.

But this does not solve the larger issue that comes with the particularity of revelation in scripture. The power to name is an ability to create a world of meaning and power. The nearly exclusive use of male pronouns and typically male roles to designate God sounds exclusionary and denigrating to women. Yet this is part of the crux of the issue—whether the Father-Son language in the Trinity and heavenly Father-child of God in the Christian fellowship degrades the dignity of men and women.

Theologically speaking both the man and the woman are the image of God and so it is not appropriate to speak as though the male alone were the imager of God. While it is only a tiny portion of scriptural images of God refer to God as female (e.g., Isaiah 49:15 portrays God as a mother), it is enough to scotch the position that refuses any female language to God.

So the question, can God also and equally be called "Mother," needs to be answered affirmatively. Jesus' calling God "Father" was not an attempt to make an indirect statement about human social orders (e.g., to say that only males and Fathers are primary imagers of God and legitimate holders of authority and power in human society). Jesus seeks here to designate the primordial relationship of God to his creatures. God is a personal source of their being who is loving and desirous of an intimate relationship with them.

Yet we humans only possess limited experiences of parenting. Such experience is culturally and often personally diverse. God's nature is beyond gender. Communication with us is not beyond human limitations—and so communicating the meaning and significance of God within the creation comes in terms that we can grasp. But the meaning, significance and reality of God is not exhausted within one metaphor portraying the relationship. Calling God "Father" gives us permission to name God in that way, but it does not limit God to that name alone.

To call God "Mother" need not detract from the authority of Jesus or the appropriate naming of God as "Father." These are not authentically antithetical terms in this context. Faber's "My God, How Wonderful You Are" has us properly worship God by singing:

No earthly father loves like you,
No mother, e'er so mild
Bears and forbears as you have done
With me, your sinful child.

August 30, 1992 **(d) Luke 11:1-4**

To hallow the name of God is to bring to our recollection who God is by reverently reciting God's names. It is to confess that God is "Father" and we are "children." To pray for the

hallowing of God's name is to acknowledge a great unfulfilled passion. We are those who are concerned for the honor of God. We are those with a zeal for the respect, veneration, reputation and integrity of God's good name. We cannot stand by, neutral in a world where God is alternately reviled and ignored.

The word holy means to "set aside" because of its sacredness, its special qualities that mark it off from the ordinary, its dedication to uses that are more than the everyday and common. F. Dale Bruner suggests we ought to use a different term to capture the meaning of holy because of the modern mentality's sense of space. To set aside or separate can signal in our thinking to put on one side, that is to move out of the center to the margins. The idea of hallowing God's name is to make God the absolute center, to make central to all of life.

This petition is not an indirect sermon to humans to make God central. The petition is to God and asks that God will do the one thing necessary to set all things in order in this disorderly world: for God to be God. God is active in this world to establish the conditions and realities under which God is treated as God. The world's great need, even though it does not know it, is to know God, the true and living God. That is not something humans can accomplish.

God is the wholly other, the unapproachable, the hidden. If we are to know God, God must generate the conditions of that knowledge. The gap between our ignorance of God and the knowledge of God we need can be spanned only by the activity of the gracious power of God himself. In short, to know God is to experience God showing himself. It is to experience divine self-disclosure. In a word, it is to experience revelation.

The notion of hallowing the "name" refers to acknowledging the true identity and character. There are many rumors of God in our world, many fabrications and suppositions. Some say this and others that about God. So many are the opinions and the major religions that our heads spin as we contemplate separating the truth from falsehood. In asking that God's name be hallowed we are praying that God's real character will be revealed and made plain in our world. We are asking that God's reputation will improve in this world, that more and more will have their illusions and mistaken notions exploded by encountering God in Jesus Christ.

In praying this we are first of all acknowledging that we do not know God aright. Why are we hungry for the hallowing of God's name? It is because of our own great ignorance and inaccurate apprehensions of God in our lives. We are saying first that we need God to make his real identity known so that we will recognize how central and weighty (glorious) a person God is. We are asking that God prove himself to be holy, majestic, faithful, loving, just, eternal, wise and good. It is not that we do not have the revelation of God already in the pages of scripture. But even that revelation needs to be activated and energized in our consciousness.

"God has revealed Himself to Israel as the Holy One, i.e., the Unapproachable, wholly Other God, as the glorious Majesty, the Ruler over all powers in heaven and on earth, the God who vindicates His honour, who judges in His wrath, and who is also absolute in righteousness and truth. The full glory of Yahweh's holiness ranges itself behind His demands for righteousness and gives a character of inevitability to the moral standards." (T. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, 2nd. ed., p. 310)

The key to this knowledge of God is already given by Jesus. Jesus Christ is the eternal Son, the second member of the trinity, who proceeds eternally from God, knowing God as his unique Father. In fact, Jesus never speaks simply of "our" Father when addressing the disciples. It is always "my" Father. What Jesus is saying is that the unique relationship which he has with God the Father is now passed on to his disciples. They are empowered to call God their Father as well. In relating to God in that manner, they position themselves for the self-revealing God to hallow his name in their lives.

August 30, 1992 (e) **Luke 11:1-4**

God is the known and unknown God. The situation in which we find ourselves is a world "full of God's glory" (Isaiah 6:3). God is near to us all. There is no place in the earth or heavens we can scan and not have God available to us. God is present and communicating his nature and power. God is knowable and known. Yet Paul tells us the moral darkness that inhabits human consciousness represses that knowledge. Our unrighteousness acts like an anti-body, attacking the knowledge that is available to us. So God is both known and unknown.

This is true in the world in general. We cannot search through the social and mental constructions of human cultures and history and find the clear knowledge of the true and holy God. Instead of truth and clarity, we find a cacophony of claims and counterclaims, of pride and arrogance, of ethnocentrism and moral squalor. We also find astonishing beauty and aspiration, heights of technical achievement and depths of literary penetration into the human dilemma.

Yet the essential sum of it all is an ambivalence, an indecisiveness, an ambiguity, a pervertedness in relationship to God. The vast sea of human knowledge and achievements do not add up to a knowledge of God. There are intimations and reflections of God throughout. Yet the knowledge is distorted by an equal desecration and repudiation of God and righteousness.

God is at the center of the world and world history. However, God is present only as the hidden actor and goal of that history. The knowledge of God in the world is wrapped up in the great darkness which hovers over history due to human unrighteousness and faithlessness.

God is also known and unknown in the Church. God is known there because of Jesus Christ and thus known in a way that is quantitatively and qualitatively different than in the world. The origin and animating reality of the life of the Church is God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. The Church has its being in the reality of this definitive self-disclosure of God. Yet we find even in the Church that the true and holy One can be alien and contradicted by its very structure and life.

This happens when the Church is *apostate*, when it no longer hallows the knowledge and reality of God. Instead it neglects, abandons, perverts and distorts that knowledge, giving itself over to a perverted nature. It does this by exalting itself, claiming too much for itself, making itself the glory that fills the earth. The Church in excess becomes preoccupied with its own traditions, the loftiness of its grand institutions, the finality of its understandings and gifts to the world. It hallows and sacralizes its own name and structures.

It can also be the Church in defect. This is the Church that no longer takes itself seriously, doubting that its Word comes from God, intimidated by the great powers of science, politics, economics, and history. It is frightened by the world about it and becomes the imitator and repeater of all the other words and actions. It glorifies the world and denigrates itself, secularizing itself while sacralizing the names that shine in the world.

In either case God is no longer hallowed and central. The Word of God is replaced with human words and perspectives. In its supposed "knowledge of God," the Church becomes the harbor for a great ignorance of God. In praying that God might hallow his name, we pray that God will destroy and remove the evil that infects even the Church and brings about its perversion and destruction.

God is also known and unknown by the individual believer. Even we who say we are followers of Christ lament the fact that our knowledge and vision of God is so dim and uncertain. While we know there can be no compromise with evil and the darkness it brings, we come day by day to ask forgiveness from God (as Isaiah cried out: "Woe is me! I am undone, for my own eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." Isaiah 6:5) There is no knowledge of God that does not also reveal the circle of ignorance that remains. The great scandal in the Christian life is that alongside our hunger for righteousness is a drive toward unrighteousness. In opposition to our knowledge of God we acknowledge evil thoughts, evil words, evil deeds. If we confess Christ, we must also confess sin and guilt as well. We desecrate God and therefore pray, "Hallowed be Thy Name."

August 30, 1992 **(f) Luke 11:1-4**

The second petition is for the coming of God's kingdom. Isaiah's great vision of God was of the Holy One seated high and exalted on the throne, with the skirt of his robe filling the Temple (6:1). God is the King of Kings. God rules and reigns supreme in the world he created. This is the most fundamental reality of our world. God is the one who orders and sustains the very physical process and substance of our universe.

Nonetheless, this petition acknowledges that our world is no longer ordered according to the will of God. God's kingdom no longer effectively governs and directs all things in accordance with God's will. There is a kingdom other than God's that is present and effective in our everyday affairs. This is God's world by right and yet God is excluded from it. It also is a great sigh acknowledging that only God can establish God's Kingdom. We are not its architects, its

builders, its establishers. If God does not take the initiative to make his rule active in this unruly world of principalities, kingdoms, states and lordless powers, we are completely lost and undone.

What are these **lordless powers** that create the disorder called human history? They are the powers set loose by humans who have chosen to live autonomous lives separate from God. They are powers of *politics*, where we see petty tyrants or simply corrupted representatives who seek to exercise power for their own sakes rather than for the common good of the citizens of a realm. Seeking and holding power becomes an end in itself. National security reasons override all other rationales and justify injustice on behalf of a hundred different ideas, be it freedom, social justice, democracy, the honor of the nation.

They are powers of *economics*, exercised by the millions of servants of mammon. Their absolute dedication to "controlling" material goods and valued items leads to an idolatry of money that controls them. People come to have "substance" only to the degree to which they have money and property ('She's a person of real substance!'). They "exist" only so far as they "have."

There are the powers of *ideologies*, "isms" of various sorts to which people are so committed they shoot and kill those from opposing "isms." The twentieth century is littered with the bodies of people killed in the name of fascism, communism, Islamic fundamentalism, capitalism, socialism, anarchism, ethnic nationalism, individualism, Catholicism and Protestantism etc. Ideas become more important than people and the righteousness of human community is sacrificed in the name of this or that movement seeking communal or personal fulfillment.

There are the powers of *science and progress*. We "subordinate" more and more natural forces in the name of dominating nature and turning it to the goals and comfort of the human being. Technology grows ever more precise and powerful. Yet our experience of its destructive side portends ecological disaster, planetary poisoning, and extinction. We create a great myth and religion of science and progress and refuse to cope with the foreseeable disasters our generation creates for the next.

All of these powers occupy the "orders" we build because we seek in them to free ourselves of God. We take the good powers loaned to the human and nature and use them without regard to the righteousness God seeks in a human fellowship that cares for and nurtures the earth as well. The very abilities that mark us out as made in the image of God become inhuman, demonic, disruptive. They are used against fellow humans and the earth rather than for them. By making them lordless powers we humans have become the creators of disorder, tearing not only society apart but ourselves as well. We overreach ourselves in prideful rebellion against what God asks from us for our own good.

In praying for the coming Kingdom of God, we pray for God himself to reenter our disorder and bring its disruptiveness back into congruence with his righteousness. We ask for the coming completely future world of heaven come to earth. But we also ask that here and now, that kingdom will come near as it came with Jesus Christ and exercise lordship over our lordless powers, restoring them to their place as servants of God.

August 30, 1992 **(g) Luke 11:1-4**

It is not enough simply to acknowledge that the first two petitions are directed toward God. That is what must ever be underlined. God's activity is prior to and more important than our own. Yet we do not pray without acting. God often answers prayers by setting human hands and feet to work in service of what we have petitioned God to do. If we are the imagers of God on earth, then we will in our activity and attitudes, mirror the character and activity of the God we serve.

Paul's most common term for those who have encountered Christ through repentance and faith is "saints" (holy ones). We are those who are made holy by submitting ourselves to the Holy God. If we are asking, seeking, and knocking on the portals of heaven for God's hallowing in this world, we will ourselves be proactive in placing God at the center of our worlds and relationships. We cannot pray for the hallowing of God's name and then turn around and place ourselves in the service of that which desecrates God in our world.

The omnipotence of God is not the omnicausality of God. God may alone be the One who can show himself as he is in himself so that we can have true knowledge of God and thus reverence God properly. But God often brings us that knowledge via other human beings (through Moses, David, Isaiah, Jesus, Paul, Luke, James, John). God's answering our prayers does not exclude mediating that answer through human capabilities. God's hallowing of his name includes using us to advance the knowledge of the glory of God among the peoples.

So there is in our zeal for the honor of God not only the activity of earnest and repeated prayer and praise. There is also the practical holiness of spreading the knowledge of God through example, writings, speaking and sharing. To pray for the honoring of God is to care that every occupation and sphere of life have people in it who fear and serve the Lord there, who confess the name of God over their plans and activities. So in response to our praying this God may well answer by sending us to be those (like Isaiah) who witness to the true and living God in those occupations and arenas of human endeavor.

The same is true in our petition for the coming of God's kingdom. We dare not pray this and then turn our efforts to furthering lordless powers and god-defying processes. If our zeal is for God's rule and righteousness, then we will find ourselves empowered by God to oppose all unrighteousness. There is something contradictory about praying for the triumph of God in human affairs followed by our not being a part of the struggle for human righteousness. The order of God includes a corresponding order in human affairs. Insofar as we are responsible agents within our human communities, we can seek to bring that orderliness into existence.

To be sure we will not and cannot bring about God's Kingdom. What we can do is bring about small, humanly-limited anticipations of that divine righteousness and orderliness. In praying for the coming Kingdom, Christians see that they must seize the possibilities that are inherent in their current disorderly orders so as to actualize more justice than is now present. If we hunger and thirst after righteousness, we will be satisfied. Ultimately that satisfaction comes with the coming Kingdom of God. Yet even here and now we can engender right relationships in a provisional manner. We will seek to act in Kingdom-like fashion, practicing the presence of the King in our families, churches, organizations and politics.

The Kingdom of God is the entirely future world of God coming to earth at the end of history. But it is also the Kingdom that enters our hearts and transforms our character now. Already the Kingdom is near and can be entered and experienced. Yet it not only changes us inwardly, it seizes more than our motives. It moves our hands and feet into the service of doing the will of God in this world. Already we are to move beyond conformity to the disorderly cultures and politics of our age into a new pattern of behaving. We can be witnesses to what it is God does for human beings and desires to do for the natural world of animals and plants in which we live. We can be those witnesses by reforming and transforming the way we relate to fellow humans and to the natural world. We can be small answers to the prayer we pray.

August 30, 1992 **(h) Luke 11:1-4**

The third petition is for bread for today. Having tended to the central issue of our world (God), Jesus teaches us then to turn to the priorities of human concourse and affairs. While the theological concerns of the beginning of this prayer are primary, the human concerns we pray for can never be merely secondary or peripheral.

The sum of the law is loving God and the neighbor as oneself. These are tied together but in a given order. The preeminent matter to rectify is the godlessness of ourselves and our world. False spirituality is the root of all the distorted humanity and sociality we see in ourselves and about us. Yet Jesus is not satisfied that we pray about the most important things alone. He leads us to concern ourselves equally with matters which (to those with false ideas of God) may seem beneath the dignity and attention of God: bread, forgiveness, things that put us to the test.

This first petition underlines the materialism of Christian faith. We are embodied selves who exist precariously on the platform of available food. We may not live by bread alone, but we cannot live without the sustenance bread provides. There are several facets worth emphasizing in this petition:

1. Beginning with this petition, we have a number which are in the first person plural. This is not "give me" daily bread. The focus includes me but does not exclude the other six billion people. The Jesus who fed the five thousand is concerned that all humans have sufficient for

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daily living. When I pray this, I seek an answer to my own need that is compatible with including all others in the bounty God supplies from the earth. I do not pray for daily steak or cake, but bread—the basic necessities for life.

2. Bread is the result of a long process beginning with the seed and the good soil in which it is grown. To pray for daily bread is to pray for a whole series of things starting with the care and fruitfulness of the earth to the money needed to buy bread. This petition focuses on the whole realm of socio-economics—how we are organized and ordered to create and distribute the goods and wealth that come from our productive powers. In praying for daily bread I am praying for arable land, good strains of plants, good weather, farmers, bankers, business, labor, government, jobs and money. I am praying for good roads and transportation systems, adequate storage facilities and honest manufacturers who create healthy foods, just wages and fair distribution of wealth so all can afford to purchase bread. A whole world of human affairs is contained in this simple, direct petition.
3. We live in an era when we are faced with constant reminders of the hungry, such as the tragedy of starvation in several regions. The hungry and malnourished of the world stare out of us from our TV screens. Our current world economic system and the terror created by a half century of a spiraling arms industry placing grotesque amounts of force into the hands of millions constantly produces impoverishment. Huge numbers of people are displaced. In asking for our daily bread we find ourselves facing the embarrassment of our filled refrigerators and extravagant life-styles. With the rich man we confess our sin of storing up more assets than we could expend in ten life times while doing little for those who have so little they will not even eat one slice of bread today. So we confess our own guilt and ask as well for God to show us what we can and must do. We are rich Christians in an age of hunger. We become partners with the godless and lordless powers by living so comfortably and callously.
4. This petition is followed by the prayer for forgiveness. We pray first for bread because we cannot exist without bread. We first must be able to stand. Only then can we stand straight. When we view the world through the eyes of the physically hungry, we will see new dimensions of our need for forgiveness and our indebtedness to share, not only the prime directive to hallow God’s name, but the abundance that God gives to us. The gospel starts with the spiritual reality of God as the most economically and socially significant reality in the world. But it continues with the practicality of physical bread and the social justice that mandates that we not be too content with having too much when there are others with too little. Spirituality and social justice go together.

August 30, 1992 **(i) Luke 11:1-4**

The fourth petition is for forgiveness of sins, connected to our forgiving others. Given our godlessness, our rebellion against the rule of God and our covetous hoarding of the goods of life, we find this request eminently logical and reasonable. We have much to be forgiven for before God and by our fellow human beings. The problem with our world is not those other blackguards and scoundrels who keep ruining it for the good people. The problem with the world is me. I’m at the heart of the problem.

First we ask God to give and then we ask God to forgive (“Thou art giving and forgiving, Ever blessing, ever blest”). Our first need is to exist. So we ask for bread. Our profoundest need is to exist in a way that pleases our Creator. Because we fall short of the glory of God, we exist precariously and gravely endangered. So we ask to be forgiven. It may seem strange that those who are called “saints” are taught to ask forgiveness. Martin Luther understood us well when he described the Christian as *simul justus et peccator* (at the same time just and sinner). This is true of us all, even such as Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the Apostles of the Church.

There is a sequence in this petition. First we forgive our fellow humans whose neglect and mismanagement have injured us. Then we ask for God’s forgiveness. In Luke the tense is present: “forgive us because we are forgiving.” The condition for asking God to extend to us forgiveness is that we ourselves extend forgiveness to those who wrong us. It is not a condition for the forgiveness of God (which is granted on the basis of free grace and mercy) but a condition of asking for it.

It is also an indication that we ourselves understand what it means that God forgives us. How can we be open to the experience and reality of being forgiven if we do not or cannot forgive others? Can we who do not love others receive love from others? Yet we cannot give what we have not received. There is a chicken-egg sequence here. Only when we know the forgiveness of others can we discover within ourselves the resources to forgive others. This petition is in a prayer meant to guide the disciples. They already have stepped through the portal of repentance and confession of sin, receiving the forgiveness of God. Now they must image that activity of God in their own interrelationships. The reality of their profession of knowing the God who forgives sins is that they become people who forgive others.

Can we ask God to forgive us for not forgiving others? Certainly we are not talking of perfected saints whose forgiving others is perfect. Forgiving is often not an instant event or a mouthing of the words, "I forgive you." Often the hurt and pain is so deep and vivid that the healing within that comes from forgiving another takes time. At the least we can come to God with a willingness to become forgivers. What cannot be brought to God is a prayer from a heart that is hardened and determined never to forgive. If the faith that says, "I believe; help thou my unbelief," is received by Jesus, surely the struggle that says, "I forgive; help thou my unforgiveness," can as well.

In the Lord's Prayer there are two different terms used: "forgive us our sins [*hamartias*] for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted [*opheilonti*] to us." The Old Testament vocabulary for sin can be summarized in three categories: (1) deviation from the right way; (2) the state of being in sin, hence guilty and ungodly; and (3) rebellion against a superior or unfaithfulness to an agreement (trespass). The New Testament agrees with this portrait. The word, sin, in the Lord's Prayer refers to missing the mark. It is an event in which we personally and voluntarily deviate from the norm God purposes for our lives. It is a transgression of God's law, the omission of doing what is rightfully expected from us, the violation of relationship, and the falsifying of the truth.

We ask forgiveness because we could have lived differently than we have. The pain we have caused to God and to others was avoidable and undeserved. We have forsaken the rulership of God (and resist his kingly rule). We go after other gods and desecrate the holy name of the Living God. We have misused and abused our fellow human beings, leaving many without the bare necessities of life. So we ask for God's forgiveness.

August 31, 1992 **(j) Luke 11:1-4**

The fifth petition asks that God not put us to the test. The prayer for bread focused on the present and immediate future. The prayer for forgiveness sought the removal of past wrongs. This request focuses on the future. Once the matters of physical sustenance and reconciliation with God and fellow humans is settled, then the future is ready to be faced. What we know from our own family histories and from the stories of the Bible is that we can fall under the influence of events and persons so overwhelming that they cause us to break down or break out in sinful actions.

Job was tested in the Old Testament—as was Abraham on the mount when commanded to sacrifice his only son. The most notable testing is described earlier in the Spirit's leading Jesus into the wilderness to face the Evil One. Testing elicits the need for guidance and protection. Jesus did not take himself into that encounter, as though he relished the idea of engaging in the struggle. Nowhere in scripture are we invited to put ourselves into places and circumstances where we know we are subject to the crisis and opportunity of doing evil.

The fact that this petition is included is indication that our properly ordered relationship with God does not put us beyond the possibility of sinning. The possibility of perfectibility on this side of the full coming of the Kingdom of God is a chimera. We do have a complete Sanctifier in the person of the Holy Spirit, but we are not completely sanctified until we are glorified and see Christ face to face. Then we shall be like him. Now we are like him only partially.

This is not to counsel despair or legitimate an easy conscience in the face of continued sinning and desires for sinning. Paul knew the inner struggle of desiring the right and doing the wrong (Rom 7). There remains within us the continuing principle of the fleshly nature, ready to pull us back into the deeds of the old self. There remains outside of us a world full of encouragements and allurements to sin. So our prayer not to be led into temptation is a realistic

implementation of the desire to hallow God's name. We know how easy it is for us to desecrate God's character and to withdraw ourselves from following his kingly rule.

Yet Paul also cries out triumphantly that the Holy Spirit can and does deliver us from the inner drives of the old self, giving us the actual ability to walk in harmony and faithful obedience to God (Rom 8). We need not live forever in our own habitual sins, discouraged and despairing ever of victory. We need not be foolhardy and put God to the test by placing ourselves in the same position we know from past history brings a fall into sin. But neither need we be timid about what we are encouraged to ask from God in this petition.

What we face in temptation is (most frequently) not a frontal, announced attack of evil. It is more subtle, such as that we see quintessentially in the Garden of Eden. People are put under stress in such a way that they will choose directions and deeds that will destroy them in the end. Some stress strengthens because it brings us beyond what we thought were the limits of our capability, yet without breaking us down. The stress of temptation is a lure to a person into something that does positive damage and harm, usually moral. God does not test us with the intention of breaking but of strengthening us and drawing out more of the true self that is made over in the image of Christ (James 1:13).

This prayer affirms what we need: "God keeps faith and will not let you be tested beyond your own powers, but when the test comes he will at the same time provide a way out and so enable you to endure" (I Cor 10:13). We are temptible because God has made space for our freedom and responsible wills. The temptation that seeks to destroy our freedom by luring us to use our freedom badly is not faced alone. Christ, the triumphant, walks alongside us. Yet we must face the temptations ourselves. Jesus does not take the discipleship journey away from us, keeping us from either the stresses placed upon us to strengthen us or the stresses that come from a hellish source and lure us to our own self-destruction. What Jesus does is to invite the prayer for God's help, a help that empowers us in manifold ways to endure faithfully whatever tests come.

August 31, 1992 **Luke 11:5-8**

The friend roused at midnight to supply needed bread for hospitality is a parable both of comparison and contrast. It compares the person praying to the man desperately in need of the loaves of bread in order to carry out the duties of a good host. It contrasts God to the sleepy householder, very reluctant at midnight to rouse himself and give his neighbor those needed loaves.

The thrust of the parable is an argument from the lesser to the greater. God is not one who goes to bed, shuts the door, can't be easily roused much less be persuaded by friendship to provide the neighbor with needed provisions. God does not wait to hear and answer until we irritate him with our persistent and shameless petitions without end. The point of comparison is that God, like the sleeping householder, will give people what they genuinely need when they ask him. If such a person succeeded in getting what he needed in such unfavorable circumstances, how much more likely are we to get what we need from our slumberless and loving God?

More difficult is the comparison focused on the man asking for the bread (even whether the comparison refers to him or to the sleepy householder). The problem comes with the imprecision of meaning in the word usually translated persistence or importunacy (Greek, *anaideia*). It has normally been taken as making the point we find in Luke 18:1, that we should not grow weary in praying but should persist in bringing before God what we know is his desire to give us. Yet Bailey has suggested that the word is better translated as "shamelessness."

Even if it is better translated "shameless," two possibilities for interpretation remain. If the "shamelessness" refers to the householder, the idea runs somewhat along these lines. Shame and honor were crucial features of one's reputation within a closed network of small village life. The person of honor will act in such a way as to avoid bringing shame to his or her name or that of the family. So this householder, who is irritated at being roused at such an unwelcome hour, nonetheless sees the issues of honor and shame involved in this encounter. Because he does not want to lose face and bring shame, he will get up and act in accord with the village code and give the loaves. So he acts in a way that is "without shame" (=blameless). The point of the parable is thus single: the assurance that if a man obtained what he genuinely needed under

such spectacularly unfavorable conditions, how much more will we when we come in prayer to our heavenly Father?

If the "shamelessness" (or "without shame") refers to the one asking for the bread, then the point shifts as well as the meaning of the word. In this case the host risks displaying his own lack of planning and lack of resources in public fashion. He risks waking more than just the householder but other families living snugly up against this man's house. Nonetheless, he is bold, forthright, "shameless" in his request, not hesitating to demand it from a reluctant neighbor at an awful hour of the night. In this case the point is not about God. The comparison is with ourselves in prayer. We should not hesitate to come to God and boldly put forth our requests for what we need. We come to a God who has promised to give to his children good gifts if they will but ask. God is not a distant, uninvolved, easily irritated figure who will throw our requests back in our face even when they come out of our own faults and lack of planning.

However we finally settle the specific thrust of this parable, we are not in trouble. The principle of persistence is taught in later texts, as is the principle of bold, forthright entrance into the very presence of God. We need not fall into the traps of the Evil One who lead us into self-pride (acting as though we do not need the help of God in very mundane affairs of our lives) or self-disgust (acting as though we have muddled things so badly God does not and would not listen to us in the desperation of our needs).

One of the wonders of the Lord's Prayer is the way it circles all of life. The prayer for forgiveness is set in the middle of the petitions for ourselves. We have not because we ask not or ask improperly (motivated by our own lusts). Yet we can come forthrightly even when we have fallen and ask for reconciliation and renewed relationship and be granted it. We can come repeatedly and find what we seek from God.

August 31, 1992 **Luke 11:9-13**

One of the reasons for seeing persistence as the basic theme of the parable of the midnight friend is due to the immediate context. There are three present tense imperatives. The flavor of the verbs is "keep on asking," "keep on seeking," and "keep on knocking." The verbs specify a repeated action. Together they form a nice acrostic in the English: ASK (Ask, Seek, Knock).

Might we not see in them levels of intensity as well? Do you want something from God? Then mention it verbally to God. Do not think it will come to you simply because God reads some inarticulate longing. Name it and God will listen and you will receive it.

But then seek. You need to open your eyes and look about for the answer you have named in prayer. Marshall your energies and wrestle with God for what is on your heart and lips in prayer. This is a step beyond simply naming it in prayer.

Then knock. This is the most persistent and demanding form of praying—like the midnight friend pounding on the door of his neighbor, asking and seeking the bread he needed in order to extend proper hospitality to his visitor. In seeking answers to your prayers, you will often find closed doors between you and the answer. This is an invitation to pound on the doors of heaven.

The promise is simple: what you ask for will be given. What you seek will be found. The doors you knock on will be opened. These are startling words for anyone who has spent time praying. My own experience is not a simple straight forward set of direct correlations between what I prayed for and what happened in space and time. Why this is so has in part been suggested by the model prayer: sometimes I ask for the wrong things out of a life not centered in God's honor and kingly rule and not concerned with the basic necessities of life in that kingdom (daily food, reconciliation, and empowerment for endurance in the ambiguities of life). But there is another reason this seemingly simple promise and my seemingly discrepant experience confront me.

In vss. 11-13 Jesus gives another argument from the lesser to the greater, another contrast between God and human beings. In this case the comparison is between what human fathers, evil though they are, give to their children and what God (in whom not a single speck of evil is present) gives. When children ask for the normal food for meals (eggs or fish), the human father does not give inedibles such as a scorpion or a snake. They give good things gladly. Even

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more does our heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask of him. God is more perfect in love than an earthly father. We may pray for a "scorpion" but God will give us bread instead.

In this case all the good things we might ask for, seek after, or the closed doors we knock on to open are summed up in the supreme gift of the Holy Spirit. In receiving the Holy Spirit in an increasing fullness, exercising increasing guidance and empowerment, in participating increasingly in God's reality, we have with the Spirit all those other good things we might seek.

Sit down and make a list of those things we are stirred up enough to seek: more discipline, wiser management of one's life, better grades in school, control of impatience or temper, a less judgmental spirit, a love for a difficult person in one's life, the capability to be an outstanding preacher, a bag of money to pay off school loans, opportunity and wisdom to share Christ with the lost, freedom from a persistent habit or sin, etc. Whatever it is you are driven to seek, in having the Holy Spirit you have the one prayer answer that answers all the other requests together.

If we pray for a holiness of life that sincerely hallows God's name, the Holy Spirit is the secret to our reverencing God in all we do and say. If we pray for the coming Kingdom of God, the Holy Spirit is the power of the age to come. If we ask for food, forgiveness, guidance and strength—all of these come by the operation of the Holy Spirit's activities. We now live in the age of the Spirit and are baptized by the Spirit and water. In seeking specific things, we discover we finally are seeking God in all his fullness.

Spiritual Formation
Unit 4
Obstacles:
Why Aren't We Making It All the Way?



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Unit 4

Obstacles: Why Aren't We Making It All the Way?

Unit 4 Contents

- Learning Outcomes and Steps to Complete Unit 4
- Lecture Notes and Workbook
- Email Assignment
- Readings: Discipline in Focus: Fasting

Learning Objectives

- Begin self-examination as you begin to identify weaknesses and habitual patterns of sin.
- Review your grounding in the grace of God.
- Analyze in detail the dynamics of self-deception.
- Investigate important exegetical foundations for our understanding of “the world, the flesh, and the devil.”
- Initiate an examination of the particular obstacles blocking your spiritual development.

Steps to Complete Unit 4

Read and Reflect...

- From your text: *Devotional Classics*, pp. 55-62 (Augustine), pp. 143-149 (Pascal), and pp. 230-236 (Woolman).
- From your Reader (after the workbook portion of this Unit): “Discipline in Focus: Fasting.”
- Continue to write reflections upon your reading in your journal.

Respond

- Complete the journaling exercises. This unit focuses on fasting as the discipline to be practiced. Your journaling should continue to reflect what is going on in your life at present. It may be that you will want to spend some special time during your fast writing in your journal, especially if fasting is a new discipline for you. There are also questions for your aid in the text, *Devotional Classics*. The material you continue to encounter in the readings may raise significant issues about your spiritual life. Keep recording what is most valuable to you.
- This might be a good week to read back through what you have written since beginning this course to see if there is a pattern to God's speaking to you—some new awareness of areas to be celebrated or areas to be strengthened.

Complete the final email assignment and send your work to the professor.

Lecture Notes and Workbook

[David Fraser]: In the last unit we worked on prayer. We begin this unit with a self-analysis on self-deception. Self-deception is the process where we look at ourselves with a distorted, false image. We overestimate or underestimate ourselves. We are uncomfortable with our capabilities. We are not honestly seeing ourselves as God sees us. Please find the self-evaluation form in the Readings section of this module at the end of this unit. Rate yourself in the areas listed. After rating yourself, ask your spouse or a close friend to rate you.

Think About It

Please complete the self-evaluation exercise located on the last pages of this unit.

Studies in Self-Deception

[Chris Hall]: Many scientific, empirical studies indicate human beings have an innate tendency to deceive themselves. We deceive ourselves about our strengths and weaknesses, goodness, sinfulness and motivations. We fool ourselves about who is at fault when things go wrong. We also claim exaggerated credit when things go right.

Arkin and Maruyama, for example, studied attribution, affect, and college exam performance. They wanted to know to whom college students would attribute poor grades on college exams. Their study showed a marked self-centered bias in college students. College students consistently attributed failure on exams to either those who administered the exams or to the exam itself. Most refused to accept responsibility for their failure.

Bradley also observed this same self-serving bias in human behavior. His research indicates that people tend to attribute positive behaviors to themselves and negative behaviors to external factors. That is to say, human beings are most likely to take credit for their good or praiseworthy actions and to deny responsibility for their bad acts or failures. (cf. Bradley, "Self-Serving Biases in the Attribution Process: A Reexamination of the Fact or Fiction Question." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 36 (1978): 56-71.)

Helmut Lamm and David Myers observed that on a variety of dimensions, "most people see themselves as more ethical than their peers and as less prejudiced than most in their communities." (Myers, *The Inflated Self*, 23; cf. Lamm and Myers, "Group-Induced Polarization of Attitudes and Behavior," in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. II, L. Berkowitz, ed., New York: Academic Press, 1978, 145-195)

Think of the Holocaust during World War II or the killing fields of Cambodia in the 1970's—or more recently the slaughter in Rwanda and Darfur. We would like to believe that there is something inherent in the German authoritarian character that led to Dachau and Auschwitz. The Germans, Cambodians or Hutus might be capable of such evil, but not us. Are we self-deceived at this point? In a well-known study, Stanley Milgram placed well-intentioned people in an evil situation to see whether good or evil behavior would prevail. Myers comments on Milgram's experiment:

Under optimum conditions, with an imposing close-at-hand commander and a remote victim, 65% of his adult male subjects fully obeyed instructions. They delivered what were supposedly traumatizing electric shocks to a screaming innocent victim in an adjacent room. These were regular people—a mix of blue collar, white collar, and professional men. They despised their task, yet most could not disengage themselves from it. (Myers, *The Inflated Self*, 15; cf. Stanley Milgram, "Some Conditions of Obedience and Disobedience to Authority," *Human Relations* 18 (1965): 57-75)

Michael Ross and Fiore Sicoly conducted a study that observed many things, including whether spouses believed they receive enough credit from each other for cleaning the house and caring for the children. Myers writes "Ross and Sicoly believe that the bias is due partly to the greater ease with which we recall things we have actively done, compared with the things we have not done." (Myers, *The Inflated Self*, 22; cf., Michael Ross and Fiore Sicoly, "Egocentric Biases in Availability and Attribution," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 37 (1979): 322-376)

Unit 4: "Obstacles: Why Aren't We Making It All the Way?"

B.R. Schlenker and R.S. Miller observed that people interpret facts in a manner positive to themselves, attributing negative behaviors to external factors. (Cf. B.R. Schlenker and R.S. Miller, "Egocentrism in Groups: Self-Serving Biases or Logical Information Processing?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 35 (1977): 755-764.)

All of these studies indicate that human beings experience great difficulty in facing the truth about their own weaknesses. We are self-deceived. We think we are stronger than we really are. We imagine we are better than we truly are. And even when confronted by our palpable failures, we possess an innate ability to lie about the truth of the situation. We believe we are humble when we are filled with pride. We think we are free from lust when we're actually consumed by it, and we tell ourselves that we are free from the love of money and possessions, although we rarely if ever give anything away. Perhaps self-deception comes easily to us because we have suffered from the disease of sin all our lives. It seems to be the normal state of affairs. For the most part, we fail to recognize its presence. (cf. Psalm 36:1-2, 1 John 1:8)

Psalm 36:1-3: Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in their hearts.

There is no fear of God before their eyes. For they flatter themselves in their own eyes that their iniquity cannot be found out and hated. The words of their mouths are mischief and deceit; they have ceased to act wisely and do good.

Why do people find it so hard to face the truth about themselves? Is it due to pride, or fears of rejection, punishment, change? It could be because our attempts to change have been met with repeated failures.

Think About It

A Leader of Israel

Meditate on the story of the rich young ruler (Mark 7:17-22). In what way is this man deceived about himself? What are the dynamics of his deception? How does Jesus zero in on the area where the man particularly has deceived himself? Put yourself in the place of the rich ruler. Try to integrate your own attitude toward your own money and wealth into the narrative. What would you say to the rich young man if you were asked to counsel him and provide concrete advice to him on how to reorient his attitude toward money?

Write your answer on a separate paper.

Learning About Ourselves

[Chris Hall]: On what basis can we begin the daunting process of learning about ourselves? What dynamic process can we use to straighten the twisted pathways of our own sin? We can only do this by immersing ourselves in the love and grace of God. There are so many things I don't know or understand. The more I study theology, the more I realize the immensity of the subject. I learned the character of many of the great mysteries of the faith, but they cannot be explained or even experienced. When I turn and look at myself, I'm increasingly aware of the infinitely tangled web of my own personality. However, of one thing I am sure: God loves me and has demonstrated love for me in sending God's Son to die for me. Over time, with the aid of specific spiritual disciplines (i.e., prayer, meditation, and study), I am coming to know, in a deep, almost inexpressible manner, that I have been justified, sanctified, adopted, and sealed by God as God's own child. Gradually I am learning that in the final analysis all of God's actions for me are evidence of God's love toward me. It is within this context of love that I am learning to face the areas of my life that continue to need renewal and restoration.

Is it not true that all of us possess an "iron box" – a box to which only we hold the key? Why do we put things into the iron box? Issues of fear and trust, lack of clarity regarding God and God's grace, issues of shame, fear of the Christian community, false or distorted teaching from the church.

In this box we place all the events, experiences, memories, doubts, fears and sins that we cannot face. We are so ashamed and embarrassed by what we have done and what we are. Day after day we stow more in the box. Perhaps we think that once something is put into the box it dies. But the contents continue to squirm inside of us. They strangle our spiritual life, choking

our vision of Christ and Christ's call. Still Christ gently beckons to us, "Open the box. I know what is inside. I knew these things about you when I first called you into my kingdom. I know you better than you know yourself. Only by opening the box and emptying its contents before me will its power finally die. None of it will shock me. I know the worst side of you and still love you. Trust me. Open the box and let its contents die. Remember I am gentle and humble in heart."

Henri Nouwen writes in *The Road to Daybreak* of the difficulty of openness and honesty before God:

'Do I want to be seen by Jesus? Do I want to be known by him?' If I do, then a faith can grow which proclaims Jesus as the Son of God. Only such a faith can open my eyes and reveal an open heaven. Thus, I will see when I am willing to be seen. I will receive new eyes that can see the mysteries of God's own life when I allow God to see me, all of me, even those parts that I myself do not want to see. O Lord, see me and let me see. (Nouwen, 18)

Think About It

Hiding From Ourselves and From God

Consider the previous question: Why do people find it so hard to face the truth about themselves? What have you locked in your 'iron box'? Why? Reflect on yourself and your life in your journal.

The World, the Flesh and the Devil

[David Fraser]: Part of the answer to why we are self-deceived is found in the realities of the world, the flesh and the devil. These are key actors in keeping us from showing ourselves to God, and allowing God to show God's self to us as God changes us and transforms us. In the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew's gospel, Jesus teaches that his disciples are to be both salt and light.

"You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden . . . In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:13a, 14a, 16)

In light of this passage, William Iverson asks a telling question, after observing that more than a quarter of the entire population of the United States had professed an evangelical conversion experience: "A pound of meat would surely be affected by a quarter pound of salt. If this is real Christianity, 'the salt of the earth,' where is the effect of which Jesus spoke?" (William Iverson quoted in Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 23)

Iverson's question is a fair one. On the one hand, Jesus issues a clear call in the gospel to a life of faith, commitment, integrity, and good works. He teaches that his disciples must demonstrate the life of his kingdom to the surrounding world. If not, the salt "will have lost its taste. . . . It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot." (Matthew 5:13b) While Christ's teaching is clear, the reality of our lives is more muddled. We are now members of the kingdom of light, but still find ourselves struggling against the kingdom of darkness. In our more honest moments we realize that we fall far short of the goal of integrity—a life where word and deed correlate in genuine love. We experience temptation and conflict. We sin. We encounter strong opposition to our highest hopes and dreams of serving Christ faithfully. By God's grace, a careful analysis of the roadblocks and opponents that face us in the life of faith will move us further on our journey toward Christian maturity.

The World

What exactly is the world (Greek word: *kosmos*) from a biblical perspective? Richard Lovelace offers us excellent help in making sense of this term. In his book *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* Lovelace writes:

When world is used in a negative sense in scripture, what is meant is the total system of corporate flesh. It is operating on earth under satanic control, with all its incentives of reward and restraints of loss, its characteristic

Unit 4: "Obstacles: Why Aren't We Making It All the Way?"

patterns of behavior, and its anti-Christian structures, methods, goals and ideologies. It involves many forms and agencies of evil, which are hard to discern and to contend against on the basis of an individualistic view of sin. Included are dehumanizing social, economic and political systems; business operations and foreign policy based on local interest at the expense of general human welfare; and culturally pervasive institutionalized sin such as racism. Like the many-headed beast of Revelation 13, the world is secretly compatible with and operative within systems that are antithetical on the surface, such as capitalism and communism. We are required to separate ourselves as much as possible from the unholy force field of this planet's corporate flesh; to break our conformity to its characteristic ideologies, methods and motives; and to speak and act prophetically against its injustice and restraint of full human liberation. (Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 93-94)

We want to keep a number of Lovelace's metaphors in mind as we continue our discussion. Pay attention particularly to the description of the world as "corporate flesh" and an "unholy force field." I have sometimes thought of the "world" as a corporate manner of thinking and living. In its overall orientation, it is fueled by the demonic, ruled by the devil, energized by the flesh and diametrically opposed to the purposes of God. It represents a consensus that continually challenges and attempts to undercut the gospel. Perhaps we can think of the world in its negative connotation as a polluted, acidic environment in which the church must live at the present time. To change metaphors, it is an infectious virus that we must continually strain out of our spiritual bloodstream.

Jesus had much to say about the "world." He promised that we can expect opposition and hatred from the world. "If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, I have chosen you out of the world. Therefore the world hates you." (John 15:18-19, NRSV) In Jesus' prayer shortly before his betrayal and crucifixion he specifically asked that God leave us in the world but also protect us and fill us with joy.

But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. (John 17:13-15, NRSV)

Paul writes of the "world" as a vise that attempts to squeeze the Christian into a foreign mold. J.B. Phillips captures Paul's meaning well, "Don't let the world squeeze you into its mold." (Romans 12:2, Phillips Translation) Rather, Paul exhorts his readers to offer their bodies as "living sacrifices" and to "be transformed by the renewing" of their minds.

Think About It

The World-- Shaping of Our Lives and Outlook

Part 1: Identify three ways in which you sense the world has squeezed you into its mold. (Romans 12:1-2)

Part 2: Think about the culture you are from or the culture in which you now minister. How does that culture reflect the "corporate flesh" of the world in opposition to God? Give five examples.

The Flesh

[David Fraser]: The common New Testament word for flesh is the Greek word *sarx*. It has a number of interesting meanings. The New Testament scholar F.F. Bruce notes *sarx* can refer to our "bodily flesh (Romans 2:28), natural human descent or relationship (Romans 1:3, 4:1, 9:3), and humanity as such (Romans 3:20)." (F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Romans*, 42) When referring to human nature, *sarx* has a number of neutral or negative connotations. For example, Paul employs *sarx* neutrally to speak of Jesus' humanity, the human nature Christ shares with all human beings. Bruce writes, "Christ came in real flesh, but not in 'sinful flesh'; sin was unable to gain a foothold in His life. Therefore He is said to have come 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' (Romans 8:3)." (F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Romans*, 43)

Paul uses *sarx* in a negative manner to describe the weakness of human intelligence in Romans 6:19. In Romans 8:3, Paul speaks of the ineffectiveness of the law to produce righteousness because it was "weakened by the flesh" (NRSV) or "the sinful nature" (NIV), which Bruce defines as "frail human nature." (F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Romans*, 43)

Paul also speaks of his flesh as a sinful inclination or a propensity to sin that he has inherited from Adam. Bruce notes carefully the following aspects of *sarx* in this particular sense saying there is nothing good in it, "For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh." (Romans 7:18)

The "flesh" still must be reckoned with in Paul's life, though it is "progressively disabled" (Bruce, 43), in fact crucified with Christ. "We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin." (Romans 6:6; cf. Galatians 5:24) How is it that we must still reckon with the "flesh" if it has been crucified with Christ? Bruce explains:

This apparent paradox is one that we meet repeatedly in the Pauline writing. The believers are enjoined time and again to be what they are. They are to be in actual practice what they are as members of Christ. Thus they are said to 'have put off the old man with his deeds' and to 'have put on the new man' (Col. iii.9f.). In other places they are exhorted to 'put off. . . the old man' and 'put on the new man' (Ephesians iv. 22, 24). (F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Romans*, 44)

Our fallen nature, then, is not our body. Rather, *sarx* in its negative connotation is the fallen human personality using the body as a host, much like a virus or bacteria uses our physical body. Richard Lovelace defines our fallen nature as "the fallen human personality apart from the influence and control of the Holy Spirit." He contends that "the characteristic bent of the flesh is toward independence from God, His truth and His will, as if [a human being] were God." (Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 89-90) Luther believed the chief characteristic of the flesh was unbelief. Augustine saw *sarx* as possessing two central manifestations, self-exaltation and self-indulgence.

Both Augustine and Luther employed a helpful Latin phrase in their analysis of *sarx*. They spoke of the fallen self as *incurvatus in se*, drastically skewed or "curved in on itself" and away from God. Why? Think of the story of humanity's fall into sin. God has commanded Adam and Eve to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Genesis 2:17) The serpent's temptation specifically focuses on the trustworthiness of God. Can God truly be believed? Might God not have an ulterior motive in the commandment? "For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:5) Can Adam and Eve trust such a crafty God? Can they believe such a deceitful God?

Sadly, Adam and Eve choose to trust themselves, disbelieve God, and disobey the commandment. They turn away from God and place themselves at the center of their universe. Their insights and desires will form their central reference point for determining good and evil. As we have seen, the scripture insists that humanity's fundamental inclination to trust ourselves rather than God is a universal phenomenon. We all want to be at the center of the universe. We all want to be the center of attention. We all want to be God.

Unit 4: “Obstacles: Why Aren’t We Making It All the Way?”

This deep-seated tendency toward sin manifests itself in a tragic catalogue of horrors: sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, jealousy, party spirit, envy and murder. (cf. Galatians 5:19-21, Colossians 3:5-9) We are not all equally attracted to each of these concrete manifestations of our fallen nature. Through a combination of genetics, environment, personality type, varied life experiences and habit formation, differentiation occurs among individuals. Some of us struggle with lust, others with greed, others with laziness and others with self-pity.

At times we become aware of these faults, but too often we are oblivious to our inner havoc. We easily recognize the shortcomings of others, but fail to see our own. “Why,” Jesus asks, “do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?” (Matthew 7:3) One of the chief characteristics of the “flesh” in its fallen condition is to turn in upon itself (*incurvatus in se*), to place twistedly the isolated individual at the center of the universe as queen or king. Surely, we practice the central activities of the spiritual life to reverse this tendency. Jesus and Paul practiced these activities consistently. How can we practice them? As Willard insists, “through activities and ways of living that would train... [our personalities] to depend upon the risen Christ as Christ trained himself to depend upon the Father.” (Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 106) In fact, the purpose of this course is to expose the student to the activities themselves.

Please reflect on the role and dynamic of the “flesh” in your life.

Think About It

Ingrained Habits of the “Flesh” Within Us

Paul tells us to “put off the old nature” and “put on the new.” We need to think as concretely as possible about what that means. How do we put off our old selves and clothe ourselves with Christ and his nature? One way of approaching this question is to identify habit patterns, repeated actions, behaviors or attitudes that continually appear. Can we put negative patterns to death and develop positive patterns in their place?

List three negative habit patterns of your fallen nature you would like to break.

List three positive habits you would like to develop in their place over the next year.

The Devil

[David Fraser]: Paul is quite clear in his insistence that personal, supernatural evil—Satan and the demonic realm—stands opposed to the purposes of Christ and the extension of His kingdom. “For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6:12, NRSV) Peter, too, speaks of the resistance of Satan and recommends spiritual discipline and alertness as effective protection, “Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him. . . .” (1 Peter 5:8-9a).

Richard Lovelace pictures the demonic realm as an occupying power in alliance with the “world” and the “flesh.”

There is no more contradiction between the combination of the world, the flesh and the devil in the production of decline than there is in the conjunction of environmental stress, physical strain, and bacteria as causes of illness. Evidently the evil that emerges naturally from the human can be prompted, shaped and governed by these forces to accomplish their own larger purposes in opposing redemption. Every expansion of the kingdom of God involves combat with and displacement of these occupying powers. There is a strange inability among modern Christians to take this information seriously. Christians, even Evangelicals, are uneasy about paying very much attention to it. I suggest that this reluctance is not because the subject is trivial, morbid or dangerous, but because these forces have access to our minds, and

they are just as adept at blinding us to their presence as they are at concealing the gospel from the world (2 Corinthians 4:4)." (Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 70-71)

Think About It

The Power of the Evil One

Identify three aspects of the demonic in your culture or your life experience. Where do you see the devil and the devil's allies actively at work and in places where Christians need to resist the devil vigorously in the humility of our own weakness by the power of the Spirit?

Considering Specific Obstacles

[Chris Hall]: As we continue to investigate the dynamics of spiritual formation, we will give further consideration to the fallen trio of the world, the flesh and the devil. How, for example, has our fallen nature distorted our understanding of who we are, our sense of vocation and our willingness to trust God to supply what we need to fulfill God's call? We turn to these questions in our next unit. Now consider specific effects of the world, flesh, and devil (obstacles):

Laziness in our spiritual life (sloth): Pay particular attention to Dallas Willard's warning against the fallacy that spiritual growth comes easily.

Think About It

Spiritual Growth as the Product of Hard Work

Read and reflect on these words by Dallas Willard:

Today, around every corner stands someone hawking wisdom and goodness on easy terms. But this is not what history and experience teach. Such instant wisdom is just another expression of our modern, hedonistic ideology fueled by our constitutional right to pursue happiness. Somehow, we think that virtue should come easily. Experience teaches, to the contrary, that almost everything worth doing in human life is very difficult in its early stages. The good we are aiming at is never available at first. It is not available to strengthen us when we seem to need it most.

Think of all the projects, all the resolutions we begin and never finish. Starting is easy. Following through is hard. Few people get very far in most activities, even those at which we long to excel. While this is obviously true in the arts and sports, it is just as true in activities such as communicating with people, making money, directing a group activity, or caring for honeybees. We are not exempted from this rule when we enter the kingdom of grace. There is nothing left to do. We must accept this psychological fact about human personality, and realize that excellence calls us to a rigorous form of life. Excellence is the only way in which we can 'purge' ourselves into becoming a 'vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, prepared unto every good work.' (2 Timothy 2:21) We must accept it and submit to it, knowing that the rigors of discipline certainly lead to the easy yoke and the full joy of Christ. (*The Spirit of the Disciplines*, p. 121)

[Chris Hall]: Most Christian leaders will immediately recognize the truth of Willard's words. Few of us have attained our present positions by cultivating laziness in our lives. Yet it is possible to use our disciplined work habits and busyness as a smokescreen, often unrecognized, to hide our laziness in dealing with important fundamental issues. For example, am I avoiding my wife or children under the guise of ministry? Am I shielding myself from the

Unit 4: “Obstacles: Why Aren’t We Making It All the Way?”

pain of facing my self-centered, selfish nature—aptly demonstrated in the privacy of my home—through constant travel, study, writing, speaking, and office responsibilities?

Struggles with Discouragement: If we fail to grasp adequately the inherent rigors and hardships of spiritual growth and change, we will become quickly discouraged. What is the remedy? We must work at developing a healthy self-perspective; discouragement is often related to pride and self-deception. Have you said to yourself after committing sin, “I’m not like that; I can’t believe I’m like that.” A tremendous step toward healing occurs when instead we admit, “I’m exactly like that. And apart from the grace of Christ, I will love being like that.”

Other issues can generate discouragement in Christian leaders. These issues include lack of time (have I come to feel I’m indispensable—do I have issues of control?), undesirable comparison with other Christian ministries, struggles with integrity (fund raising, lifestyle issues), and the lack of a nurturing community (an accepting peer community to whom I can hold myself accountable—do I instead find myself stuck in a legalistic and judgmental environment?).

Think About It

Busyness and Discouragement

Are there ways you allow the “tyranny of the urgent,” the fast and constant demands of ministry to hide more critical issues of your family or personal life? Is busyness a mask for sloth in your life?

What about discouragement? When do you tend to get discouraged? Are there specific events, attitudes or responses that trigger discouragement in your life?

Write your answers.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS:

Use the following questions for journaling as you continue to reflect on what God is saying to you: from the *Devotional Classics*:

Pascal believes we are created in glory and innocence and perfection. Yet we fell into presumption, desiring to make ourselves the center and do without the help of God, desiring to find happiness in ourselves. How do you deal with the tendency to put yourself at the center, to be independent of God, and to find happiness in yourself? (p. 148)

Observe yourself, and see if you do not find the living characteristics of these two natures,” writes Pascal. In looking at your own life, how have you seen the greatness and the wretchedness, the pure and the impure, the noble and the ignoble? (p. 148)

St. Augustine says that he felt like “a house divided,” torn between two opposing desires. Have you ever had this experience? Describe. (p. 60)

A strong force that works against our inner unity, writes Augustine, is that we are weighed down by habit. What role have habits played in your struggle of commitment to God? (p. 60)

Augustine writes about the whispers of his old habits, and how they tried to persuade him until, in time, their voices grew faint. Which voices of habit would cry out the loudest if you were to try and break that habit? (p. 60)

The Prayer of Release: “First, lift up into his arms your children, your spouse, your friends. Next, place into his loving care your future, your hopes, your dreams. Finally, hold up to him your enemies, your angers, your desire for retaliation. Give it all into his hands and then turn and

walk away. He will care for everything as he sees fit." (Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, 55-56)

Email Assignment

When you have finished all the assigned readings, and spiritual discipline exercises, answer the following questions. Using two pages, answer reflection questions 1 and 2 on pages 234 of *Devotional Classics*:

1. "After early success as a merchant, John Woolman decided that to continue to expand his business would divert too much of his energy and attention from God. For this reason he turned to a more quiet life as a tailor and growing orchids. What actions could help you keep a 'steady attention to the voice of the True Shepherd' in the midst of your vocation?"
2. "In what ways, both obvious and subtle, do you find that the sentiments of others hinder you from following God's way? How can humility become both health and safety for you?"

Unit 4 Reader: Fasting

Before directly discussing the discipline of fasting, a discipline that relates intimately to the human body, read a word of reminder from Dallas Willard concerning the body's relationship to spiritual formation:

"Redemption as it is portrayed in the New Testament is comprehensible only when placed into careful relation with embodied human nature and God's purposes in our creation. It could not have been otherwise. God in creation placed in the fleshly human organism abilities to serve as the vehicle of our vocation. Our bodies are shaped into a specific character and laden with specific skills and tendencies by our experiences, including those we voluntarily undertake. Through the instrumentality of his life-giving word, God in regeneration renews our original capacity for divine interaction. But our body's substance is only to be transformed totally by actions and events in which we choose to participate from day to day.

*What then is the specific role of the spiritual disciplines? Their role rests upon the nature of the embodied human self -- they are to mold and shape it. And our part in our redemption is, through specific and appropriate activities, to 'yield' the plastic substance of which we are made to the ways of that new life which is imparted to us by the 'quickening spirit.'" (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 91-92; my emphasis)*

How does the discipline of fasting contribute to the molding and shaping of the human self?

Scripture describes a number of situations and occasions when Israel fasted as a nation. Israel, for example, fasted during times of national crisis. Esther, shortly before she intervenes on behalf of her people, asks all the Jews who are with her in Susa to fast.

"Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai, 'Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.'" (Esther 4:15-16)

Prayer was often coupled with fasting. When Nehemiah in Babylon hears that the wall of Jerusalem is in disrepair he mourns, fasts, and prays.

"They said to me, 'Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.' When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven." (Nehemiah 1:3-4)

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Both passages link fasting to a strong desire to see God intervene, protect, and restore the fortunes of Israel. Ezra also prays and fasts for protection as he contemplates the long trip from Babylon to Israel.

"There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, 'The good hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him.' So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer." (Ezra 8:21-23)

King Jehoshaphat calls Israel to fast when military conflict appears imminent.

"After this, the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites 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, En Gedi)!' 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 Chronicles 20:1-4)

The prophet Joel calls Israel to fast as a sign of repentance and confession of great apostasy.

"Put on sackcloth, O priests, and mourn; wail, you who minister before the altar. Come, spend the night in sackcloth, you who minister before my God; for the grain offerings are withheld from the house of your God. Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord." (Joel 1:13-14; cf. Joel 2:12, Jonah 3:5)

In all five of these Old Testament passages, common themes emerge. In every instance fasting occurs as a sign of the great seriousness of the situation and Israel's fervent desire to see God act. That is, nothing is more important than the situation at hand. Things are no longer business as usual. The normal routine is disrupted. Even basic needs such as eating and drinking are set aside as a sign to God that Israel is in great danger and can only be saved if God acts on its behalf. "Lord," the petitions express, "Take us seriously. We are without hope without you. Left to ourselves we are lost. Act on our behalf. Forgive our transgressions. We truly mean to change."

In the New Testament we see persons and groups fasting to prepare for intense periods of ministry and testing. On other occasions people fast and pray to discern God's will for a particular situation. Jesus fasts for forty days in the wilderness before his confrontation with the devil. (Luke 4:1-2) Jesus explains to the disciples that certain acts of ministry require ardent preparation. They have been unsuccessful in their attempts to cast a demon out of a young boy and Jesus replies, "This kind can come out only by prayer and fasting." (Mark 9:29) The prophetess Anna worships in the Temple "with fasting and prayer night and day" (Luke 2:36-38) and is one of the few people to recognize the Messiah when he appears. While fasting, worshiping and praying the church at Antioch discerns that Barnabus and Paul are to be set apart for mission to the Gentiles. (Acts 13:2) In these varied examples we see that fasting normally entails giving something up -- often food -- for the sake of a greater good or need. Foster writes,

"The central idea in fasting is the voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity. There is nothing wrong with these normal functions in life; it is simply that there are times when we set them aside in order to concentrate." (Foster, Study Guide for Celebration of Discipline, p. 40, emphasis mine)

Fasting can serve as a tool used by God to help us learn about ourselves and to strip away layers of self-deception. I, for one, would like to fool myself. I'd like to imagine that I am a patient, wise, sensitive individual. It's easy for me to continue in my self-deception until I don't get what I want when I want it. For example, normally when I'm hungry I get something to eat. My hunger pangs set off a signal of discomfort that I respond to quickly and then carry on with my normal circle of activities. Fasting interrupts this cycle of discomfort and response. I don't get what I desire according to my time schedule. Instead, I stay hungry.

I'd like to lie. I can say that I use the time normally spent eating for more worthwhile activities, such as prayer and study. This has been true only on rare occasions. The more normal pattern in my life that emerges, however, is one of impatience and irritation. Minor problems become major difficulties. Sensitivity turns to insensitivity, irritation becomes anger and self-sacrifice becomes self-absorption. "Am I really like this, Lord?" Sadly, left to myself, I am like this. Fasting often functions like a divine magnet in my life. It raises hidden weaknesses to the surface. I would much rather disguise these weaknesses under layers of food, friends, distractions, amusements, books, etc. Fasting shows me what I genuinely rely on for my sense of happiness and peace of mind. It shows me where I am weak so that I might become strong. It is a key tool God uses in my life. God also uses fasting in the lives of many other people. It develops self-control, and empowers me to rebuke my constant desire for immediate self-gratification.

Foster suggests a number of exercises to help us learn from the discipline of fasting. They are extremely helpful. Fasting can and perhaps should encompass more than simply food. Some of us are trapped by our need for friendship. As Foster puts it, "we devour people." He suggests, "we learn to fast from people not because we are antisocial but precisely because we love people intensely. When we are with them, we want to be able to do them good and not harm." (Foster, *Study Guide for Celebration of Discipline*, p. 40)

Others of us will need to fast from the media. Has our ability to concentrate been undercut because of the constant interruption of television, radio, or newsprint? Foster argues that there is "a time for the media, but there is also a time to be without the media. We send our children to summer camp and they come back thrilled because 'God spoke to me!' What happened at camp was simple: they merely got rid of enough distractions for a long enough period of time to concentrate. We can do that through the course of our ordinary days." (Foster, *Study Guide for Celebration of Discipline*, p. 41).

Perhaps some will be called to fast from chocolate, soft drinks, alcohol or music. Foster suggests fasting from anything or anyone whom we sense is controlling us. This sense of control can be to an exaggerated or inappropriate degree. He includes here the telephone and billboards.

Why, Foster asks, do we allow the telephone to tyrannize our lives? What message are we sending when we do so?

I have known people who stop praying in order to answer the telephone! I want to let you in on a secret: you are under no obligation to answer that gadget every time it rings. In our home, when we are eating or when I am reading stories to the children, we do not answer the telephone. I want my boys to know they are more important than any phone call. And it is terribly offensive to interrupt an important conversation just to answer a machine. (Foster, *Study Guide for Celebration of Discipline*, p. 41)

When we look at billboards what do we see? A fast from advertising might mean we learn to view ads from a different perspective.

When we are bombarded with bigger than life pictures of foxy ladies and well-fed babies, perhaps that can trigger in our minds another world, a world in which four hundred and sixty million people are the victims of acute hunger (ten thousand of them will be dead by this time tomorrow). This is a world in which a million hogs in Indiana have superior housing to a billion people on this planet. (Foster, *Study Guide for Celebration of Discipline*, p. 41-42)

Finally, Foster mentions the need to fast occasionally from the influence of our consumer oriented society, "our gluttonous consumer culture."

Unit 4: "Obstacles: Why Aren't We Making It All the Way?"

For our souls' sake, we need times when we go among Christ's favorites—the broken, the bruised, the dispossessed—not to preach to them but to learn from them. For the sake of our balance, for the sake of our sanity, we need times when we are among those who, in the words of Mahatma Gandhi, live an 'eternal compulsory fast.' (Foster, *Study Guide for Celebration of Discipline*, p.42)

JOURNAL EXERCISE

Begin to explore the discipline of fasting by starting with a short fast of twenty-four hours. Skip dinner and breakfast. Note your reactions in your journal.

Is the fast easier or more difficult than you thought it would be? What struggles or undetected personality flaws manifest rise to the surface? Perhaps fast from other influences. Foster suggests fasting from the media for a week and carefully noting what you learn about yourself. As you fast, lift your weaknesses up to God.

To what degree are we driven by the need for more, more, more? How can we break free from a surrounding corporate flesh that trumpets fulfillment and security in notes of self-indulgence and selfishness? Is there a wiser way to live and think, a lifestyle that better corresponds to the perspective of pilgrims on a journey toward home?

Self Evaluation Exercise

How Clear-sighted and Self-Perceptive Am I?

Much of what we've been asking you depends upon clear-sighted honesty. In our experience with others—and with ourselves—we have found that most people, including Christians, are not very honest or forthcoming about their weaknesses and sins. Is this your experience? What specific examples come to mind to illustrate your response to this general question? How would you rate your own willingness to face weaknesses, habit patterns, and sins contrary to God's will and the extension of the kingdom? Rate yourself in the following areas, with a **1 being Never**; a **5 indicating Frequently**; and a **10 Always**.

	Never				Frequently			Always		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Honesty	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10
Sensitivity	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10
Need to be right	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10
Compassion	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10
Good listener	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10
Self-insight	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10
Willingness to admit weaknesses	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10
Openness to correction	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10
Make amends when I discover harm done to others	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10
See most ministry problems as due to other team members	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10
See most ministry problems as due to my own inability or mistakes	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10
Slant the truth about my ministry to potential or present supporters	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10

Unit 4: "Obstacles: Why Aren't We Making It All the Way?"

After rating yourself, ask your spouse or a close friend to rate you on these matters without seeing your rating. Where there are major differences between your own rating and their ratings? You might want to explore the difference in perception.

Additional Evaluation by someone else: with a 1 being *Never*; a 5 indicating *Frequently*; and a 10 *Always*.

	Never			Frequently				Always		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Honesty	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10
Sensitivity	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10
Need to be right	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10
Compassion	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10
Good listener	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10
Self-insight	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10
Willingness to admit weaknesses	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10
Openness to correction	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10
Make amends when I discover harm done to others	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10
See most ministry problems as due to other team members	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10
See most ministry problems as due to my own inability or mistakes	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10
Slant the truth about my ministry to potential or present supporters	1	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	10

Spiritual Formation

Unit 5

Spirituality: What It Is and Is Not



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Unit 5 Spirituality: What It Is and Is Not

Unit 5 Contents

- Learning Outcomes and Steps to Complete Unit 5
- Lecture Notes and Workbook
- Email Assignment
- Readings: Discipline in Focus: Service

Learning Objectives

- Explore the theology and practices of Paul in spiritual formation.
- Think more thoroughly about the place of the body and the spiritual disciplines.
- Begin to explore your own habit patterns to identify potential areas of strength and weakness.

Steps to Complete Unit 5

Read and Reflect

- Your Reader for Unit Five: Discipline in Focus: Service. This Reader is located at the end of the workbook portion for this unit. Service is the engagement of "our goods and strength in the active promotion of the good of others and the causes of God in our world." (Willard, p. 182)
- Textbook, *Devotional Classics*, pp. pp.115-120 (Martin Luther), pp. 200-206 (de Caussade), pp. 223-229 (William Temple), and pp. 258-263 (John Wesley).

Respond

- Complete the various assignments in the space provided in the workbook. Complete the various journaling assignments.
- Your journaling during this unit will focus on what you sense God is calling you to be and to do in service. This is about relationships with the people who help you in what you are doing, and with those to whom you minister. Often, we see our need for spiritual growth and maturity in the challenges of service. Think about the role that service plays in your present life as you journal.

Complete the final email assignment and send your work to the professor.

Lecture Notes and Workbook

[Chris Hall]: We have an exercise for you to do on the human body and its relationship to our spiritual life. This might be a new idea for some of you, and we'll be developing it throughout the unit.

This unit seeks to clarify what we mean by the notion of "spiritual" and "spirituality." We come from many cultures and traditions with various notions about the spiritual. We want to ground our view in what scripture shows us is spiritual. One of the most serious struggles in the early church was over the relationship of spiritual things and the physical body. Begin thinking through your own feelings and attitudes about this relationship.

Think About It

Spirituality and the Body

How do I view my body? (Positively? Negatively?) How have I understood my body in relationship to my spiritual life? How do I sense my "embodied self" has affected my spiritual development?

Write your reflections on what place you see the body playing in your spiritual life. Include both the negative and positive.

Body and Spirit

[Chris Hall]: Does having a body help or hinder spiritual development? Jesus' own example might aid us as we begin to examine the relationship between "embodied existence" and spiritual growth.

The writer to the Hebrews comments in Hebrews 5:8 that although Jesus "was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered..." He learned through the incarnation. He entered the world as the Son of God, born as a baby boy from the Virgin Mary. This entailed definite learning experiences, even for Jesus. How did Jesus learn? What were the practices of the spiritual life he exercised that aided him as a genuine human being to enter into the rich life of the kingdom of God? How might Christ's spiritual life serve as an example for us? Willard writes:

The pervasive practices of our Lord form the core of those very activities that through the centuries have stood as disciplines for the spiritual life. It would seem only logical to emulate his daily actions since he was a great master of the spiritual life. So isn't it reasonable then to see in those disciplines the specific factors leading to the easy yoke, the light burden, and the abundance of life and power?

Obedience, even for him, was something to be learned. Certainly we cannot reasonably hope to do his deeds without adopting his form of life. And we cannot adopt his form of life without engaging in his disciplines. Maybe we need the disciplines even more than he did. Surely, we should add other disciplines because our much more troubled condition. (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 29)

Embodiment, including the incarnate state of the Son of God, appears to entail the necessity of training in a manner of life that will "sow to the Spirit."

This idea might leave some of us feeling uncomfortable because of our tendency to view our bodies in a negative light. We see our bodies as hindrances rather than helps to spiritual development. We shy away from Christ's genuine humanness. We are not the first Christians to do so. Early in the church's history we encounter the "docetist heresy." Some early Christian teachers claimed that Christ only "appeared" (Gk. *dokeo*) to have a human body. Willard comments:

This thinking remains alive and well today in the hearts and minds of many who say he was human as well as divine. Though, in fact, we do not believe and cannot even imagine that he had a full-fledged human body. They cannot do so because we tend to think of the body and its functions as only a hindrance to our spiritual calling. We see it as having

no positive role in our redemption or in our participation in the government of God. (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 30)

Think About It

Christ and Spirituality

Take time to consider the historical life of Jesus. What did he do to nurture his relationship with God? How did he grow strong in the realities of the spiritual life? Can we see the things he did in the fullness of his maturity? These things are examples to us as his followers and imitators. Be sure to notice how his body was involved. Below are listed a number of passages; use them, but do not be limited to them.

Take about an hour and a half to read and reflect on what you discover in the following passages:

Matthew 3:13-4:11

Matthew 8:23-27

Matthew 14:1-25

Matthew 26:6-13

Matthew 26:36-46

Mark 2:15-20

Luke 4:42; 5:16; 6:12-13; 9:18-22, 28-29

John 3:22

John 13:1-15

Matthew 8:3, 14-15; 9:10; 29:34; (Mark 10:13)

Matthew 11:16-19

Matthew 9:35; 13:1, 54; 21:23

Matthew 26:17-21a

Matthew 26:57-68; 27:11-50

Luke 2:46-52

Luke 10:21-22

John 2:23; 5:1; 7:10

[David Fraser]: As Willard aptly notes, the foundational events of the Christian faith were bodily events. Could there have been an incarnation, crucifixion, or resurrection if Christ were only a "spirit?" The greatest sacrifice of Christ hinged upon Jesus' willingness to give up himself (and thus his body) for us on the cross. Willard argues that "what is true of the foundations is no less true of the superstructure." That is, just as Christ offered himself for humanity in love on the cross, so his disciples are called to offer themselves in surrender and sacrifice to him.

[Chris Hall]: I like the way Willard describes this.

The surrender of myself to him is inseparable from the giving up of my body to him in such a way that it can serve both him and me as a common abode, as John 14:23, 1 Corinthians 6:15-20, and Ephesians 2:22 testify. The vitality and power of Christianity is lost when we fail to integrate our bodies into the disciplines by intelligent, conscious choice and steadfast intent. It is with our bodies we receive the new life that comes as we enter his kingdom. (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 31)

How else, Willard asks, can salvation concretely affect our lives in this present "in-between time?" This is the time between Christ's first and second coming. It must have some affect on our bodies.

It can't be any other way. If salvation is to affect our lives, it can do so only by affecting our bodies. If we are to participate in the reign of God, it can only be by our actions. And our actions are physical; we live only in the processes of our bodies. To withhold our bodies from religion is to exclude religion from our lives. Our life is a bodily life, even though that life is one that can be fulfilled solely in union with God. (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 31)

Think About It

Spirituality: What Is It?

It's time to be specific: write out a definition of spirituality on this page. Be sure to depict what you see as the central core matters or characteristics that make up spirituality.

Spirituality Defined

[Chris Hall]: What, then, is spirituality? Willard's definition might surprise us.

Spirituality in human beings is not an extra or 'superior' mode of existence. It is not a hidden stream of separate reality, or a separate life running parallel to our bodily existence. It does not consist of special 'inward' acts, even though it has an inner aspect. It is, rather, a relationship of our embodied selves to God. It has the natural and irrepressible effect of making us alive to the Kingdom of God. It is here and now in the material world. (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 31, emphasis added)

Why do we struggle to grow and mature in the Christian faith? Willard contends that at least one factor might be our failure. This factor is fostering "those bodily behaviors of faith that would make concrete human existence vitally complete; it is taking them as a part of the total life in the kingdom of God." (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 32)

Salvation, Willard believes, while including the vital reality of the forgiveness of sins, includes:

the idea of redemption as the impartation of a life. . . . God's seminal redemptive act toward us is the communication of a new kind of life, as the seed – one of our Lord's most favored symbols—carries a new life into the enfolding soil. Turning from old ways with faith and hope in Christ stands forth as the natural first expression of the new life imparted. That life will be poised to become a life of the same quality as Christ's, because it indeed is Christ's. He really does live on in us. The incarnation continues. (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 38)

Part of the difficulty we may experience in understanding the positive contribution our body can make to spiritual development can be traced to our suspicion of the "flesh." Willard's discussion of the "flesh" is particularly helpful and supplements well our earlier discussion of *sarx*.

Willard correctly emphasizes that the biblical authors do not always employ *sarx* or "flesh" negatively. He notes *sarx* not only refers to the body as such, but also to the powers inherent within the body's living organism.

This essential biblical term applies to the natural physical substance of a person. . . .and it refers to the reservoir of finite independent powers inherent in the human body as a 'living being' among other living beings. (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 54)

As a result of the Fall of humanity into sin, though, the resources and power of the body have served as a host to sin rather than to the Spirit of God. The "flesh," both as "the material stuff of the body" and as "the natural powers that that stuff exhibits, now serves as primary host to sin. Nevertheless, not it but its deformed condition is 'fallen human nature.' In this condition the flesh opposes the spirit, does that which is evil, and must be crucified to restrain it (Galatians 5:16, 19f.)." (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 90)

"Fallen human nature," Willard argues, "is a certain manner in which the good powers deposited at creation in our human flesh are twisted and organized against God. This comes about through processes that are social and historical as well as individual." (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 91)

As a result of sin's entrance into the world, humanity places itself at the center of the universe. We trust ourselves rather than God. "...we now suppose... that, since there is no God to be counted on in the living of our lives, we must take things into our own hands. This is what it is to be carnally minded. It is the carnal mind – not the flesh – that is at enmity with God and incapable of subjection to the law." (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 91)

By the grace of God and the power of the Spirit, we can choose life – the life that comes from God and is imparted to us by the Spirit of Christ. The alternative is to restrict our thinking and living "to the flesh alone." Death is the result.

Paul writes in two key passages noted by Willard:

Those who live on the level of our lower nature have their outlook formed by it, and that spells death; but those who live on the level of the

spirit have the spiritual outlook, and that is life and peace. For the outlook of the lower nature is enmity with God; it is not subject to the law of God; indeed it cannot be: those who live on such a level cannot possibly please God. (Rom. 8:5-8, NEB)

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. (Gal. 6:7-9)

Willard comments:

The choice is a very grave one in its outcome, and we must be as careful as possible in understanding what the alternatives mean. It is my aim in these pages to help us see that our choices concern specific life processes of spiritual growth or decay and that we will not be exempted from the law of those processes by God's actions on our behalf. (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 89)

Think About It

- Why does Willard consider the concepts of power and freedom to be integrally related to our embodiment? What's the connection?
- Why do we gain power and freedom in God's created order by virtue of having a body? And why does Willard consider being a bodily creature a pivotal concept?
- Don't move forward until you have some sense you know Willard's point. Reflect on this relationship and pivotal concept by writing your understanding on separate paper.

Power and Freedom

[Chris Hall]: Will we, through the Spirit's power, choose to place the independent power God has given us (our bodies) back into the hands of God? Note well, the primary source of power we independently possess is resident and operative in our bodies.

The human body is the primary field of independent power and freedom given by God to people. Put simply—no body, no power. People have a body for one reason--that we might have at our disposal the resources that would allow us to be persons in fellowship and cooperation with a personal God. (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 92)

We have the freedom to turn away from God through the use of this power. Such is the tragic story of sin on a grand scale and in the smaller individual dramas of our own lives. Or will we place our embodied selves under the reign of Christ and discover what we were always meant to be?

...herein lies the pivotal concept about our nature we need to understand when we begin to talk of redemption. Let us try to make this point as clear as possible since everything turns upon it in practical theology. In creating human beings in his likeness so that we could govern in his manner, God gave us a measure of independent power. Without such power, we absolutely could not resemble God in the close manner he intended, nor could we be God's co-workers. The locus or depository of this necessary power is the human body. This explains, in theological terms, why we have a body at all. That body is our primary area of power, freedom, and—therefore—responsibility. (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 53)

During our "gift of years," God gives us, in grace, the opportunity to shape who we are and what we will become. How? First, by providing us with the needed raw material, flawed though it be because of the Fall. Parker Palmer writes:

For the fact is that we will always need to be makers. There is raw material in our lives, and it can be properly worked and shaped; in fact,

the chance to work it is one of our major gifts. The fact that we lead gifted lives does not mean that everything we need comes down like manna from heaven. There is a legitimate sense in which we need to make roads and houses and dinner, even friends and a living and love. But we need to look again at the truth of how we make; we need to see how intricately our making is interlaced with our gifts. We have the gift of the raw material itself, which we did not manufacture. We have the gift of freedom to imagine shapes that this material might take. We have the gift of skills and tools to do the making, and the gift of power to use them. If we can understand our giftedness, our making will no longer carry the burden of impossibility that leads finally to despair. (Parker Palmer, *The Active Life*, 52)

Over the years we have chosen to use the power freely given to us by God in many different ways—some good, some evil. Choices have been made and repeated. As we have seen, there is sometimes continuity between our conscious intent and our actions. At other times, we do the very thing we hate. As we all know, the habits we have formed are extremely difficult to break. Willard, in fact, contends that our habit patterns reveal who we are; they reveal our character.

In us some small part of the potential power in our body stands at the disposal of our conscious thought, intention, and choice. In essence, an individual’s character is nothing but the pattern of habitual ways in which that person comports his or her body—whether conforming to the conscious intentions of the individual or not. (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 53)

What do you think? Is Willard correct? Have you ever heard someone declare in frustration, “His character will never change. He’ll always be like that.” What do they mean? Aren’t they really saying, “I’ve seen him do that over and over. I’ve prayed that he would stop. But he keeps on doing the same things.” Habit patterns and character do appear to be inseparable, even if not identical.

Think About It

Good and Bad Habits

Think back over the past week. Do you have a regular pattern to your weekday and weekend activities? When do you get up? What do you do first and how do you get the day started? How you get your personal appearance in shape for life with others? When do you eat, listen to the radio, watch television, read or study the Bible, pray, pay bills or go shopping, wash clothes, get kids ready for school, etc.? Are there general patterns you notice in your activities and responses (at work, toward family members, in your devotional life)? What habits do you recognize?

- Make a list of your good and bad habits.

Peter’s Experience

[Chris Hall]: We need to examine in greater detail Willard’s thoughts concerning the fundamental importance of habit formation for spiritual development or decay. Willard offers an analysis of Peter on pages 71-74 of his book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. Though Jesus has foretold that all the disciples will flee at the time of his crucifixion, Peter refuses to believe. Perhaps the other disciples will flee. Not Peter. Still Jesus warns Peter that before the rooster crows three times, he will betray him. What was at the heart of Peter’s weakness and self-deception? Why would so many of Jesus’ close friends desert him at the moment of his greatest need?

Think About It

Think about what happened to Peter. His Lord dies on a Roman cross. Soon Peter encounters the risen Christ. Later Jesus commissions Peter to "feed my sheep" and "follow me." (John 21:17, 19, 22) Power is sent from heaven upon the tiny community of believers gathered in Jerusalem. (Acts 1:13-14) Put yourself in Peter's shoes. How might these events have affected you? What would it have been like to be Peter during this time? [If you have a copy of Willard's book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, please read pp. 70-74 where Willard summarizes the events in Peter's life.

Write your answer.

The Spirit is Willing: The Flesh is Weak

[Chris Hall]: Again, we ask: why would so many of Jesus' close friends desert him at the moment of his greatest need? We find at least part of the answer, Willard contends, in Jesus' words recorded in Matt. 26:41. As the disciples make their way from the Upper Room to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asks them to "watch with me." However, they soon fall asleep. Why? "The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." (Matt. 26:41, NIV) Willard comments:

He did justice to that element in them that was genuinely turned to God, 'the spirit.' But the natural powers of their bodies, those of 'the flesh,' were not at that time aligned with their spirits, and hence the flesh was weak in that toward which their spirit was truly and rightly directed. (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 71)

Take a close look at Peter's actions at the time of Jesus' betrayal. On the one hand, his intentions are good. His full expectation is that he will remain faithful to Christ. On the other hand, look at Peter's actions. He rashly cuts off the ear of the high priest's servant. Then Peter flees, but only for a short distance. He shows up at the courtyard of the high priest to see how events will turn out. However, as Willard puts it, "it soon became clear that at this point the Spirit had more control of his legs than of his mouth." Peter denies that he knows Jesus three times. Why? Willard argues,

All his most sincere and good intentions, even though specifically alerted by Jesus' prediction and warning of a few hours earlier, were not able to withstand the automatic tendencies ingrained in his flesh and activated by the circumstances. What a firsthand knowledge Peter gained this night of 'the motions of sins, which work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.' (Romans 7:5) (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 72)

Jesus, though, doesn't desert Peter when his fallen habitual responses demonstrate themselves. Rather, as Willard puts it, Christ providentially introduces into Peter's life experiences specifically designed to change his ingrained responses. "In the hours and days that followed, Peter was subjected to experiences that synthesized what he had gathered from his years of companionship with Jesus on the road and drove it deep into the governing tendencies of his body." (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 72)

Clearly, Peter's character begins to change. "That old hand that automatically reached for the sword to kill, the legs that spontaneously took flight, the detestable tongue that forgot its inspired confession of the Messiah and, as with a life of its own, denied all relationship to Jesus, cursing God to 'prove it!' Now all were of an entirely different character." (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 73)

Peter's new name, "Rock," begins to reflect reality as Peter stands up in the midst of the Jewish community and preaches that Christ has risen from the dead (cf. Acts 2:41-47). Though there would still be bumps along the road (cf. Gal. 2:11-14), Peter's "flesh [body] remained strong on behalf of the Spirit."

It is in Peter and his kind that we begin to get a glimpse of what is really possible for human life. We can see what the grand restoration of human life to its proper center in the spiritual life could mean for humankind's

divine calling to have dominion over the glorious earth for its good and for the pleasure and glory of God. (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 74)

Think About It

Please complete the special exercise at the end of the workbook for this unit called "Disciplines and the Full Redemption of the Person."

[Chris Hall]: "Fine," you say. "I can agree with Willard, at least in terms of the biblical evidence that concrete change should come with conversion. I believed the message of the gospel for years. But in so many ways I'm still the same person I was twenty years ago. I've trusted in Christ, even tried dozens of different devotional programs and ideas, but little change has occurred. I feel dry, bored, burned out. If there is an abundant life, in my more honest moments, I know I haven't experienced it. And I'm afraid others have sensed my dissatisfaction and frustration and turned away from Christ as a result." The following exercise will help address these feelings.

Think About It

Offering the Parts of Our Body to God

In the past, how have you attempted to "offer the parts of your body" to God rather than to sin? What did you actually do? Was this a prayer, a stepping forward in a meeting for consecration, a laying on of hands and prayer by others, an active engaging of a discipline involving that part of the body? To what extent did such an offering of that part of your body produce concrete change? Did that part of your body act or behave differently after the offering?

Try to be as specific as possible in remembering dates, situations, temptations, successes or failures. Pick one or two parts of your body that have posed a challenge for you.

How Habits Change

[Chris Hall]: Perhaps a closer look at Paul's analysis of how habit patterns change might lower our frustration level and provide hope for concrete transformation in the future. How does Paul picture "the replacement of habits of sin by habits of righteousness?" (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 114) Take special note of a key Pauline text for understanding this process.

Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. (Romans 6:13, NIV)

Willard believes that to "understand this statement is to understand our part in changing our habits." How so?

Dying

Paul begins Romans 6 with the astounding statement that Christians are "dead to sin." "To employ a crude mechanical metaphor, we can no longer run on sin because our engines have been switched over to another, superior type of fuel. We cannot run on that fuel and on the other at the same time. We cannot live from Christ and from sin." (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 114)

Paul describes this change in power source through the language of baptism. Believers have been baptized into Christ. Through our union with Christ we enter a new form of life, a life that "provides not only new powers for our human self, but also, as we grow, a new center of organization and orientation for all of the natural impulses of our bodily life." (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 115).

In Christ, the natural desires and powers that had hosted the "world, flesh, and devil" now are joined to Christ and in this personal union "have a real alternative to sin and the world's

sin system as the orientation and motivation for our natural impulses." Willard pictures this new perspective as including a psychological condition that enables believers to see sin for what it is—a condition "established in us by the influx of Christ's life..." While we might "waver" or be tempted to turn back toward sin, we can do otherwise. "...we have a new source within us that gives us choice. In this sense we are free from sin even if not yet free of it." (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 115)

Reckoning

The second stage in Paul's understanding of redemption in Romans 6 entails "reckoning." Through our new union with Christ we are to reckon ourselves as dead to sin and alive to Christ. What are the dynamics of this "reckoning?" We begin to "see," where before we had been blind. Our tastes and inclinations begin to change. In Christ we discover we no longer must be trapped by habitual thought patterns forged in a foreign mold (i.e., as in the past the world "squeezed us into its mold"). We can choose to think new thoughts.

With the life imparted by this vision we love what we see and are drawn to it. In this vision and the power it provides lie our freedom to determine who we shall be... The psychological power to direct how we think has its positive side in our living consciousness of Christ. But that power is largely one of dismissing thoughts originating from this old life's motivational structure. We know old habits are hard to break, but the decision to dwell or not to dwell in thought upon certain things is the freedom secured for us by our vision of Christ. (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 116)

Offering

In the third stage of Paul's analysis we concretely offer our bodies to Christ as "instruments of righteousness." That is, we seek out ways of using our bodies to extend Christ's kingdom rather than hindering it. At first, this will not come naturally. Should this surprise us? We have spent a lifetime training our bodies to respond to a different king and kingdom. Willard explains,

After conversion our will and conscious intent are for God or 'the spiritual,'...But the layer upon layer of life experience that is embedded in our bodies, as living organisms born and bred in a world set against or without God, doesn't directly and immediately follow the shift of our conscious will. It largely retains the tendencies in which it has so long lived." (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 86)

With practice, however, as we yield the "plasticity" of our bodies to specific practices and cultivate new dispositions, what we must first practice diligently will become second nature. Oswald Chambers describes this dynamic well,

The question of forming habits on the basis of the grace of God is a very vital one. . . . If we refuse to practice, it is not God's grace that fails when a crisis comes, but our own nature. When the crisis comes, we ask God to help us, but He cannot if we have not made our nature our ally. The practicing is ours, not God's. (Oswald Chambers, in Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 118)

Paul's clear expectation is that the person who follows these three stages will be emancipated from sin and a slave of God (cf. Romans 6:17-18). We are not meant to live frustrated, defeated, discontented lives. Perhaps, at least for many Protestants, we have experienced little substantial spiritual growth because we have identified the "practice" involved in learning a new way of life with "works" or "legalism."

Spirituality and Grace

Remember that the practice of a disciplined spiritual life "earns" us nothing from God. All that God has given us in Christ is a result of grace, God's unmerited favor toward us. God does not love spiritually disciplined people any more than God loves undisciplined people. God's love for us is not predicated on whether we are spiritually disciplined or not. Our experience of God's

love, however, might be linked to certain disciplines. Why? Perhaps because the means God has ordained for entering into a deeper experience of Christ is indissolubly linked to prayer and meditation, the study of scripture and worship. God does not force me to do any of these actions. But should it surprise me if my spiritual health declines through neglecting the very means designed to nourish its vitality? Spiritual disciplines, then, are means God uses for helping me to practice, to develop new habit patterns to replace old ones, to enter into the full, rich life of the kingdom.

The 'practice' that prepares us for righteous living is not limited to putting our body through the motions of actions directly commanded by our Lord. It also involves engaging in whatever other activities may prepare us to carry out his commands—and not just carry them out, but to carry them out with strength, effectiveness, and joy. And this is where the standard, well-recognized spiritual disciplines become involved.

If Christ's life continues to live in the embodied lives of believers, should we be surprised if the same spiritual disciplines practiced by the incarnate Lord also nurture his life within us? Exactly what are the spiritual disciplines and how should they be practiced? We will explore this question at length in future units. For the present, note both words in the phrase "spiritual disciplines;" they are "spiritual," and they are disciplines.

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Email Assignment

Remember on an earlier page we asked you to work on a critical passage in Willard. Please do the next exercise "Disciplines and the Full Redemption of the Person" before you do this final, email assignment. Confirm in your email to your facilitator that you've finished that assignment and have spent some time working over those pages and seeking to think through or even memorize some of the parts.

When you have finished all the assigned readings, and finished the spiritual discipline practice, answer the following questions:

- On one page, answer the question from *Devotional Classics* on page 262, Question #2: "In section 2, Wesley writes of the tendency of some to expect a spiritual blessing (e.g., knowledge, spiritual strength) without any spiritual work on their part (e.g., prayer, reading the Bible, hearing the preached Word, Christian fellowship). As you look at your life, what spiritual blessings would you like to have from God? What spiritual means might help you to receive those blessings?"
- On a second page, be as specific as you can in describing the struggles you experience with finding balance in your Christian life. Many modern Christians, especially when they are involved in professional Christian ministries, find themselves extraordinarily busy. The higher they climb organizationally in their church, para-church or business, the more the demands on their time and energy. How do you find time for the major priorities of living in Christ? Evaluate your current success (or failure) to make room in your schedule for the most important things God has given you to do

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Disciplines and the Full Redemption of the Person:

Be sure to do the following before sending your email assignment to the facilitator.

In Willard, The Spirit of the Disciplines, the section on "The Role of the Disciplines in the Full Redemption of the Person" is essential material (p. 91-93). We need to absorb his points so thoroughly that they become second nature to us. Take time during several days of this week to re-read, outline, re-think, memorize and meditate on his main themes.

Here is our outline of the material—

1. Redemption is pictured in the New Testament as directly related to "embodied human nature and God's purposes in our creation." (p. 91)
2. God has placed in our embodied selves—what Willard terms our "fleshly human organism"—innate abilities to serve "as the vehicle for our vocation." In Willard's thinking, as we have already noted, the body is "the primary field of independent power and freedom given by God to people." Its power and resources "allow us to be persons in fellowship with a personal God." (p. 92)
3. Our bodies "are shaped into a specific character and laden with specific skills and tendencies by our experiences, including those we voluntarily undertake. . . .our body's substance is only to be transformed totally by actions and events in which we choose to participate from day to day." (p. 92)
4. Grace alone does not guarantee our transformation. Because of the "plasticity of our body," it can be molded or shaped toward the practice of both good and evil. Note well William James' definition of plasticity,
Plasticity . . . means the possession of a structure weak enough to yield to an influence, but strong enough not to yield all at once. Each relatively stable phase of equilibrium in such a structure is marked by what we may call a new set of habits. Organic matter, especially nervous tissue, seems endowed with a very extraordinary degree of plasticity of this sort; so that we may without hesitation lay down . . . that the phenomena of habit in living beings are due to the plasticity of the organic materials of which their bodies are composed. (James, quoted in Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, p. 92)
5. If the human body inherently possesses this type of plasticity, what role might the spiritual disciplines play? Willard writes,
Their role rests upon the nature of the embodied human self – they are to mold and shape it. And our part in our redemption is, through specific and appropriate activities, to yield the plastic substance of which we are made to the ways of that new life which is imparted to us by the quickening spirit.' (p. 92)

Unit 5 Reading: Service

Earlier in this study we mentioned Augustine and Luther's understanding of fallen human nature as "*incurvatus in se*" or "turned or curved in on itself." Augustine believed that human nature was drastically skewed or twisted away from God and toward itself. Both Augustine and Luther were utterly convinced of the human inclination to place ourselves, rather than God, at the center of the universe. Apart from God's grace and love we all desire to be king or queen. Inside of us a beast lurks, continually growling for prestige, recognition, status.

The disciples of Christ were no different than we are. Take a close look at Mark 9:30-32. Mark tells us that Jesus and the disciples were passing through Galilee. Jesus wanted to keep his whereabouts secret "for he was teaching his disciples" (Mark 9:31a, NRSV). What was his special focus at this time? "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." (Mark 9:31b, NRSV).

These events have become so familiar to Christians that we tend to forget how shocking this teaching was to the disciples. Betrayal? Suffering? Death? Resurrection? What was Jesus talking about? What kind of Messiah was this? This teaching was strange and unexpected. "But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him" (Mark 9:32, NRSV).

Think About It

JOURNAL QUESTION:

Why do you think the disciples were afraid to ask Jesus the meaning of his teaching about his approaching suffering, death and resurrection?

Rather than questioning Jesus about his teaching, the disciples had argued on the road about who was the greatest (Mark 9:33-34). Apparently glory and honor were much more palatable and interesting topics than suffering and death. William Lane comments,

In Mark . . . the dispute over greatness indicates the degree to which the disciples had failed to understand Jesus' solemn affirmation concerning his abandonment to the will of men (Mark 9:31ff.). It also shows how impregnated they were with the temper of their own culture where questions of precedence and rank were constantly arising. (Lane, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*, p. 339)

Adolf Schlatter argues that Jesus' teaching affirms the possibility of glory and greatness, but relocates where genuine glory manifests itself. "Jesus established a new pattern for human relationships which leaves no occasion for strife or opposition toward one another. The disciples' thoughts were upon the period of glory, when questions of rank seemed appropriate. . . . Jesus redirected them to his insistence that the way to glory leads through suffering and death." (Schlatter quoted in Lane, p. 340)

We see this cultural focus on status as a sign of greatness reflected in Jesus' parable of the wedding banquet. It is when Jesus "noticed how the guests chose the places of honor" that he warns them of the danger of exalting oneself. A greater person might arrive at the banquet, and one will have to surrender his or her place to the greater person. Better to take the lowest place and be exalted later (cf. Luke 14:7-11). "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." (Luke 14:11, NRSV)

Jesus illustrates his attempt to reorient the disciples' thinking about greatness by taking a small child into his arms. (Mark 9:36) "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me." (Mark 9:37, NRSV) Why does Jesus mention children in the midst of a discussion on the nature of service and greatness? Perhaps because in the pecking order of the day children were overlooked. Attention paid to a child would not further one's ascent up the social scale. Children had nothing to offer in return; they were not "important" people who would remember what had been done for them and repay the favor later. They were no "big deal." Still, as Lane notes, Jesus instructs the disciples to "identify themselves with children and become 'the little ones' who have no basis for pretensions to greatness." (Lane, *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*, p. 340)

Other narratives in the gospel accounts teach the same principle. The mother of James and John, for example, comes to Jesus and requests that her sons be granted the honor of sitting on Jesus' right and left hand in his kingdom. (Matthew 20:20-21) When the other disciples heard of this request, "they were angry with the two brothers." (Matthew 20:24) In light of the request made by the mother of James and John and the response of the disciples, Jesus again teaches the disciples about greatness.

The rulers of the Gentiles "lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you...." (Matthew 20:25-26, NRSV; my emphasis) Both Greek words, *katakuriuo* and *katexouziazo*, are very strong verbs; both speak of using one's power to push somebody around, to tyrannize another person. Christ's disciples, then, are not to seek after positions of power and authority because of the status or influence such positions afford. They are indeed to exercise authority, but Christ relocates this authority in willing service to those on the periphery of society, those who have little to offer in return. As Bernard of Clairvaux expresses, "Learn the lesson that, if you are to do the work of a prophet, what you need is not a scepter but a hoe." (quoted in Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, Rev. ed., p. 126) Or, as Foster himself puts it, "Therefore the spiritual authority of Jesus is an authority not found in a position or title, but in a towel." (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, Rev. ed., p. 128)

Jesus acts out the principle of authoritative servanthood by washing the disciples' feet during his last evening with them before his crucifixion (John 13:1-13). Note the striking juxtaposition between John's introduction to the passage and the act of Jesus. "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself." (John 13:3-4)

On the one hand, John accentuates Jesus' awareness that "all things" had been given into his hands; "he had come from God and was going to God." Jesus' greatest service, a work involving untold suffering and humiliation, will be taking place in a few hours on the cross. John emphasizes, though, that this work is not foreign to Jesus' authority or position as God incarnate. Leon Morris writes,

Again John stresses Jesus' command of the situation . . . But John does not see the cross as the casual observer might see it. It is the place where a great divine work was wrought out and the divine glory shown forth. So he describes it in terms of the Father's giving of all things to the Son . . . The reference to the Father is important. He is no idle spectator at the Passion, but He works out His will there . . . John is about to describe an act in which Jesus takes a very lowly place. But he does not lose sight for one moment of the truth that the highest possible place is His by right. (Morris, *New International Commentary on the New Testament, Commentary on the Gospel of John*, p. 615)

The divine glory, John seems to say, is manifested as Jesus first washes the disciples' feet and then, in the supreme act of condescension to our weakness and desperate situation, dies on the cross. God, John says, acts like this. Divine power delights to manifest itself in the unlikeliest situations and actions, at least from the perspective of the surrounding "corporate flesh."

From the perspective of the surrounding culture, Jesus' actions were surely inappropriate. Gentile slaves and servants washed peoples' feet, not the promised Messiah. (cf. Morris, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, note 23, p. 617) Peter appears to have been confused and perhaps offended by Jesus' action. As Jesus approaches Peter to wash his feet Peter says, "You will never wash my feet." (John 13:8) Why? Because great people, important people, well-known people don't wash feet! They have more important matters to which they must attend.

Jesus teaches dramatically, however, that true greatness is discovered and manifested in actions just like this. If the Lord washed the disciples feet, they "ought to wash one another's feet." Observe at what point Jesus promises blessing. It is when the disciples "do" what he has taught them that they will be blessed. (John 13:17) Knowledge apart from concrete action is simply not enough.

I am reminded of the experience of a former student, Bill, who had been attending a class I teach on spiritual formation at Eastern College. As the semester progressed, Bill seemed increasingly frustrated and depressed. He expressed to me that he was "learning" a great deal in the class. The readings were excellent and the lectures thought provoking. And yet as the weeks passed, Bill appeared increasingly gloomy. Toward the end of the semester a distinct change occurred.

Bill arrived early to class and shared with me that over the weekend he had gone with two friends to Philadelphia to visit the homeless. They had packed a number of bag lunches and had shared them with the people they met on the street. Bill particularly remembered the grateful response of an old man he had met in a back alley.

"Could I share a lunch with you?" Bill asked the old man.

"Sure, son, I'm hungry," the man responded. As Bill walked away he turned to say good-bye and saw the old man bowed in prayer over his bag lunch, tears streaming down his face.

Bill's ability to assimilate what he learned from me in class dramatically increased as he concretely acted on the knowledge he gained through study. Left to itself, study was not enough.

Spiritual Formation

Unit 6

The Spiritual Aspect of the Disciplines



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Unit 6 The Spiritual Aspect of the Disciplines

Unit 6 Contents

- Learning Outcomes and Steps to Complete Unit 6
- Lecture Notes and Workbook
- Email Assignment
- Readings: Discipline in Focus: Meditation

Learning Objectives

In this unit you will:

- Review the meaning and place of "grace" in the Spirit-filled, maturing life of the Christian leader.
- Examine yourself in the light of three "crises" that occur when we engage a spiritual discipline apart from a grace-filled life:
 - Self-inflation (legalism, judgmentalism, self-righteousness, spiritual pride)
 - Self-denigration (discouragement, despair, spiritual depression)
 - Self-deception (illusions, rationalizations, false-image)
- Identify areas where you may already be experiencing a proper "disillusionment." Consider whether God is taking away some of the spiritual blindness about who you are, and where you are in your spiritual growth process.
- Practice the Spiritual Discipline, Meditation.

Steps to Complete Unit 6

Read and Reflect...

- Your Reader for Unit Six: Discipline in Focus: Meditation. This reader is located at the end of the workbook portion for this unit. Meditation is "listening to God's word, reflecting on God's works, rehearsing God's deeds, ruminating on God's law, and more." (Foster, *Celebration*, p.15)
- Textbook, *Devotional Classics*: pp. 26-32 (Frances de Sales); pp. 350-356 (Kierkegaard); pp. 150-156 (à Kempis); pp. 180-185 (Catherine of Genoa), and pp. 193-199 (Ignatius of Loyola); *Theological Germanica* (Anonymous) p. 143 of this unit's reader.

Respond...

- Complete the various journaling assignments. Note the reflection questions in the text, *Devotional Classics*. Meditation slows us down so we can include what we have read in our prayers and reflections, and we can be nourished by what we are learning. It allows us the luxury of assimilating and digesting the spiritual food we have obtained from God's rich banqueting table. Spend time journaling about your experiences in meditating.

Complete the final email assignment and send your work to the professor.

Lecture Notes and Workbook

[David Fraser]: This unit continues the theme of the last unit. In this unit, we want to look at "what is spiritual" about the spiritual disciplines. Why are these disciplines spiritual? The exercise below will help you with this unit.

Think About It

"Spiritual..." "Disciplines"

What are they? Quickly write a list of what you think are the major "spiritual disciplines":

Here is a strange truth: God can use almost anything as a tool used by God to strengthen and mature us. Yet there are some regular tools God gives us—and Christians have found to be fruitful—as means by which grace is received and our lives are enlivened. We call these "spiritual disciplines."

What we want you to think about is what is it that is spiritual about a spiritual discipline? Answer the questions in the exercise below:

Think About It

What is it that is spiritual about a spiritual discipline? How might a spiritual discipline be different than a physical discipline (such as weight training) or a mental discipline (such as memorizing a speech to be delivered) or emotional discipline (entering into a relaxation or centering activity to calm us down and remove the tensions from stress)? *What is spiritual about it?*

Answer on a separate paper.

Think About It

What is a Discipline?

Why do we call it a spiritual discipline? What makes something a discipline? Does this have something to do with its difficulty? What about its frequency or intensity? What about our attitude when we engage in it? *Why call it a discipline* instead of an exercise, activity, habit, or hobby?

Answer on a separate paper.

[Chris Hall]: There are no definitive answers here because of an irony in doing God's work. The irony is that everything that God gives us as tools for accomplishing his work can become obstacles to accomplishing his work. Christians through the centuries have discovered that there are patterned ways of opening ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit on a regular and consistent basis. We call these patterned activities "disciplines" for at least two major reasons:

1. First they require high levels of commitment to keep on doing them month by month and year by year. They are not easy. Only those who are self-controlled and highly disciplined in their personal life will engage them over the long haul.
2. Second, they are disciplines in that one of the aims of many of the classic activities is to chasten a part of us that is unruly, in order to make us aware of how captive we are to unhealthy, ungodly, unspiritual habits and ways of thinking. The discipline cuts across our own sinful and disorderly inclinations. It brings order, health, and to our lives; in short, it brings discipline to our lives.

The only thing that makes any of these disciplines spiritual is the work of the Holy Spirit. We are seeking to grow in godliness, not legalism or pharisaism. We become more like Christ

only as the Spirit is present and active in our spiritual exercises. Otherwise, the disciplines may make us more ordered and strong—but not more like Christ.

Your answer may have differed from what we have just summarized—and that’s not a problem. The reflections you do are meant to drive you back to your foundations. They will help you in the process of Christian maturity as you discover approaches to Christian living that are more biblical, more adequate and more mature. Many answers may well be accurate and even better than our own. So keep on thinking clearly and carefully.

Grace and Good Works

In many ways spiritual formation appears to be a balancing act. Is this also true of theology? Think of the topics of grace and good works. Are we not saved by grace alone? Yes. Is there anything we can possibly do to earn our salvation? No. What then of good works? Some, accentuating scripture’s teaching on salvation by grace alone, rarely if ever speak of the significance of good works in the Christian life. To do so seems to threaten the infinite sufficiency of Christ’s work for us on the cross.

An emphasis upon the grace of God, though, has occasionally led to splitting inappropriately the gift of salvation from the ordinary patterns of our daily life. That is, if we are saved by grace alone, it matters little how we live. Others, reacting against such a split between grace and behavior, have stressed the importance of good works. For some, grace fades so far into the background that the responsibility for salvation is shifted on to the believer’s shoulders. Soon Christians realize the fruits of discouragement and despair.

Richard Foster speaks of the difficulty of maintaining a wise and appropriate balance between grace and works:

When we despair of gaining inner transformation through human powers of will and determination, we are open to a wonderful new realization: inner righteousness is a gift from God to be graciously received. The needed change within us is God’s work, not ours. . . . The moment we grasp this breathtaking insight we are in danger of an error in the opposite direction. We are tempted to believe there is nothing we can do. If all human strivings end in moral bankruptcy (and having tried it, we know it is so), and if righteousness is a gracious gift from God (as the Bible clearly states), then is it not logical to conclude that we must wait for God to come and transform us? (Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 6-7)

Foster describes dynamics often operative in the spiritual life. On the one hand, if we fail to lay a healthy foundation in the grace and love of God, we will inevitably lose our spiritual balance and problems will unavoidably occur. Perhaps, for example, we might begin to think that God’s love for us increases in direct proportion to our ability to live a disciplined life. Subtly we start to believe that God’s love for us is based on our ability to live spiritually disciplined lives. Loudly, then, we must proclaim the truth that God does not love disciplined people more than undisciplined people. Why? God’s love is not based on our ability to pray, fast, study or serve. Rather, it is a free gift offered to us in Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, God’s love for us does not free us from the responsibility of developing patterns of life that sow to the work of God’s Spirit within us. And this, indeed, entails hard work.

Think About It

The Spiritual Disciplines and the Grace of God

Write out your definition of God’s “grace.” Exactly what is the grace of God? Is “grace” different from mercy or loving-kindness? Be as precise as you can.

How has the grace of God been manifested to you? By what means? How do you know that grace has been at work in your life?

What is Grace?

[Chris Hall]: How did you define the word "grace?" Grace (Greek *charis*) had a wide range of meaning in the secular Greek world, including favor, beauty, thanksgiving, gratitude, delight and kindness. (cf. H.H. Esser, "Grace," *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 2, 115) The Apostle Paul's use of the word particularly focuses on the unmerited character of God's love and goodness to us as demonstrated in Christ. (Romans 3:24, Ephesians 2:8-9) Paul particularly accentuates the grace-filled love of God for us when he emphasizes that it was when we were "powerless," "ungodly," "sinners," and "God's enemies," that Christ died for us. (Romans 5:6-8) Will God love us any less in the future than he has in the past? Whatever lessons are ahead of us in the call to discipleship are not new to God. God knew our every weakness when he called us into the kingdom of Christ. While we might occasionally be shocked and depressed by what we are, and what we are capable of doing, God remains gracefully unshocked.

What is a "Spiritual" Discipline?

The first aspect of the spiritual disciplines: The "spiritual" aspect of the disciplines can help us clarify our thinking concerning the link between the grace of God and spiritual growth. What are "spiritual" disciplines? They are disciplines ordained, animated, and enlivened by the Holy Spirit. The disciplines are specific means that God has designed and ordained for sowing to the work of the Spirit within us. They cannot be practiced apart from the power and grace of the Spirit working within us. In fact, we can undertake the disciplined life only by being firmly grounded in the love and grace of God. Hence, our insistence in the last unit that God does not love spiritually disciplined people any more than undisciplined people.

We must constantly remember the absolutely fundamental place of grace in spiritual growth. Why? Grace is fundamental to spiritual growth because spiritual growth is difficult for us. It requires change, and change is hard. Habit formation is tough work. At times, we will fail. The question that our failure raises concerns the love of God. Will God stop loving us when we begin to take our relationship to God with greater seriousness and enter a process of formation that will inevitably involve struggle, exertion, and error? If God's grace is God's unmerited favor toward us in Jesus Christ, it cannot be earned. God's love for us cannot be increased or enhanced; it is already infinite in its breadth and depth.

Soren Kierkegaard speaks movingly of the initiative of God's infinite love:

Father in Heaven! You have loved us first; help us never to forget that You are love so that this sure conviction might triumph in our hearts over the seduction of the world, over the inquietude of the soul, over the anxiety for the future, over the fright of the past, over the distress of the moment You have loved us first, O God, alas! We speak of it in terms of history as if You have only loved us first but a single time, rather than that without ceasing You have loved us first many times and every day and our whole life through. (Kierkegaard, *The Prayers of Kierkegaard*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, 351)

Grace-Less Spiritual Disciplines

The spiritual disciplines are grounded in the infinite grace of God. What will happen if we forget this truth? A number of unfortunate and distasteful characteristics will quickly develop in us. We will consider three of in this unit. They are:

- the characteristics that afflict those who consider themselves doing very well;
- the characteristics afflicting those who think nothing they do is right, and finally,
- the characteristics for those who are undergoing the crisis of losing their spiritual blindness and beginning to see what they are really like.

We might call these

- the crisis of self-inflation,
- the crisis of self-denigration, and
- the crisis of self-deception.

We begin with those who feel they are spiritual stars, doing very well indeed in their spiritual journey, moving forward in growth and maturity, and going deep with the Spirit. What

are some of the characteristics that mark such people when grace no longer infuses their practice of the spiritual disciplines?

The Crisis of Self-Inflation (those who consider themselves doing very well)

This characteristic shows itself in several ways. The first is legalism. Legalism turns the disciplines into law, basing our relationship with God on how well we are performing or progressing. From legalisms, we move to externalism and judgmentalism, efforts to judge others through the use of our own law. In these efforts, we consider who is measuring up and who isn't measuring up. These characteristics result in spiritual competitiveness. Pride, the final characteristic, results in self-righteousness and an exaggerated self-estimation. Foster warns against the danger of turning the disciplines into laws. (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 10) He writes:

If we are to progress in the spiritual walk so that the Disciplines are a blessing and not a curse, we must come to the place in our lives where we can lay down the everlasting burden of always needing to manage others. This drive, more than any single thing, will lead us to turn the Spiritual Disciplines into laws. Once we have made a law, we have an “externalism” by which we judge who is measuring up and who is not. Without laws the Disciplines are primarily an internal work, and it is impossible to control an internal work. When we genuinely believe that inner transformation is God's work and not ours, we can put to rest our passion to set others straight. (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 10)

St. John of the Cross speaks of self-righteousness as particular temptation for those just beginning to practice the disciplines,

Beginners in the spiritual life are apt to become very diligent in their exercises. The great danger for them will be to become satisfied with their religious works and themselves. It is easy for them to develop a kind of secret pride, which is the first of the seven capital sins. (St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, 34)

Spiritual pride, St. John teaches, manifests itself in a number of unpleasant ways:

- A tendency to become “too spiritual.” “They like to speak of ‘spiritual things’ all the time.”
- Self-righteous condemnation of others. “They become content with their growth. They would prefer to teach others rather than to be taught. They condemn others who are not as spiritual as they are. They are like the Pharisee who boasted in himself and despised the publican who was not as spiritual as he.”
- A desire to be noticed by others. “. . . they begin to do these spiritual exercises to be esteemed by others. They want others to realize how spiritual they are.”
- An unwillingness to be honest about shortcomings. “They will also begin to fear confession to another for it would ruin their image. So they soften their sins when they make confession in order to make themselves appear less imperfect.”

St. John's remedy: Remember that there is little we can do for God. Thank God for God's gifts but don't broadcast your giftedness to others. “. . . they will focus on how great and how deserving God is and how little it is that they can do for him. The Spirit of God dwells in such persons, urging them to keep their treasures secretly within themselves.” (St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, 34)

These dangers are critically important markers of our slipping away from the grace side of the spiritual disciplines. We have listed these signs below. Take some minutes and prayerfully read through them again—asking God to give you clarity as to your own sense of God's grace in your life.

Think About It

Grace-Less Experiences of the Spiritual Disciplines

Please complete the following exercise.

EXERCISE:

Without the grace of God in the power of the Spirit, a number of defects will appear in our engagement of the spiritual disciplines. The lecture stresses the following areas (listed below). Prayerfully consider them before God and try to place yourself honestly and accurately.

1 = definitely true of me; 5 = definitely untrue of me; 3 = unsure where to place myself; the 2 and 4 ratings represent probably or occasionally true of me.

	1. <i>True</i>	2. <i>Probably True</i>	3. <i>Unsure</i>	4. <i>Occasionally True</i>	5. <i>Definitely Untrue</i>
<i>Legalism</i> : turning the disciplines into laws, basing my relationship with God on how well I am performing or progressing					
<i>Externalism and judgmentalism</i> : judging others through the use of our own laws, i.e., who is measuring up and who isn't? Issues of spiritual competitiveness enter here					
<i>Self-righteousness</i> : estimating ourselves as right with God because of our own discipline and accomplishments in carrying out certain spiritual activities					
<i>Pride</i> : an inappropriate and exaggerated self-estimation of our spiritual condition and importance					

[Chris Hall]: It is difficult for us to see clearly what we are like. You may feel, as I often do in such an exercise—even here I play the game of rating myself much worse than I am in order to feel self-righteous and good—because that is what I’ve been taught to say. Francis de Sales speaks of the moral blindness of self-righteousness. Those who suffer from this sin will be quick to spot the weaknesses of others. However, they fail to notice their own shortcomings.

. . . everyone paints devotion according to his own passions and fancies. People who fast think of themselves as being very devout if they fast, although their hearts might be filled with hatred. Much concerned with sobriety, they don't care to wet their tongues with wine or even water, but they won't hesitate to drink deep of their neighbor's blood by detraction and gossip. Other people think of themselves as devout because they daily recite a vast number of prayers, but after saying them they utter the most disagreeable, arrogant, and harmful words at home and among the neighbors. Another person gladly takes a coin out of his purse and gives it to the poor, but he cannot extract kindness from his heart to forgive his enemies. . . In the same manner, many persons clothe themselves with certain outward actions connected with holy devotion, and the world believes that they are truly devout and spiritual whereas they are nothing but copies and phantoms of devotion. (Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, 26-27)

Think About It

Spiritual Pride: What to Do About It

A friend or acquaintance comes to you for specific counsel and encouragement. Why? He comes to you because he struggles with spiritual pride and self-righteousness. How would you help a person struggling with such a problem?

List five specific steps toward healing you might offer to such a person.

[Chris Hall]: Now listen to how Jeremy Taylor might have answered this question. In place of the moral blindness of self-righteousness, Taylor advises us to develop a realistic opinion of who we are. Taylor writes:

First, do not think better of yourself because of any outward circumstance that happens to you. Although you may—because of the gifts that have been bestowed upon you—be better at something than someone else (as one horse runs faster than another), know that it is for the benefit of others, not for yourself. . . . Second, humility does not consist in criticizing yourself, or wearing ragged clothes, or walking around submissively wherever you go. Humility consists in a realistic opinion of yourself, namely, that you are an unworthy person. (Jeremy Taylor, *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, 244)

Note well Taylor’s healthy and mature self-perspective. He holds together what we are apt to split apart. For example, Taylor reminds us that we are unworthy. God owes us nothing. It is not because of our essential worthiness that God sent Jesus to die for our sins. Rather, Christ died for his enemies, those running from him at light speed in the opposite direction. Despite our unworthiness, though, Taylor warns against a feigned submissiveness or condemning self-criticism that can only recognize our faults and weaknesses.

Taylor offers a number of practical and potent antidotes for the poison of pride and self-righteousness. You will find that we have listed these five suggestions below. You might want to review them sometime and compare them with the five suggestions you made on the previous page to the person struggling with spiritual pride.

1. Do your good works “in secret.” “Be content to go without praise, never being troubled when someone has slighted or undervalued you.”
2. Avoid fishing for compliments. Taylor advises, “Never say anything, directly or indirectly, that will provoke praise or elicit compliments from others . . . Do not ask others to identify your faults if your intent or purpose is to have others tell you of your good qualities. Some people will speak lowly of themselves in order to make others give an account of their goodness. They are merely fishing for compliments. Yet, they end up swallowing the hook, and they will swell up and burst by drinking the waters of vanity.”
3. Consciously practice praise rather than disparagement. “Take an active part in the praising of others, entertaining their good with delight. In no way should you give in to the desire to disparage them, or lessen their praise, or make any objection. You should never think that hearing the good report of another in any way lessens your worth” [a healthy antidote to spiritual competitiveness] (my emphasis).
4. Avoid spiritual competition and comparison. “Never compare yourself with others unless it be to advance your impression of them and lower your impression of yourself.”
5. Identify compassionately with the weaknesses of others. “. . . look with great forgiveness upon the weaknesses of others. The truly humble person will try to see how the sinful deeds done by others were committed because the person was unenlightened or misled, concluding that if the person had the same benefits and helps that he had, they would not have committed any such evil, but rather, would have done much good.” (Jeremy Taylor, *The Rules and Exercises of Holy Living*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, pp. 244-45)

[David Fraser]: Now we turn from those who think highly of themselves to their opposite counterparts. There are always people who feel that everything they do is wrong. What about the person who is actively seeking the Lord and working hard to serve the Lord and to do the Lord’s will? Yet, they are constantly faced with what we may call the crisis of self-denigration.

The Crisis of Self-Denigration (those who think nothing they do is right)

People who engage in self-denigration are not like the people who inflate themselves. People who denigrate themselves are not firmly grounded in the grace of God. They attempt to live a disciplined spiritual life, but they are frustrated by what we can describe or define as

"spiritual depression;" they experience discouragement, despair, and a sense of estrangement from God. Some oscillate between the self-inflated and the self-denigrating. Discouragement and despair can easily trouble us if we are not firmly planted in the soil of the divine love, particularly as our own self-awareness deepens. Apart from being grounded in the love of Christ, will we ever be able to face what must be changed if we are to experience abundant life? C.S. Lewis, for example, writes of the folly of attempting to follow the dictates of conscience apart from the grace of God:

For, make no mistake: if you are really going to try to meet all the demands made on the natural self, it will not have enough left over to live on. The more you obey your conscience, the more your conscience will demand of you. And your natural self, which is thus being starved and hampered and worried at every turn, will get angrier and angrier. (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, 8)

Think About It

Spiritual Discouragement

When, specifically, do you tend to become spiritually discouraged? Are there patterns to your discouragement or sense of estrangement from God? That is to say, what aspects of your own spiritual life are continuing sources or causes of discouragement to you? Why? Reflect by writing a response on a separate paper.

[David Fraser]: Some of us might battle discouragement for most of our lives. We should note that, while a failure to ground ourselves in the grace of God might be a significant factor, other issues might also be involved. Genetics, family background, life experiences, personality type and present difficult circumstances might also be key factors in our spiritual discouragement. Perhaps we need to distinguish between the discouragements all human beings experience when life's difficulties weigh us down, and spiritual discouragement itself. Is there a difference between the discouragement we experience when our car breaks down and the spiritual depression we feel over a string of unanswered prayers? The question calls us to be wary of oversimplifying matters, either for ourselves or for others.

Some of us might never have battled with spiritual discouragement. Why? The answer might not be immediately connected to a spiritual or theological rationale. Perhaps we were fortunate enough to have grown up in an affirming, loving family environment. Maybe in God's providence we have been shielded from the tragedies, heartaches, and struggles that other people have encountered. There is even the possibility that we are living in denial. We hurt but we are unable or unwilling to face our pain and its causes. Finally, some of us might simply be avoiding life. We have not experienced discouragement or deep depression simply because we have protected ourselves from it, and never engaged in any significant risks. We have not tasted spiritual discouragement or depression because we have not reached beyond our "comfort zone" in our attempts to extend God's kingdom or to grow spiritually.

Yes, the disciple's path can be a discouraging one. What, though, is the alternative? Willard reminds us that non-discipleship also easily leads to despair:

Nondiscipleship costs abiding peace, a life penetrated throughout by love, faith that sees everything in the light of God's overriding governance for good, hopefulness that stands firm in the most discouraging of circumstances, power to do what is right and withstand the forces of evil. In short, it costs exactly that abundance of life Jesus said he came to bring (John 10:10) . . . The correct perspective is to see following Christ not only as the necessity it is, but as the fulfillment of the highest human possibilities and as life on the highest plane. (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, 16)

There is no doubt that the inherent difficulties of spiritual growth can be daunting and discouraging. Thomas à Kempis advises that we be patient with ourselves, particularly during times of temptation. This patience, though, is nearly impossible to cultivate apart from a sure grounding in God's love and acceptance. Thomas writes:

We must not despair when we are tempted but, instead, seek God more fervently, asking for his help in this time of tribulation. . . .Patience is necessary in this life because so much of life is fraught with adversity. No matter how hard we try, our lives will never be without strife and grief. (Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, 151-52)

Catherine of Genoa offers surrender to God as a possible antidote to discouragement. Only God, Catherine contends, can deliver us from who we are. Better to surrender to our deliverer than to spend years thinking we can free ourselves on our own:

I then saw others who were fighting against their evil inclinations and forcing themselves to resist them. But I saw that the more they struggled against them, the more they committed them. So I said to them, "You are right in lamenting your sins and imperfections, and I would be lamenting with you if it were not for the fact that God is holding me. You cannot defend yourself and I cannot defend myself. The thing we must do is renounce the care of ourselves unto God who can defend our true self. Only then can God do for us what we cannot do ourselves." (Catherine of Genoa, *Life and Teachings*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, 181-82)

Did Catherine lead a passive spiritual life divorced from active service and commitment? No. She led a spiritually disciplined life of service to the poor and sick in Genoa. Catherine's acts of charity and disciplined life, however, flowed out of her awareness of God's love toward her. She knew that God was "holding" her; God was her defender and shield. This fundamental grounding fueled her discipline and service. Catherine warns, however, that apart from the love and care of God we will easily become driven, frenetic, "burned-out" cases.

Kierkegaard, St. John of the Cross, Jeremy Taylor, Francis de Sales and Catherine of Genoa are united in their insistence that spiritual growth and change are gifts from God. Ignatius of Loyola teaches that spiritual "desolation" can sometimes be traced to God's . . .

. . . wish to give us a true knowledge and understanding so that we may truly perceive that it is not within our power to acquire or retain great devotion, ardent love, tears, or any other spiritual consolation, but that all of this is a gift and a grace of God our Lord. Nor does God wish us to claim as our own what belongs to another, allowing our intellect to rise up in a spirit of pride or vainglory, attributing to ourselves the devotion or other aspects of spiritual consolation. (Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, 195)

The Crisis of Self-Deception (those losing their spiritual blindness and beginning to see what they are really like)

[Chris Hall]: As we have mentioned earlier, spiritual despair can be linked to a variety of situations, circumstances, and experiences. The issue of self-deception is involved in both overestimating ourselves and underestimating ourselves. We, ironically, think too highly of ourselves and too poorly at the same time. As we undertake a more serious pursuit of the spiritual disciplines, we begin to lose the spiritual blindness about ourselves that allows those two tendencies.

Discouragement is, however, often a more natural outcome of growth. Here is the issue: Can we grow in self-awareness, freely admitting our faults and errors, apart from a firm grounding in God's love and grace? Spiritual growth inevitably involves bringing our personal darkness into the light of God's healing love, a process Parker Palmer describes as the path of "disillusionment."

Contemplation is difficult for many of us because we have invested so much in illusion. Sometimes we even seem wedded to illusion as a way of survival. When I look at my own life I am appalled at the illusions I have cultivated simply to get me through the day—illusions about my motives, abilities, my desires. I am appalled at the pain that my illusions have caused me and others, and at the thought that right now I harbor

illusions I cannot even name because I depend on the belief that they are real. (Palmer, *The Active Life*, 25)

Recently I have been involved in this process of "disillusionment." I would like to live the illusion that I am a patient, loving person. This is an illusion that I can easily cultivate at the college where I teach theology. At heart, though, I struggle with impatience, an impatience I can generally hide from colleagues and students. I disguise it less easily from my family. Why? Disguise is difficult with my family because they are with me more of the time and see me at my most "unspiritual" moments. Just last week, in fact, my daughter confronted me in frustration and love with the observation, "You have the worst temper in the world!" Surely not, I initially said to myself. I'm a kind, loving, generous person. As I thought more honestly about her words, though, I recognized the truth they contained.

Had not the discipline of fasting been teaching me this very same thing? Why was it that when I could not have what I wanted when I wanted it (i.e., food) I so easily became irritable and impatient? Fasting was serving as a divine can opener, insistently lifting the lid of my illusions so that my woundedness might be acknowledged and brought to Christ. This was an extremely difficult weakness to acknowledge. Only Christ's gentle "disillusioning," though, would bring healing and growth to my life.

Think About It

Spiritual Disillusionment

Perhaps by this time in the spiritual formation module you are experiencing what Parker Palmer describes as "disillusionment." Can you pinpoint three specific illusions that have risen to the surface of your awareness? Can you identify the roots of those illusions? What deep needs have those illusions been meeting?

On a positive note, what positive realities can replace these illusions in your own experience?

[Chris Hall] Finding we are less gifted, less holy, less laudable than we imagined punctures our illusions. Ordinarily, we avoid this type of self-awareness. When by God's grace we finally open our iron box of secrets to Christ's revealing light, we experience a kind of death. As Parker puts it,

. . . .we go through a kind of dying. But the very name we give these moments tells us that something positive is happening through our pain. We say we are being "dis-illusioned." That is, we are being stripped of some illusions about life, about others, about ourselves. As our illusions are removed, like barriers on a road, we have a chance to take that road farther toward truth. Instead of commiserating and offering a shoulder to cry on when a friend says that he or she is disillusioned, we ought to congratulate, celebrate, and ask the friend how we can help the process to go deeper still. (Parker, *The Active Life*, 26-27)

Roberta Bondi also reminds us of the danger of remaining in our illusions, The Monastics assumed that all of us know ourselves at some level much better than we want to admit we do. No matter how blinded by passions we are to ourselves, other people, and God, there always is a little bit of us that can see the truth. Nevertheless, we often do not care to see it, and so we use up a lot of energy hiding from that seeing part of ourselves and denying what it sees. We know the damage we are doing to ourselves and other people with our anger or hatred or our gluttony. (Bondi, *To Love as God Loves*, 89)

There's no doubt about it. A spiritual life based on a discipline divorced from God's grace soon becomes burdensome. Indeed, the surrounding "corporate flesh" of the world would like to convince us that spirituality is a harsh, gloomy task that produces brittle, rigid, mean spirited people. Francis de Sales writes to Philothea,

Those who discouraged the Israelites from going into the Promised Land told them that it was a country that "devoured its inhabitants." . . . It is in this manner, my dear Philothea, that the world distorts holy devotion as much as it can. It pictures devout persons as having discontented, gloomy, sullen faces and claims that devotion brings on depression and unbearable moods. (Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, 28)

Four Kinds of People

[Chris Hall] As we bring this unit to a close, we ask you to pay special attention to four different kinds of people mentioned by the writer of the *Theologia Germanica*. Each of the four individuals has a different motivation for leading a disciplined spiritual life.

1. **Compelled:** The first person leads a disciplined life because of external compulsion. Some lead an ordered life neither for God's sake nor out of a particular personal desire, but simply because they are compelled. They do the least possible and it all turns sour and burdensome for them. (*Theologia Germanica*, quoted in first edition of the *Devotional Classics*, 148, not in the revised edition)
2. **Self-Disciplined:** The second person disciplines himself/herself in hope of a reward. That is, people who believe that it is possible to earn the kingdom of heaven and eternal life. They consider that person holy who observes a great many rules. The person who neglects even some little rule, they believe, is lost to the devil. They show great seriousness and diligence in keeping these rules, yet, after a time, it all turns sour and burdensome for them. (*Theologia Germanica*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, First ed. 148)
3. **Self-Deceptive:** The third kind of person is grossly self-deceived. These people ignore their personal sins and shortcomings and are "quick to tell you just how perfect they are. They think that they do not need any rules and laws and, in fact, scoff at any talk about 'order.'" (*Theologia Germanica*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, First ed. 148)
4. **Responsive:** The fourth kind of people has learned to respond to God out of love. They do not practice the ordered life in expectation of reward. They do not want to acquire anything with the aid of reward, nor do they hope that they will some day reap some reward because of it. No, they do what they do in the ordered life out of love. They are not so concerned about the outcome, about how a particular behavior will turn out, how soon, and so on. Their concern is rather that things will work out well, in peace and inner ease. And if sometimes some less important rules have to be neglected, they are not lost in despair. (*Theologia Germanica*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, First ed. 148)

Think About It

Foster and Smith (p. 151 of *Devotional Classics*, First ed.) pose a number of helpful reflection questions based on the reading from *Theologia Germanica*. Please answer the following four reflection questions based on the insights of that writing.

"Of the four kinds of people who try to live an ordered, moral life, which are you most like? (the compelled, the seekers of reward, the grossly self-deceived, the lovers of God)"

"The author of the *Theologia Germanica* stresses the importance of being motivated from the inside, not merely from the outside. What kinds of inner motivations and outer motivations prompt you to engage in the spiritual disciplines?"

"Our whole world runs on a system of rewards and punishments; e.g., we tend to obey the speed limit for fear of getting a ticket. Yet the author suggests that obedience must be loved for itself, not merely for its rewards or for fear of punishment. How does God's grace fit into this struggle?"

The right eye of the soul looks to the eternal, while the left eye looks to the things of this world. Using this metaphor, which is your dominant eye? What patterns in your life indicate which "eye" is dominant?

Use a separate paper for your answers.

Loving Friendship with God

[David Fraser]: Hundreds of years earlier Gregory of Nyssa also emphasized that a spiritual life rooted in loving friendship with God produced lovely, life-giving fruit. In fact, Gregory suggested that we pursue a disciplined life best when we remember that God is our friend, not a harsh taskmaster eagerly waiting for us to fail,

This is true perfection: not to avoid a wicked life because like slaves we fear punishment, nor to do good because we hope for rewards, as if cashing in on the virtuous life by some business-like arrangement. On the contrary, disregarding all those things for which we hope and which have been reserved by promise, we regard falling from God's friendship as the only thing dreadful and we consider becoming God's friend the only thing worthy of honor and desire. (Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, 126-27)

Think About It

Allowing God to Love Us as a Cherished Friend

Foster and Smith suggest a helpful closing exercise for this unit that might serve to bring Gregory's words to life in your experience. Exercise #4: "This week strengthen your friendship with God by spending time with God, sharing more and more of your life—your hopes and dreams and failures—and allowing God to love you as a cherished friend." (Foster and Smith, *Devotional Classics*, p.128)

On a separate paper, list four practical steps you could begin to take to strengthen your friendship with God.

[Chris Hall]: It is friendship with God on a long-term basis that will undermine all the tendencies we have toward self-inflation, self-denigration or self-deception. In our experience, these tendencies have been the overwhelming inner issues when we have lost sight of God's grace. The steps we take need to be folded into our own habit patterns. Friendship is strengthened as we spend time with each other, do reality or perception checks to be sure we understand the communication we think is happening, have fun together, share our most

intimate questions and struggles. Sometimes all we need is a card in our pocket to read saying, "At this very moment, God wants to be your best friend." Then we can take it out at every meal and remind ourselves that just as God has given us food to nourish our body, God is pouring out love toward us by the Holy Spirit. We need to reckon, to fix our minds on the reality that that love is coming toward us constantly.

There are many practical, simple things we can do to enhance our sense of God's friendship. We hope you have listed a few good ones.

Email Assignment

When you have finished all the assigned readings, journaling and spiritual discipline exercises, answer the following question on one page:

Reflect on your own tendencies toward forms of the three crises that mark Christian living when it uses the disciplines apart from a grace-filled experience (self-inflation, self-denigration, self-deception). What would you describe as the areas of major temptation that trap you in unfruitful and damaging engagement (or non-engagement) with the disciplines?

On a second page: This course is about half finished. Spend time evaluating your current motivations and habits that are in place in your life for on-going growth in grace and faith. Write out a short contemporary "spiritual autobiography" for the time spent so far on this course. What's been happening in your life as you have tried faithfully to fulfill the assignments and practice the disciplines? Evaluate what you need to do to activate the possibilities in this course to grow deeper or to re-ignite your passion for godliness.

Unit 6 Reading: Meditation

Psalm 1 sets forth the elements and benefits of meditation, "Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all they do, they prosper." (vs. 1-3) It is not meditation alone, but rather meditation on something that delights the inner person.

Foster, in *Celebration of Disciplines* writes, "In contemporary society our Adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry, and crowds. If he can keep us engaged in 'muchness' and 'manyness,' he will rest satisfied." (p. 15) We are left with little time to rest, meditate and absorb what God is teaching us. (Cf. the story of Mary and Martha—Luke 10:38-42 and the contrast between busy service and the sitting at Jesus' feet.)

Meditation is a call to listen and reflect. Peter Abelard uses the illustration of a cow chewing on its cud. In meditation we are sinking our roots deeply into the Word of God, aspects of nature, events, etc.

Foster also speaks of *Otium Sanctum*, "holy leisure". "It refers to a sense of balance in life, an ability to be at peace through the activities of the day, an ability to rest and take time to enjoy beauty, an ability to pace ourselves. With our tendency to define people in terms of what they produce, we would do well to cultivate 'holy leisure.'" (p. 27)

We must take Foster's words seriously. In the United States we evaluate people in terms of what they do rather than what they are—in terms of their production rather than their character. Meditation forces us to reevaluate our values and priorities.

Perhaps we need to learn to distinguish between the urgent and the important. Henri Nouwen writes in *The Road to Daybreak*,

...I have to keep a careful eye on the difference between urgent things and important things. If I allow the urgent things to dominate my day, I will never do what is truly important and will always feel dissatisfied...the issue is not where you are, but how you live wherever you are. For you that means a constant choosing of what is important and a willingness to accept that the urgent things can wait or be left undone. (p.81). It is so easy to let what needs to be done take priority over what needs to be lived... (p. 93)

Through meditation we can begin to see what God sees, both the beauty and wonder we often times rush by and the suffering and need we often ignore. "Lord, let me see what you see—the love of God and the suffering of people—so that my eyes may become more and more like yours, eyes that can heal wounded hearts." (p. 56)

The call to meditation, then, is a call to slow down, a call to reflect, a call to listen, a call to see, a time to be renewed, a time to drink deeply. "I feel a tension within me. I have only a limited number of years left for active ministry. Why not use them well? Yet one word spoken with a pure heart is worth thousands spoken in a state of spiritual turmoil. Time given to inner renewal is never wasted. God is not in a hurry." (p. 20)

Principles for Meditation

1. The discipline of meditation, like all the other disciplines, must be nourished and cultivated in the grace of God. Merton speaks in Foster, "How do we receive the desire to hear his voice? 'This desire to turn is a gift of grace. Anyone who imagines he can simply begin meditating without praying for the desire and the grace to do so, will soon give up. But the desire to meditate, and the grace to begin meditating, should be taken as an implicit promise of further graces.'" (pp. 24-5)
2. Meditation is a form of delight. "Blessed are those...[whose] delight is in the law of the Lord..." (Psalm 1) Whatever we delight in, we think about and seek after. Gradually our lives become more and more centered around our hearts' desires. How would you describe your own relationship to the scriptures? What can you do to bring your relationship with God's word more into conformity with that of the meditator in Psalm 1 ("They are like trees planted by streams of water.")? Where have we planted ourselves? In what soil? By what river? When the wind begins to blow, are our roots pulled loose? What kind of fruit are we bearing? How is the fruit related to the roots and the soil? If you were to choose a type of tree or flower or plant life to describe your spiritual life, what would you choose?
3. As we meditate upon our delights, we will soon perceive that the call to meditate is a call to repent and obey. (cf. Psalm 119:97, 101-102) A powerful image comes to mind. A woman was teaching about how important it was to be careful about what we put into our minds, about what we mold our minds around, and what we put into the minds of our children. She spoke of a powerful image which had occurred to her. She was walking along the road and saw a "cow pie" lying in the road. "Take and eat," a divine voice seemed to say. She backed away with revulsion. "Then how can you read what you read, watch what you watch, delight in what you delight? You refuse to fill your mouth with what you see lying in the road, and yet you fill your mind with that very thing all week long." Meditation, then, involves a refraining from certain things and an embracing of others.

Learning to Meditate: The Image of the Tree

Note the various types of literature present in scripture: law, historical narrative, poetry, proverbs, prophecy, gospels and letters. The question the meditator asks is, "How can I most effectively appropriate the truth addressed to me?" The type of literature in view will determine to a large degree the disciplined approach I take in meditating on it. For example, with the letters of the New Testament, one would normally take an exegetical approach. With poetry or gospels, the exegetical approach might be coupled with a more imaginative, less cerebral approach.

On biblical images of meditation, "These are figures of speech, not of our own invention but given by God in his Word ...We are probably used to thinking of an image as a vague picture in the mind, rather than as a valuable source of information....you can go more deeply into the truth....scripture can go more deeply into you." (Thomas McCormick and Sharon Fish, *Meditation: A Practical Guide To A Spiritual Discipline*, InterVarsity Press, 1983 p. 68)

Thought when nourished by meditation is like the tree which, in proportion as it grows higher and spreads its branches wider, in quest of air and light, strikes its roots ever deeper and multiplies incessantly the thousand shoots which reach out in the surrounding earth to get more nourishment and to gain new resisting power against the winds above. (Joseph McSorley)

The Meditator

1. Reflect on the things the psalmist does not do. (Psalm 1:1) Reformulate these expressions in your own words, considering their application to your life in today's society. In contrast, what does the psalmist actively do? (antithetical parallelism, note the "but")
2. Turn the negative statements of vs. 1 into positive statements to learn more about the life of the meditator, a life which provides the framework for this meditation.
3. What is the specific object of the psalmist's meditation (vs. 2)? When does he or she meditate? Where? The answer to the last question, while not explicit, is implied in verses 1-3.
4. Reflect on the attitude of the one who meditates on God and the things of God, specifically the law. What does the phrase delight in convey to you? What would be some synonyms of delight? What do you delight in? What prompts you to delight in each thing? How is your delight different in each case? Remember the danger of delighting in the wrong things.

The Tree

5. Read again Psalm 1:1-3 to reconsider the image of the tree. What three verbs are used in verse 3 to describe the tree? What qualifying statement is associated with each verb? How does the person of verses 1 and 22 resemble a tree? Look especially at the last sentence of verse 3.
6. Turn to Jeremiah 17:7-8. What similarities and differences do you recognize? How do the differences clarify and illumine your understanding and enrich your appreciation of this image?
7. Various aspects of the tree image are used in other parts of the scripture. Consider John 15:1-11, where Jesus uses the image of the vine. What similarities do you see between the vine and the tree? What does John 15 say about "bearing fruit"? (cf. vv. 2, 4-5). What is the means or source of bearing fruit here? In Psalm 1? In Jeremiah 17? What is the purpose of bearing fruit in John 15? (cf. v. 8). What type of fruit is in view here? (cf. Galatians 5:22). (These exercises are adapted from "Cormick and Fish, *Meditation: A Practical Guide to a Spiritual Discipline*.)

How does meditation help us change by bringing the reality of Jesus into our hearts? Often the use of a sanctified imagination is important as we exercise the *meditatio scripturarum*. For most of us a merely cerebral approach is too detached. In meditation we see God personally addressing us. The scripture is a Word addressed to us, meant to be internalized by us. We can feel free to use all the resources we have as human beings (reason, imagination, senses) understand the truth addressing us. "Our task is not so much to study the passage as it is to be initiated into the reality of which the passage speaks." (Foster, p 30)

We enter the scripture as active participants, not as passive observers,
...with your imagination anointed with holy oil, you again open your New Testament. At one time, you are the prodigal....at another time, you are Mary Magdalene: at another time, Peter in the porch...Till your whole New Testament is all over autobiographic of you. (Alexander Whyte)

Yes, our imaginations can be deceived or manipulated by factors such as fatigue, diet, medications, etc. But the same danger is present if we simply take a cerebral approach. And by doing so, are we not forgetting that we are embodied beings and more than simply rational minds? We do learn in other ways than by analysis. Perhaps we are called to a more synthetic approach. Note the absolute need for trust and dependence on God and for the coupling of meditation to the discipline of study.

God has created us for closeness and intimacy. God is not far from us. Part of the problem we face is our difficulty in realizing and experiencing how truly close God is to us at all times, how intimate our union with Christ is. God has created us for this closeness. God desires for us to draw near. In return God will draw near to us. (James 4:8— "Come near to God and he will come near to you.")

God has designed and initiated this relationship. In a sense, God wants to blossom within us, producing in us the fruit of God's likeness. (Colossians 1:27, John 14:15-21, John 17:20-23, Luke 17:21)

If we truly realized how close God is to us, would we dare to do some of the things we do in God's presence? The closer we draw to God, the more we are aware of our sinfulness and his love. Cf. Luke 5. (Peter is suddenly aware of his sinfulness and yet desires to follow Jesus. Peter wants to remain with Jesus.)

The Vine and the Branches: John 15:1-11. What similarities do you see between the vine and the tree? What does John 15 say about "bearing fruit?" (cf. vv.2, 4-5) What is the means or source of bearing fruit here? In Psalm 1? In Jeremiah 17? What type of fruit is in view here? (cf. Galatians 5:22).

Practical Advice on Meditation

1. Find a place, if possible, where you can be quiet and undisturbed. Be aware of what tends to distract you and where there are places of quiet. Collect your mind and spirit. Make sure to have pen and paper handy to note impressions and insights. If possible, try to meditate at a set time. Be creative. Purposely develop an atmosphere that quiets your heart and accentuates your attentiveness.
2. Have a time of recollection at the beginning of your meditation. We need a few minutes to slow down and quiet down. If you find yourself distracted, frustrated or filled with anxiety or fear about different issues or circumstances, write those thoughts down at the beginning of your meditation. Once you write things down, you'll know you can deal with them later; be specific with worries, etc. If we're not specific, a vague fog of anxiety can disrupt what we're called to do. We can meditate on more than scripture. Our own anxieties will teach us much about ourselves and our relationship with God. Look for patterns that might begin to emerge. Are there certain circumstances, kinds of people, etc. that are regular sources of anxiety and fear? Or sin?
3. Remember that in meditation we are recognizing the object of meditation as a direct address from God to us that is meant to be entered into/internalized. Whether it be a popular image in scripture such as the tree or a story from the gospels, enter into the reality presented as an active participant, rather than a passive observer. Use your imagination. Here we face the importance of internalization.
4. Perhaps make a project of getting to know one biblical character well, such as Peter or David. Put yourself in the person's shoes/experiences. Or maybe you will want to spend time in a specific book or section of the scripture, such as the Psalms, Sermon on the Mount or gospel of Luke. Perhaps employ memorization as part of your meditation. Coupling imagination with memorization might facilitate matters.
5. Search out a trusted individual, one further along in his/her spiritual pilgrimage, someone who is familiar with the ways of the Spirit, demonstrates integrity and genuineness in his/her spiritual life, and understands the pitfalls we are likely to encounter as we draw near to God. A guide is necessary if we are to avoid self-deception and error.
6. Surround the entire contemplative process with prayer. Continually ask for the grace needed to develop a meditative life. Allow your meditations to lead you into prayer; often they will provide the context and direction for your prayers. Remember Foster's words, "Anyone who imagines he can simply begin meditating without praying for the desire and the grace to do so, will soon give up." (*Celebration of Disciplines*, pp. 24-25)

Theological Germanica (1350) Selections

(based on Susana Winkworth's translation, 1893, modified and updated)

This document is anonymous. The work was discovered and published in 1516 by Martin Luther, who said of it, "Next to the Bible and St. Augustine, no book has ever come into my hands from which I have learnt more of God and Christ, and man and all things that are." It has since appealed to Christians of all persuasions. Martin Luther wrote a preface to the document in 1516 (and to a more complete version in 1518).

It seems to come from the 14th century German movement known as the "Friends of God." So it is frequently dated to about 1350 and seen as written by a priest of the Teutonic

knights stationed at Frankfurt-am-Main. The intent of the work is to urge us to take seriously the notion that the issues of life are heart-issues (Matt. 15:19), matters of the inner person, not the external or outer person.

God is a God of Order

It is said truly: God is beyond and without custom, measure, and order, and yet gives to all things their custom, order, measure, fitness, and the like.

This is to be understood in this manner: God will have all these matters of order to be. They cannot have existence in Himself apart from the creature, for in God, apart from the creature, there is neither order nor disorder, custom nor chance, and so forth.

Therefore He will have things so that these shall be, and shall be put in exercise. For word, work, or change happen either according to order, custom, measure and fitness, or contrariwise, according to unfitness and disorder. Now fitness and order are better and nobler than their contraries.

Four Types of People

But mark this: There are four sorts of people who deal in different ways with order, laws, and customs.

The Compelled

1. Some keep them neither for God's sake, nor to serve their own ends, but from constraint: these have as little to do with them as may be, and find them a burden and heavy yoke.

The Meritorious or Reward Folk (self-disciplined)

2. The second sort obey for the sake of reward. These are people who know nothing beside, or better than, laws and precepts, and imagine that by keeping them they may obtain the kingdom of Heaven and Eternal Life, and not otherwise. Those who practice many ordinances they think to be holy. Those who omit any smallest element of them they think to be lost. Such people are very much in earnest and give great diligence to the work, and yet they find it a weariness.

The Perfect or Free Spirits (self-deluded)

3. The third sort are wicked and false-hearted, who dream and declare that they are perfect and need no ordinances, and make a mockery of them.

The Illumined (the responsive)

4. The fourth are those who are enlightened with the True Light, who do not practice these things for reward. They neither look nor desire to get anything thereby, but all that they do is from love alone. And these are not so anxious and eager to accomplish much and with all speed as the second sort, but rather seek to do things in peace and good leisure. If they neglect some small matter, they do not therefore think themselves lost. They know very well that order and fitness are better than disorder, and therefore they choose to walk orderly. At the same time they know that their salvation does not hang thereon. Therefore they are not in such great anxiety as the others.

Following the Middle Path

These fourth are judged and blamed by both the other parties, for the hirelings (that is the Reward Folks) say that they neglect their duties and accuse them of being unrighteous, and the like. The others (that is, the Free Spirits) hold them in derision. They say that they cleave unto weak and beggarly elements, and the like. But the enlightened ones keep the middle path, which is also the best; for a lover of God is better and dearer to Him than a hundred thousand hirelings. It is the same with all their actions.

Furthermore, note this well, that to receive God's commands and His counsel and all His teaching, is the privilege of the inward person, according to which he is united with God. Where there is such a union, the outward person is surely taught and ordered by the inward, so that no outward commandment or teaching is needed. But the commandments and laws of human beings belong to the outer person. They are needful for those who know nothing better.

Otherwise they would not know what to do and what to refrain from, and would become like dogs or other beasts.

Union with Christ

Now be assured that no one can be enlightened unless he be first cleansed or purified and stripped. So also, no one can be united with God unless he be first enlightened.

Thus there are three stages: first, the purification; secondly, the enlightening; thirdly, the union.

The purification concerns those who are beginning or repenting, and is brought to pass in a threefold manner: by contrition and sorrow for sin, by full confession, by hearty amendment.

The enlightening belongs to such as are growing, and also takes place in three ways: to wit, by the repudiating sin, by the practice of virtue and good works, and by the willing endurance of all manner of temptation and trials.

The union belongs to such as are perfect, and also is brought to pass in three ways: to wit, by pureness and singleness of heart, by love, and by the contemplation of God, the Creator of all things.

Two eyed View

Let us remember how it is written and said that the soul of Christ had two eyes, a right and a left eye. In the beginning, when the soul of Christ was created, she fixed her right eye upon eternity and the Godhead, and remained in the full intuition and enjoyment of the divine Essence and Eternal Perfection. This vision continued unmoved and undisturbed by all the accidents and travail, suffering, torment and pain that ever befell the outward person.

But with the left eye the soul beheld the creature and perceived all things therein, and took note of the difference between the creatures, which were better or worse, nobler or meaner. The outward being of Christ ordered according to these inner discernments.

Thus the inner being of Christ, according to the right eye of His soul, was engaged in the full exercise of His divine nature, in perfect blessedness, joy and eternal peace. But the outward being and the left eye of Christ's soul was involved with Him in the fullness of suffering, in all tribulation, affliction and travail. Yet the inward and right eye remained unmoved, unhindered and untouched by all the travail, suffering, grief and anguish that happened to the outward being.

It is said that, when Christ was bound to the pillar and scourged and when He hung upon the cross, all experienced by the outward person, yet His inner person, or soul according to the right eye, stood in as full possession of divine joy and blessedness as it did after His ascension, or as it does now. In like manner His outward person, or soul with the left eye, was never hindered, disturbed or troubled by the inward eye in its contemplation of the outward things that belonged to it.

Now the created soul of humans also has two eyes. The one is the power of seeing into eternity. The other is the power of seeing into time and the creatures, of perceiving how they differ from each other as afore-said, and by this discernment of giving life and needful things to the body, and ordering and governing life for the best.

But these two eyes of the soul cannot both perform their work at once; but if the soul shall see with the right eye into eternity, then the left eye must close itself and refrain from working, and be as though it were dead.

Goodness is Inner

This is a basic and clear truth: that all manner of virtue and goodness, and even that Eternal Good which is God Himself, can never make a person virtuous, good, or happy, so long as it is outside the soul. This cannot happen to a person whose focus is on outward things through his senses and reason, who does not withdraw into himself and learn to understand his own life, who and what he is.

The same is true of sin and evil. For all manner of sin and wickedness can never make us evil, so long as it is outside of us, that is, so long as we do not commit it or give consent to it.

So, on the one hand, it is good and profitable that we should ask, and learn and know, what good and holy persons have achieved and suffered, and how God dealt with them, and

what He has done in and through them. Yet, on the other, it is a thousand times better that we should learn and perceive and understand deeply within ourselves who we are, how and what our own life is, what God is and is doing in us, what He will have from us, and to what ends He will or will not make use of us. For, of a truth, thoroughly to know oneself, is beyond all art, for it is the highest art.

Further, we need to learn that eternal blessedness is found in one thing alone, and in nothing else. If ever a person or the soul is to be made blessed, that one thing alone must be in the soul. Now some might ask, "But what is that one thing?" I answer, it is Goodness, or that which hath been made good. Yet it is neither this good nor that, which we can name, or perceive or show. It is all good things and above all good things.

Moreover, it needs not to enter into the soul, for it is there already, only it is unperceived. When we say we should come unto it, we mean that we should seek it, feel it, and taste it. And now since it is One, unity and singleness is better than manifoldness.

For blessedness comes not in much and many good things, but in One and oneness. In one word, blessedness is not found in any creature, or the works of the creatures, but it is found alone in God and in His works.

Therefore I must wait only on God and His work, and leave to one side all creatures with their works, and first of all myself.

In like manner all the great works and wonders that God has ever wrought or shall ever work in or through the creatures, or even God Himself with all His goodness, so far as these things exist or are done outside of me, can never make me blessed. Blessedness comes only so far as these exist and are done and loved, known, tasted and felt within me.

Spiritual Formation

Unit 7

The Hard Work of the Disciplines



Development Associates International

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Unit 7

The Hard Work of the Disciplines

Unit 7 Contents

- Learning Outcomes and Steps to Complete Unit 7
- Lecture Notes and Workbook
- Email Assignment
- Readings: Discipline in Focus: Submission

Learning Objectives

In this unit you will:

- Explore the degree to which you have been strongly and consistently set to work hard at growing spiritually.
- Learn how to replace bad habit patterns with new habits, and to understand the cost such activity exacts.
- Practice the discipline: Submission.

Steps to Complete Unit 7

Read and Reflect...

- Your Reader for Unit Seven: Discipline in Focus: Submission. This Reader is located at the end of the workbook portion for this unit. Submission allows others to determine what we do with our time and energy. It is the freedom to lay down the terrible burden of always needing to have our way.
- Textbook, *Devotional Classics*, pp. 48-54 (Francis Fenelon); pp. 163-170 (Teresa of Ávila); pp. 173-179 (Thomas Kelly); pp. 309-315 (John Chrysostom).

Respond

- Complete the journaling assignments. Note the reflection questions in the text, *Devotional Classics*. One truth of the Christian life is that we are better equipped to respond to the needs of other people as we mature spiritually. We do not need to have our own way or prove our worth and rightness. We can listen to the cry of the needy and respond to the call of God to serve others as we mature spiritually. We do not have to influence people to serve us. As you journal during this unit, notice how and when you are able readily and easily to set your own agenda aside. Where appropriate, allow the agendas of others to help determine the expenditure of your time and energy.

Complete the final email assignment and send your work to the professor

Lecture Notes and Workbook

[David Fraser] In Unit Six, Spiritual Aspects of the Disciplines, we emphasized the importance of laying a firm foundation in the grace and love of God as we pursue a disciplined spiritual life. A healthy grounding in God's grace supplies the balance, freedom and joy that protect disciplined spirituality from the pitfalls of legalism, self-righteousness, spiritual competitiveness and self-condemnation. The tasks of the spiritual life can only be undertaken safely within the context of God's infinite grace and mercy.

Some listeners might want to use the discipline of meditation, perhaps over the next year, to enter more deeply into the reality of God's grace. Ask yourself, "What parables, teachings and events from the life of Jesus can I enter into more deeply through the practice of biblical meditation that will nurture a deeper awareness and appropriation of God's grace in my life?" We suggest Peter Toon's *Meditating as a Christian* (HarperCollins, 1991) as a very helpful resource for learning to meditate on Scripture.

The Disciplines are Spiritual; they are also Hard Work

Henri Nouwen helpfully explains the relationship between the spiritual life as a gift and the spiritual life as hard work:

The spiritual life is a gift. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit, who lifts us up into the kingdom of God's love. But to say that being lifted up into the kingdom of love is a divine gift does not mean that we wait passively until the gift is offered to us. Jesus tells us to set our hearts on the kingdom. Setting our hearts on something involves not only serious aspiration but also strong determination. A spiritual life requires human effort. The forces that keep pulling us back into a worry-filled life are far from easy to overcome. (Nouwen, *Making All Things New*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, 80)

Think About It

Determination in the Spiritual Life

Nouwen speaks of the necessity of "strong determination" in the spiritual life. What role has "determination" played in your spiritual life? Are you reluctant to think of determination to change because of past failures? Are you intimidated or encouraged by the prospect of determining to change and the processes involved?

On a separate paper, list three specific areas of "determined" change and growth over the next two years where you sense God is calling you.

Why Such Hard Work?

[David Fraser] Perhaps we need to begin by asking why spiritual growth entails disciplined, hard work. We have spent years developing attitudes and habit patterns that continue to obstruct the extension of Christ's reign in our own life and in the world around us. This is particularly true for those of us who became Christians later in life. As we discussed in previous units, these deeply ingrained habit patterns do not change automatically upon our conversion. To a great extent, they remain part of us, primarily because of the "plasticity" of our embodied self.

Dallas Willard contends, for example, that the central nervous system of the body is directly affected by repeated actions. In a manner of speaking, we become what we continue to do day in and day out. This principle was true for Jesus himself. The incarnation, the Son's loving entrance into time, space and the human condition, inherently involved learning, struggle and suffering. "Although he was the Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered." (Hebrews 5:8) Paul describes this process of learning and growing through the language of sowing. Whereas in the past we sowed to our fallen nature, now in Christ we are exhorted to sow to the Spirit (Galatians 6: 7-9). Paul encourages us "not to grow weary" in our sowing, promising that perseverance and consistency will result in a rich harvest "if we do not give up."

Unit 7: “The Hard Work of the Disciplines”

The hard work of the disciplines aids us in hearing and obeying Paul’s counsel and deepening the work of God’s grace in our lives. As Foster puts it,

We do not need to be hung on the horns of the dilemma of either human works or idleness. God has given us the disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace. The disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us. (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 7)

The result of sowing to the Spirit through the means the Spirit provides is freedom. Freedom is the ability to respond with the love of Christ to the concrete circumstances of our daily lives. We will be able to do what needs to be done when it needs to be done because we are prepared.

Opposition to the Spiritual Life

What opposition will we face as we begin to seriously practice the spiritual disciplines? From without, the “corporate flesh” of the world will taunt us, branding us naive and infantile, needlessly wasting our time on worthless exercises. From within, ingrained habit patterns engendered over years will fight against our heart’s desire to change. And the devil will maintain a constant pressure, urging us to take an easier path.

The classical writers of the Christian tradition relentlessly insist upon the importance of a grace filled, disciplined life as a non-negotiable in spiritual formation.

C.S. Lewis, for example, warns against spiritual laziness. Issues neglected today, he warns, will only be more difficult to remedy tomorrow,

Laziness means more work in the long run. Or look at it this way. In a battle, or in mountain climbing, there is often one thing that takes a lot of pluck to do; but it is also, in the long run, the safest thing to do. If you funk it, you will find yourself, hours later, in far worse danger. The cowardly thing is also the most dangerous thing. (Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, 9)

Think About It

Taking the “Easy” Way

Do you agree with Lewis’ comment? As you consider your own life experience, can you identify three past decisions that you made because they appeared to be the “easiest” or “smoothest” path to follow? In the long run, did these decisions turn out to be much more costly than you had expected? In what way?

Write your answer on a separate paper.

Habit Formation

[David Fraser] We all struggle with the temptation to take the easiest path. This is the painless remedy, the shortest route to the attainment of spiritual growth and maturity. However, spiritual growth involves hard work. Frequently spiritual formation is demanding and strenuous. Often it entails discomfort, pain and the possibility of failure, so we avoid it, sometimes cloaking our laziness under the veil of a theological aversion to “works righteousness.” In our most honest moments, though, we realize the bad habits crippling our spiritual development are not surrendered easily. Hence, classical Christian works emphasize reflection on habit formation.

Augustine, for example, speaks of the human will as split in two by force of habit. Part of our will wants to react in obedience, but force of habit cripples our ability to respond.

It is therefore no strange phenomenon partly to will to do something and partly not to will to do it. It is a disease of the mind that does not wholly rise to the heights where it is lifted by the truth, because it is weighed down by habit. So there are two wills in us, because neither by itself is the whole will, and each possesses what the other lacks. (Augustine, *Confessions*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, 56)

Two Worlds, Two Minds

In other words, Christians find themselves living in two minds, as Os Guinness puts it. Our new mind in Christ fills us with a breathtaking new perspective toward this life and the life to come. Our old mind remains trapped in past illusions and lies. In some ways we are like fish that have developed lungs. We long for air to breathe but still find ourselves under water in this present world; in reality we are designed for another. To change metaphors, we find ourselves torn between two worlds, pilgrims who hear a call to journey toward home, but remain overloaded with baggage that weighs us down; we are continually tempted to set up permanent camp here.

Duffy Robbins, professor of youth ministry at Eastern University, illustrates this situation well. He was camping at a mountain lake and had decided to canoe for an hour or two one summer afternoon. The canoe rested in the water next to a wooden dock. Duffy, unwisely as it turns out, first untied the canoe from the dock and then stepped into it. His situation soon deteriorated. The moment he stepped into the canoe it began to move away from the dock. Duffy's other leg remained firmly planted on the dock. He quickly realized he had a decision to make. Either he could step quickly back up on the dock or he could release the security of the dock and place both feet in the canoe. Everything within him told him to remain on the dock. It was stable, safe, and dry. And yet if he remained on the dock he would never get where he wanted to go. As Duffy's legs spread farther apart, he knew he had to make a quick decision. Either he would remain where he was or he would leave the dock behind.

Augustine relates a similar situation, but on a deeper level. As he drew nearer and nearer to Christ, he sensed his "old attachments" still held him back from commitment. Would he be able to leave his old manner of life behind? "Habit was too strong for me when it asked, 'Do you think you can live without these things?'" (Augustine, *Confessions*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, 58)

Replacing Bad Habits with Better Ones

[Chris Hall] Unfair, you complain! I've been trying to change these bad habits for years and everything I've tried to break their power has failed. Can't you offer me some concrete suggestions? Fair enough. Perhaps Thomas à Kempis can help us. He counsels us to replace ingrained habits with better ones,

At first this will be difficult. Long-standing habits will resist, but they will be vanquished, in time, by a better habit—if you persevere! . . . It is hard to give up old habits, but it is even harder to go against one's own will. Yet, if you cannot overcome small, trivial things, when will you overcome difficult ones? Fight the urge when it starts, and break off bad habits, lest perhaps, little by little, they lead you into greater trouble. Oh, if you could only know how much peace for yourself and joy for others your good efforts could bring, I think you would be more anxious for spiritual growth. (Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, 152)

Think About It

Replacing Bad Habits

Thomas à Kempis exhorts us to replace bad habits by better ones. You have already identified three bad habits stunting your spiritual growth. What good habit might effectively begin to counteract the influence of each of the bad habits you've identified? Identify at least three. Secondly, as Thomas advises, formulate three concrete, "little" steps you could take in the coming month to overcome one of these bad habits.

Write your answer on a separate paper.

The Pressure of a Foreign Mold

[Chris Hall] As we begin to take specific steps to change our habit patterns, we quickly discover that our bad habits have not been shaped in a vacuum. Our patterns of living have

been influenced by our bad choices, family influences, peer pressure and our broader culture. Many habit patterns have been formed unconsciously. Maybe we need to ask ourselves the question, “Why do I do the things I do?” What do I think I am gaining through repeatedly following a given pattern of behavior? Have I found the help or fulfillment I was searching for? The “corporate flesh” around us insistently subjects us to the pressure of a foreign mold. “If you simply buy this product, obtain this position or sleep with this person, you will find the happiness you’ve been searching for.” And yet, as Teresa of Avila aptly observes, few people in the world appear to be genuinely happy or contented.

Teresa also notes that, not only does the “corporate flesh” around the Christian community continually attempt to force us into a foreign mold, but demonic realities oppose the Christian’s effort to change bad habits into good ones. She particularly notes that the devil focuses demonic attack upon those who are beginning to take spiritual formation seriously. Teresa comments,

But, oh, my God and Lord, how everything is ruined by the vain habits we fall into and the way everyone else follows them! Our faith is so dead that we desire what we see more than what faith tells us about—even though what we see is that people who pursue these things end up with nothing but misfortune!

...Only the great mercy of God will preserve us. The soul will certainly suffer great trials at this time, especially if the devil sees that its character and habits are such that it is ready to make further progress: all the powers of hell will combine to drive it back again. (Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, 165)

Think About It

Spiritual Opposition

Identify three aspects of your culture’s broader value system that you have pursued. Have you found the attainment of your goal to be unsatisfying and illusory? What of the issue of spiritual opposition that Teresa mentions? Perhaps as you have begun to work your way through these units on spiritual formation you have encountered opposition of various kinds. How has opposition manifested itself? What steps have you been taking to overcome it? Have you been succeeding or failing?

Take an hour to write in your journal about the specific issue of spiritual opposition.

Changing our Habits of Thought

[Chris Hall] Thankfully, as Teresa’s comments show us, we are not the first people in the church’s history to encounter spiritual opposition and the difficulty of changing ingrained habit patterns. Others in our community’s history have also struggled to leave the past behind, to cultivate new habits to replace deeply ingrained old patterns and to engender strategic responses to the attacks of the devil. Thomas Kelly, a Quaker writing in the mid-twentieth century, offers extremely helpful advice to those attempting to change habits of thinking.

First, Kelly urges us to develop “internal practices and habits of the mind” and wraps these practices around the centrality of worship. He speaks of the “basic response of the soul to the Light” (a common Quaker expression for God) and particularly focuses on the importance of “internal adoration and joy, thanksgiving and worship, self-surrender and listening.” Kelly writes,

What is here urged are secret habits of unceasing orientation of the deeps of our being about the Inward Light, ways of conducting our inward life so that we are perpetually bowed in worship while we are also very busy in the world of daily affairs. What is here urged are inward practices of the mind at deepest levels, letting it swing like the needle, to the polestar of the soul. (Thomas Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, 174)

Think About It

Awareness of God

Take a close look at the events of your day, right up to the present moment or consider the events of yesterday. Have there been specific junctures during the day when you found your mind turning to God? Why? What was there about these times that particularly drew you to an awareness of God, prayer, or worship? What daily events, people, attitudes or habit patterns seemed to turn your mind away from the awareness or worship of God?

Try to be as specific as possible in identifying daily factors that move you closer to or farther away from God.

Habits that Nurture the Inward Life

[Chris Hall] Were you surprised, encouraged, or frustrated by your analysis of how your daily habits, patterns, events, and personal encounters influence your awareness of God? How can we learn to train our inward compass needle to swing perpetually toward our divine polestar? Kelly teaches us "mental habits of inward orientation must be established" and mentions the example of Brother Lawrence. Kelly suggests the following exercise as a good beginning for shaping new habit patterns that orient and nurture our inward life toward God,

Begin now, as you read these words, as you sit in your chair, to offer your whole selves, utterly and in joyful abandon, in quiet, glad surrender to him who is within. In secret ejaculations of praise, turn in humble wonder to the Light, faint though it may be. Keep contact with the outer world of sense and meanings. Here is no discipline in absentmindedness. Walk and talk and work and laugh with your friends. But behind the scenes, keep up the inward worship. Let inward prayer be your last act before you fall asleep and the first act when you awake. (Thomas Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, 176)

Kelly warns us that the first weeks of this exercise in developing a continuing awareness of and attentiveness to God are "awkward and painful," but also "enormously rewarding,"

Awkward, because it takes constant vigilance and effort and re-assertions of the will at the first level. Painful, because our lapses are so frequent, the intervals when we forget him so long. Rewarding, because we have begun to live.

Don't allow lapses or failures to discourage you. As Kelly puts it,

When you catch yourself again, lose no time in self-recriminations, but breathe a silent prayer for forgiveness and begin again, just where you are. Offer this broken worship up to him and say: "This is what I am except Thou aid me." Admit no discouragement, but ever return to him and wait in his presence. (Thomas Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, 207-208)

Kelly's advice is applicable to the practice of any spiritual discipline, and particularly to disciplines we are beginning to practice for the first time. Remember that grace, love, hard work, humility and a certain lightheartedness are at the center of healthy spiritual formation. Don't take yourself or your mistakes too seriously.

Beginning to Practice a New Habit

Kelly speaks of learning to attend simultaneously to God and the world around us. As he puts it, "we must develop the habit" of "ordering. . . .our mental life on more than one level at once." Does this seem unrealistic to you? Try the following exercise over the next week. While observing your normal pattern of activities and responsibilities, repeat inwardly a favorite phrase from the prayer book of Israel, the Psalms. Perhaps "the Lord is my shepherd" would be a good start. At first you will have to be quite deliberate in repeating this prayer. As you work at this exercise during the week, however, Kelly believes this prayer will descend into your

consciousness in such a manner that you will continue to recite it—almost subconsciously—while carrying on the normal routines of the day.

Think About It

After working on this exercise throughout a week, record your observances and comments in your journal. Get the exercise off to a start by practicing this prayer for the next fifteen minutes.

The Habits of Christ

[Chris Hall] The development of a new habit doesn't occur easily, does it? In the beginning stages habit formation can seem forced and artificial because we must be very intentional in our efforts. Some will want to give up quickly—especially those of us who thrive on spontaneity, intuition, creativity and freedom. What we must see, however, is that spontaneity and freedom always operate within a broader conceptual framework, a set of habits and presuppositions that often go unrecognized. In spiritual formation we purposely address these underlying patterns—all deeply ingrained within us—and ask whether they are nurturing or obstructing our growth into the image of Christ. Kelly insists, I think rightly, that adoration and worship flow out of a fundamental awareness of and moment-by-moment orientation toward God. Did you find his approach too mystical or foreign to your experience, partly because of his use of Quaker terminology (God as “the Light”)? If so, try applying E. Stanley Jones's more down to earth approach to habit formation this coming week (cf. *Devotional Classics*, 281-87). Jones comments that Jesus “did three things by habit”,

1. **Read and Study**—Jesus continually read and studied the Scripture. On the basis of Jesus' example Jones encourages his reader to develop “the habit of reading the Word of God daily, preferably in the morning.”
2. **Prayer**—Jesus had developed the habit of prayer.
3. **Sharing**—Jesus passed on what he had learned to others. (*Devotional Classics*, 302) Jones argues that Jesus reflects “a law of the mind. . . .If you don't share it, you won't have it. . . .If you don't sow it, you will have nothing to sow. Those who do not pass on to others are themselves empty. The converted convert, or they don't stay converted. Unless you are evangelistic, you don't remain evangelical.” (Jones, *Conversion*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, 282)

Think About It

Bible Study, Prayer and Evangelism

Jones specifically mentions Bible study, prayer and evangelism. What healthy habit patterns have you developed in these three areas? In what three ways are these aspects of the spiritual life built into your daily routine? Are you more attracted to one of the three than the others? Which of the three do you find the most difficult? Why?

What two new habits can you develop to nurture your ability to function in these areas?

The Goal of Spiritual Formation

[Chris Hall]: As we draw this unit on the “hard work” aspect of the spiritual disciplines to a close, we do well to remind ourselves of the purpose of the spiritual life. The goal of spiritual formation is neither to become a disciplined person nor to fall in love with the disciplines themselves. Rather, the goal is to experience Christ formed within us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Willard goes so far as to say that “the activities constituting the disciplines have no value in themselves.” Willard writes,

The aim and substance of spiritual life is not fasting, prayer, hymn singing, frugal living, and so forth. Rather, it is the effective and full

Unit 7: "The Hard Work of the Disciplines"

enjoyment of active love of God and humankind in all the daily rounds of normal existence where we are placed. The spiritually advanced person is not the one who engages in lots and lots of disciplines, any more than the good child is the one who receives lots and lots of instruction or punishment. (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 138)

In fact, Willard argues, the need to practice a spiritual discipline is a sign of weakness to be accepted in humility, not a sign of strength and surely not something to boast about.

People who think that they are spiritually superior because they make a practice of a discipline such as fasting or silence or frugality are entirely missing the point. The need for extensive practice of a given discipline is an indication of our weakness, not our strength. We can even lay it down as a rule of thumb that if it is easy for us to engage in a certain discipline, we probably don't need to practice it. The disciplines we need to practice are precisely the ones we are not good at and hence do not enjoy. (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 138)

As you work your way through the material ask yourself, "Which disciplines am I attracted to? Which strike me as unattractive or irrelevant?" It might well be the latter to which you should devote the most attention.

Email Assignment

When you have completed the readings, the workbook exercises and journaling, and practiced the spiritual discipline, submission, then complete the following assignment.

On one page, write a response to the following question: Think through the specific habits you follow week-by-week and year-by-year to live closely with God. Perhaps you are disorganized and don't have a very regular pattern. That is your habit pattern. Or perhaps you follow a routine for prayer, for community and for study. What do those habits look like? Sketch out a portrait of your major habits that you have been following for the last few years. Then begin an evaluation of them. Are they nourishing your current life with Christ? Do you see practical and real progress in growth in grace and graciousness? Is your character and are your abilities to minister becoming measurably stronger? In other words, what have you been doing to grow in Christ in the past few years and what have been the results?

On a second page, write a response to the following question: You've been thinking in this unit about how challenging it is to keep at the spiritual life. What would you see as the chief issues, challenges and opposition to your significant progress in moving to another level in your spiritual life? Are those primarily external matters (world and devil) or internal (flesh)? Which challenges can you address and change at this time? Which are matters that lie beyond your control? Are there ways of gaining control? What do you need to do at this moment to stop making excuses and start taking specific steps that will make a clear difference in the nurturing and growth of your life with Christ?

Readings

Discipline in Focus: Submission

The Freedom in Submission

1. Foster writes (in *Celebration of Discipline*, Rev. and Expanded ed.) that every discipline has its corresponding freedom. What is the corresponding freedom found in submission? "It is the ability to lay down the terrible burden of always needing to get our own way. The obsession to demand that things go the way we want them to go is one of the greatest bondages in human society today. People will spend weeks, months, even years in a perpetual stew because some little thing did not go as they wished. They will fuss and fume. They will get mad about it. They will act as if their very life hangs on the issue. They may

even get an ulcer over it.” (111) “Only submission can free us sufficiently to enable us to distinguish between genuine issues and stubborn self-will.” (111)

2. The biblical teaching on submission “focuses primarily on the spirit with which we view other people.” (112) This spirit has to do with mutual subordination rather than hierarchical relationships. Those who are to lead are exactly those who have learned to submit to others; leadership as the result of submission and service rather than ambition. When we have attained the freedom to place the other person above ourselves, we no longer have to be the center of attention. We can now enjoy that person for who she/he is. It is within this posture that we will receive the gift that person has for us. It is also within this posture that we can safely address issues in our brother or sister’s life that we perceive, precisely because we have learned to submit. Giving up the need to have our own way, then, leads to a willingness to serve and clarity of vision. Foster puts it this way:

In submission we are at last free to value other people. Their dreams and plans become important to us. We have entered into a new, wonderful, glorious freedom—the freedom to give up our own rights for the good of others. For the first time we can love people unconditionally. We have given up the right to demand that they return our love. No longer do we feel that we have to be treated in a certain way. We rejoice in their successes. We feel genuine sorrow in their failures. It is of little consequence that our plans are frustrated if their plans succeed. We discover that it is far better to serve our neighbor than to have our own way. (112)

Within the context of submission it becomes possible to understand and follow Jesus’ command to love and pray for our enemies and to turn the other cheek. (Matthew 5:44, Matthew 5:39)

The Touchstone of Submission

1. The touchstone of submission is found in Mark 8:34. “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Self-denial is not self-hatred. Rather, self-denial “is simply a way of coming to understand that we do not have to have our own way. Our happiness is not dependent upon getting what we want.” (113) It is not a loss of self-identity. Did Jesus lose his sense of self-identity as he made his way to the cross? Self-denial is not self-contempt. “Self-contempt claims that we have no worth, and even if we do have worth, we should reject it. Self-denial declares that we are of infinite worth and shows us how to realize it.” (114) “He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.” (Matthew 10:39)
2. How is self-denial related to self-pity and self-indulgence? “When we live outside of self-denial, we demand that things go our way. When they do not, we revert to self-pity—‘Poor me!’ Outwardly we may submit but we do so in a spirit of martyrdom. This spirit of self-pity, of martyrdom, is a sure sign that the discipline of submission has gone to seed. This is why self-denial is the foundation for submission; it saves us from self indulgence.” (114) (self-indulgence, self-gratification is getting what I want when I want it)

Revolutionary Subordination as taught by Jesus

1. “The most radical social teaching of Jesus was his total reversal of the contemporary notion of greatness.” (115, cf. John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*). Leadership is found in becoming the servant of all. The foremost example of this servanthood is the cross. (Philippians 2:8) Jesus lived not only a “cross death but [also] a cross life” (his relations with women, washing the disciples’ feet, welcoming children, willingness to suffer and die). “It is impossible to overstate the revolutionary character of Jesus’ life and teaching at this point. It did away with all the claims to privileged position and status. It called into being a whole new order of leadership. The cross-life of Jesus undermined all social orders based on power and self-interest.”(116)
2. Mark 8:34 – “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

Unit 7: "The Hard Work of the Disciplines"

Mark 9:35 – "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all."

John 13:15 – after washing the disciples' feet – "I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."

The cross life, then, is a life of voluntary submission, of freely accepted servanthood.

Revolutionary Subordination as Taught in the Epistles

1. Paul's teaching to the Philippians in Philippians 2:4-7.
2. Peter also uses the example of Jesus when he calls for submission. (1 Peter 2:21-23) Before Paul teaches on the Christian household, he writes: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Ephesians 5:21)

It is absolutely fundamental to remember that all Christians are called to the posture of submission. . . . We are commanded to live a life of submission because Jesus lived a life of submission, not because we are in a particular place or position in life. Self-denial is a posture fitting for all those who follow the crucified Lord. (117)

The Limits of Submission

Note that there is a type of submission that is destructive. ("a denial of the law of love as taught by Jesus is an affront to genuine biblical submission." Cf. Matthew 22:37-39) Peter and Paul call for submission to the state (1 Peter 2:13-14, Romans 13:1) and yet when the disciples are ordered by authorities to stop preaching the gospel, they refuse. Acts 4:19-20, Acts 5:29; God must be obeyed first)

They simply understood that submission reaches the end of its tether when it becomes destructive. In fact, they illustrated revolutionary subordination by meekly refusing a destructive command and being willing to suffer the consequences. (120)

What might be examples of destructive submission? Note the importance of dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

The Acts of Submission

Because submission and service "serve concurrently," more practical advice will be given in the discussion of service. Foster gives 7 acts of submission.

- Submission to God—our will to God's will.
- Submission to Scripture. Hearing and obeying. Submitting to Scripture's authority
- Submission within the family. "The primary deed of submission is a commitment to listen to the other family members. Its corollary is a willingness to share, which is itself a work of submission."
- Submission to neighbors and those whom God in God's providence brings into our lives.
- Submission to the body of Christ. Again, the focus is on little acts of service.
- Submission to the broken and despised. Who are the despised in your arena of service?
- Submission to the world God has created; part of our stewardship as made in the image of God. Environmental responsibilities? The homeless and poor? The hungry? "Our act of submission is a determination to live as a responsible member of an increasingly irresponsible world."

Spiritual Formation

Unit 8

Person, Place and Provision



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Unit 8: Person, Place and Provision

Unit 8 Contents

- Learning Outcomes and Steps to Complete Unit 8
- Lecture Notes and Workbook
- Email Assignment
- Readings: Discipline in Focus: Celebration

Learning Objectives

- Carefully analyze your conception of "the good life."
- Explore the concept of human "personality" and begin to identify the significant habit patterns operative in your own life.
- Investigate your areas of spiritual giftedness and their relationship to your personality.
- Take a personal inventory.
- Explore to what extent you have been influenced by the "curse of the big deal."
- Record significant "monuments" of God's provision in your life. Note how God's provision has been linked to your spiritual giftedness, vocation and gift of years.

Steps to Complete Unit 8

Your reader for Unit Eight is Discipline in Focus: Celebration. Celebration is a joy-filled festivity that overcomes apathy, melancholy and deadness. It is the activity of high-spirited freedom and pleasure that comes as we find more mastery in our lives because of the disciplines we practice. We celebrate with others when we experience the sheer delight of God's grace and love bestowed upon others and us.

Read...

- From *Devotional Classics*, pp. 19-25 (Jonathan Edwards); pp. 123-135 (Gregory of Nyssa); and pp. 264-270 (Catherine of Siena)

Respond...

- Complete your journaling assignments. Consider the questions that come out of the reading on Edwards (*Devotional Classics*, p. 23-24). The ability to celebrate through laughter and joy is rooted in our affections, which are the springs of our motivation and our loves. Think through your life and ask where you find the most delight, joy and celebration. What brings that gift into your life? How might you expand such areas of celebration? Check your life for areas of pleasure and joy.

Complete the final email assignment and send your work to the professor.

Lecture and Notes

A Positive Goal

[David Fraser] In our previous unit we discussed the difficulties of spiritual formation. Spiritual formation is difficult because it entails the reformation and occasional eradication of our deeply ingrained habit patterns. These habit patterns are antithetical to the extension of the kingdom of God in our own lives and through us to the wider world. If we are not careful, however, at this juncture in this course, we will too easily lose our vision of the forest because of the large oaks staring us in the face. The specific obstacles or roadblocks that we seemingly can't move beyond will hinder us. We can easily become obsessed with specific habit patterns. Some of these patterns are indeed sinful and need to be changed by the grace of God. If we do not change them, we lose sight of the larger goal of formation into the image of Christ.

At this point, an exercise focusing on a positive goal might be helpful. If we were to ask you to define "the good life," a life well lived, how might you respond? What would characterize a life lived well? How might the "world" (the corporate flesh around us) answer this question?

Think About It

The Good Life

Every culture and sub-culture carries a concept of the most satisfying, most broadly admired, most desirable sort of life experience. Males and females often see this in different ways. Your own encounters with biographies, the news media, the responses of your parents and peers, your own involvement in education and various work settings, even advertising and movies, have instilled in you a portrait of what "the good life" looks like. Some of you may even have feelings about your own biography—that your life is somehow not turning out according to "the" pattern. Or you may even feel it is turning out that way—and yet... there is something fundamentally missing.

Clarify for yourself what you think to be the "good life." Here it is important to be sure self-deception is not at work. This is not asking you to give the "spiritual answer" or the "correct" answer according to your Christian community. Give the answer you feel deeply within your spirit. What is your sense of what the "good life" is all about? What components does the good life involve? What would your life be like if the good life were happening this week? (Write your answer in your journal).

The "Good Life"

[Chris Hall] Richard Foster mentions "there is a general cultural confusion today about the Good Life." North American culture seems to define the good life primarily in terms of material abundance. For example, it is not uncommon to be told that one must follow certain financial trajectories to attain financial security. What is deceptive in this message, however, is the unjustified conclusion that financial security inevitable leads to well-being. Foster writes,

. . . Given the popular notion of abundance, it is almost impossible to believe that God is good and that His desire is to fill our lives with His goodness. In the modern world the Good Life is often identified with power, wealth, status and freedom from all authority. We have today two systems of teaching about the abundant life that are diametrically opposed to one another. The one system has its roots in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Both claim to bring us into the Good Life, and we must underscore the fact that their teachings are mutually exclusive. We will never see the classical disciplines of the spiritual life as a good thing until we perceive their function of bringing us into the abundant life of the Kingdom of God. And we cannot see this until we are able to understand how life under God and in His kingdom is truly good and ultimately fulfilling, as opposed to the 'good life' of human

invention. (Richard Foster, *Study Guide for Celebration of Discipline*, 11-12)

I remember sitting in a friend's home near San Francisco, reading an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* [newspaper] that quickly elevated my anxiety level. It stated that if by the age of forty I had not reached a given level of financial success, my chances for security and fulfillment were in grave jeopardy. At the time, I had just left a well-paid pastoral position at the foot of the French Alps. My wife and I had sold many of our possessions, left close friends overseas, and severely dipped into our savings so that I could return to graduate school. We had sensed strongly God's direction and providence in our decision. Yet many folks in the world around us would have thought us crazy. I heard two voices as I sat reading the *Chronicle*. One voice said I was foolish, financially irresponsible, and jeopardizing the welfare of my family. The other said, "Continue to trust me."

Six years later, I experienced a similar anxiety when I was about to complete my doctoral studies. "Professors," I said to myself, "make so little." No full-time jobs were available. My children were asking me if we would ever be able to live in a house. I felt anxious and fearful. I again sensed two kingdoms stretching me in opposite directions. One kingdom warned me that I needed to protect myself; it claimed that my safety and fulfillment depended on greater my financial assets. Didn't I realize I was growing older? What had I actually accomplished with my life? No house. No savings. No job.

A Different Kingdom

Simultaneously, though, I continued to hear the gentler voice of a different kingdom and different king. This voice reminded me that vocation, the call by God to perform a given task, was more important than the acquisition of many possessions. The voice reminded me that formation of Christian character was of greater value than the pursuit of prestige and security. It claimed that learning to love might be the most significant task of all. Paul's words to the Galatians came to mind: "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." (Galatians 5:6)

Might I find "good life" in the sacrifices discipleship demands? What of Jesus' words in Mark 8:34-36?

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? (Mark 8:34-36, NRSV)

How was it that Paul, writing to the Philippian church from his imprisonment, radiated great joy? Though Caesar might soon condemn him to death, Paul still wrote:

But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you—and in the same way you also must be glad and rejoice with me. (Philippians 2:17-18, NRSV).

Joy seemed to be popping up in the most extraordinary places and circumstances in the biblical narrative.

I had forgotten the surprising character of "the good life" as scripture relates. In my anxiety and self-absorption, I had overlooked the remarkable people in my own life who demonstrated the same perspective. Take, for example, Mary S.

Mary's Example

During my years in graduate school I worked as director of pastoral care at New Jersey's only state gero-psychiatric hospital. As you might imagine, pastoral work in a gero-psychiatric setting is exhilarating, depressing, exciting, tedious, humorous, tragic, frustrating and fulfilling. Often I experienced all of these contradictory emotions as I moved through the day!

Mary S. was a patient at the hospital. At the end of a long day I received a call that my hospital had transferred Mary to a local intensive care unit. Her heart was failing, and it appeared she had only a few hours to live. The last place I wanted to visit that day was an

intensive care unit. The pain, suffering and confusion I had witnessed in the lives of my friends at the hospital increasingly grated on my faith. Many died alone in mental and physical anguish. Where was God in all this tragedy? Did God care? Was God simply having a series of bad days? Perhaps a horrible lapse in memory? What was I really accomplishing as a chaplain?

As I drove to visit Mary in intensive care, I felt my faith slowly seeping away. What did I have to offer her? A faithless prayer? Hollow words of encouragement? In all probability she wouldn't even recognize or understand me through the cloud of her schizophrenia, cancer and medications. As darkness fell, the road I was traveling seemed a lonely tunnel to nowhere.

Upon arrival at the hospital, I greeted the I.C.U. staff and found my way to Mary's room. My last vestiges of faith drained away as I entered her room. Apparently Mary, in moments of confusion, had attempted to rip out her numerous IV's. The nursing staff was forced to restrain her arms and had tied them loosely to her bed's railing. A respirator pumped air methodically into Mary's mouth and throat. She looked terrified, bewildered, pain-filled and terribly alone. And who was there to offer her comfort, encouragement and prayer? There I was, a faithless chaplain who, at that moment, seriously questioned the existence of God.

I walked to Mary's bed, held her hand for a brief moment and mumbled a dead prayer. I radiated unbelief. Mary had stared at me with what I interpreted as despairing eyes since I entered the room. As I turned to leave, she started to wave one of her restrained hands, indicating she wanted to write a message to me. I had learned during my psychiatric work that patients had an uncanny ability to spot dishonesty. Great, I thought to myself. Mary had intuited my insincere love and wanted to chew me out. So be it.

I resignedly attached a piece of paper to a clipboard and held it near Mary's restrained hand. She began to write unevenly, frustrated by the linen sheet wrapped around her wrist. The minutes passed slowly to the periodic hum and thump of the respirator. Finally, she stopped writing. I turned the clipboard toward me and began to read her message. I fully expected to find an expletive laced note condemning my hypocrisy and insensitivity. A fitting ending to a bad day, I thought to myself. Mary's message read:

I love my Jesus. Thanks for the visit.

Your Jesus loves you, too.

I'm blessed. Thanks be to God.

The respirator continued to hum and thump. Mary's damp, bulging eyes still looked terrorized. In a moment of graced clarity, though, Mary had seen clearly while I remained blind. Was Mary experiencing the same joy Paul experienced while in Roman chains?

I make no attempt to romanticize Mary's suffering nor do I thank God for it. Yet I learned that night that the good life is not limited to the rich or to the powerful. It is also not limited to those who sleep in silken comfort, to the healthy or to those whole in mind and spirit. In fact, Mary taught me that we can find the good life, the life of the Spirit, in the most unlikely places. These places include the slums of Calcutta, the jungles of Ecuador, the prisons of Iran, the killing fields of Rwanda and in the hospital room of a dying schizophrenic. Indeed, might we not miss the good life because we fail to recognize and comprehend its contours, rhythms and rhyme? Do we fail to enter the good life because our expectations for that life have been forged in a foreign kiln? Perhaps we are simply looking in the wrong direction. Henri Nouwen writes,

Indeed, Jesus speaks through the broken hearts of the handicapped, who are considered marginal and useless. But God has chosen them to be the poor through whom he makes his presence known. This is hard to accept in a success- and production-oriented society. (Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak*, 19)

A Different Path

[David Fraser] Most of you are Christian leaders who have been engaged in significant and sacrificial ministries for many years. These words about the nature of the "good life" are not new for you. Perhaps ten, twenty or thirty years ago you chose to follow a path of service you realized from the beginning would entail suffering and renunciation. Yet, under the stress of prolonged Christian ministry, it is possible to lose focus. Our initial clarity of heart becomes fogged by disappointments, unforeseen demands on our time and energy, and unexpected tragedies—perhaps the loss of a spouse or child. As time passes the existential realities of life

corrode our deepest convictions. We grow weary, disillusioned and in danger of "burn-out." We long to regain our original sense of commitment and conviction but can't seem to find our way back to the beginning. We still hold certain basic values and presuppositions to be true, but our deep sense of call to Christ has become less easy to hear after the passage of the years. We have sacrificed. We have chosen to identify with the poor. Poverty is an everyday reality. The possibility of the "good life" seems a far distant reality.

Others of us struggle with patterns of sin that continue to plague us, including ill-temper, laziness, greed, mean-spiritedness and lust. Ingrained habits of sin defeat us repeatedly. Hence, we need to form new habits and reforming old ones as we grow spiritually.

The Inward Person

Richard Foster employs the concepts of personality, place, and provision as helpful pegs on which to hang important concepts concerning growth in the good life of the kingdom. (cf. Richard Foster, *Study Guide for Celebration of Discipline*, 12-15) Foster defines personality as "the inward person, expressed in certain determinate ways or ingrained habits."

As Foster views matters, here is a central problem. Many of these ingrained habits "defeat us over and over again." Both Richard Foster and Dallas Willard insist that both the formation of new habits and the breaking of old ones are key to spiritual formation. Foster writes:

It is at the level of ingrained habits that the main work of redemption occurs so far as the transformation of our lives is concerned. If we are going to experience the Good Life, certain deeply embedded habits are required. Conversely, to have an abundant life, there are certain ingrained habits from which we need to be liberated. Since our slavery occurs mainly at the habit level, our freedom is discovered primarily at this level. In short, I am speaking of power, power from God which enters the life and transforms the habit patterns. (Foster, *Study Guide to Celebration of Discipline*, 14-15)

We have reached a key juncture in our discussion. Perhaps the sole entrance to the good life is through a pattern of life Foster describes as "voluntarily accepted and consciously chosen," a course of action that encompasses both the individual Christian and the community of the church. "Yes," you reply. "I hear the call to discipleship and long to experience the good life, but I'm fighting the same struggle as the apostle Peter. My 'spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak.'" (Matthew 26:41) That is precisely Foster's point.

Scripture teaches, Foster insists, that Jesus did not expect Peter's struggles to continue ad infinitum. Rather, substantial healing and growth were a real possibility for Peter and remain so for us today. Scripture gives concrete instruction "on how the flesh can be brought into a working harmony with the spirit in obedience to the ways of God and in the context of contemporary life." How? Through learning and adopting a new manner of life specifically designed to form habits within us that sow to the Spirit's work.

[David Fraser]: How is the question of personality or character related to spiritual gifts and stewardship? Paul stresses, for example, that the Holy Spirit has gifted each believer with spiritual abilities or talents to be exercised for the benefit of the church and the extension of Christ's kingdom. (cf. Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, Ephesians 4:11-13)

Jesus teaches that God will hold us accountable for how we have used the gifts God has given us, whether these are material prosperity or spiritual gifting. In the parable of the talents, for example, the Master distributes different amounts of money to his servants and quite evidently expects them to invest it wisely (Matthew 25:14-30). Note that the Master in the story does not expect the servant who was given two talents to act as though he had received five. He doesn't ask the servants to compare what they had received and to compete with one another to gain his approval and approbation. The Master asked only that they be faithful and wise with what they had been entrusted.

At the close of the parable the Master condemns only one servant. Why? Not because he was unsuccessful, but because of the servant's laziness and fear. (Matthew 25: 24-27) The servant failed to use wisely the gift God had given him within the time God had allotted. To use an earlier metaphor, the servant had squandered his gift of years. The servant's gift fails to bear

fruit because the servant's character faults, in this case laziness and fear, undermine his willingness and ability to invest fruitfully his Master's money.

Stewardship of Gifts

The stewardship of our gifts, then, occurs as we exercise them within the context of our own personalities, and this poses a problem. The disciple of Christ is both a steward and a sinner. If this is the case, faithful discipleship entails more than exercising spiritual gifts well. In fact, the discovery and cultivation of spiritual gifts apart from a corresponding unveiling of the strengths and weaknesses of our personality is a dangerous activity.

Spiritual gifts operate safely within the context of self-awareness, an awareness of the patterns, good and bad, that dominate our thinking, impulses, and actions from day to day. (cf. Bunyan, *Devotional Classics*, 213-19) If we remain blind to habitual patterns of behavior, our ministry to others can easily be destructive rather than life-giving.

Behaviors That Cripple

[Chris Hall] Roberta Bondi's discussion of the "passions" helps us understanding the patterns of behavior that so often cripple our desire to love and serve. Bondi writes,

Love has space to grow within us only as each of us learns to recognize, root out, or discipline within ourselves the conglomerate of obsessive emotions, attitudes, desires, and ways of acting that the monastics called 'the passions.' It is these passions that blind us in our dealings with ourselves, each other, and the world, and so pervert perfectly good and useful impulses which take away our freedom to love. (Bondi, *To Love as God Loves*, 57)

Bondi explains that for the desert monastic communities, a "passion" might be a strong emotion, but not always. It could also be a "state of mind" or "habitual action." Passions are destructive because they rob us of our freedom to love. Bondi comments,

The passions blind us so that we cannot love. They create for us interior lenses through which we see the world, lenses we very often do not even know are there. When we are under the control of our passions, even when we think we are most objective, we cannot be—we are in the grip of emotions, states of mind, habits that distort everything we see. (Bondi, *To Love as God Loves*, 65)

We will return to analyze more deeply the passions and human personality in our discussion of self-deception. One of the tasks of Jesus' ministry, particularly in his relationship with the twelve disciples, was to gently but firmly reveal to them the nature of their sinful character and the "passions" that influenced their lives. Why? So that when they began to minister after Christ had left them, they could serve others safely rather than destructively.

Peter's Example

Take, for example, the apostle Peter. How might Peter's destructive patterns of behavior have crippled his future ministry if left unchallenged? What was Christ teaching Peter about his fallen personality during the three years they spent together?

Peter's Growth in Self-Awareness

We can follow Peter encountering the Lord to revealed things not only about Jesus but about Peter himself. In each case, what was the Lord seeking to teach Peter about himself? What are the lessons we can learn from Peter's experience? How do you think you would have responded if you found yourself in the same situation? Respond in your journal.

- Peter's attempt to walk on the water (Matthew 14:25-31)
- Peter's rebuke of Jesus at Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:21-28)
- Peter's refusal to believe Jesus' prediction that he would deny him three times (Matthew 26:31-35)
- Peter's response to the slave girl who claimed to recognize him as a disciple of Jesus (Matthew 26:69-74).

A Name Change

[Chris Hall] Interestingly, both Peter and Paul underwent a name change after encountering Jesus. During his days as a Pharisee Paul had been known as "Saul," the name of Israel's first king. After meeting the risen Christ on the Damascus road, we find Paul invariably referring to himself with the Greek name *Paulos*—"little one." Paul's self-understanding changed drastically after meeting Christ. In his own thinking he was a "little one," given a specific task to fulfill by Jesus. Peter, too, is given a new name. He was Simon but now will be called *Petros* ("rock"). We often call him Simon "Peter," using his old and new name to designate him. The new name was a way of Christ's acknowledging the changes that were beginning and would continue. Jesus renamed Simon "Peter" long before substantial changes in his character occurred. (Matthew 16:17-18)

Place

[Chris Hall] As Christ gently shapes our personality into his image, we can more effectively comprehend the related topics of place and provision. What do we mean by "place?"

All believers have a need to feel at "home"—that set of relationships and tasks that gives coherence, meaning and purpose to our lives as human beings and Christians. (cf. Foster, *Study Guide for Celebration of Discipline*, 13) What have you perceived your niche to be? What is the particular area of expertise and service God has gifted you to make your contribution to the extension of the kingdom?

Comparing Ourselves

[Chris Hall] As we noted, our ability to function joyfully and fruitfully as Christian leaders depends on our understanding of the "good life." It seems an infection has infiltrated the evangelical bloodstream, particularly for those of us raised in a North American context. To use an expression of Richard Foster, many of us have been contaminated by the "curse of the big deal," a crippling distortion of Christ's call to the good life. We idolize Christian celebrities. We adulate "successful," beautiful believers. And we subtly tell ourselves that if we don't have a speaking-teaching gift, we are second-rate leaders at best. Indeed, many of us have experienced moments of discouragement as we compared the results of our ministries and leadership with those of well-known Christian personalities.

Think About It

The Curse of "the Big Deal"

We have explored your idea and your culture's idea of the "good life." For many, this involves being "successful" in a dramatic way. "Christian" leaders tend to move from smaller ministries to larger, to look for larger salaries, more visible and widely known places. Some feel nothing is happening in their life if they are not part of a large project, a large meeting, a large movement. How about you?

Explore the extent to which you have been influenced by the "curse of the big deal." How has a misconstrued idea of the "heroic" affected your spiritual life and level of discouragement or self-deception? Answer in your journal.

Insignificance and Significance

[Chris Hall] We all want others to recognize us. Often the model of the "successful" Christian leader is the individual on the celebrity "circuit," speaking frequently, writing best-selling books and perhaps producing a television show. The wisest writers on spiritual formation, though, highlight the small, apparently insignificant acts and circumstances as the place where the most important work is accomplished. When we overlook the significance of the insignificant we ultimately harm both ourselves and others, on an individual and corporate level. As Francois Fenelon comments:

It is not elevation of the spirit to feel contempt for small things. It is, on the contrary, because of too narrow points of view that we consider as

little what has such far reaching consequences. (Francois Fenelon, quoted in Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 136)

Do we mistakenly think only the accomplishment of the "big deal" is the mark of Christian leadership? Roberta Bondi warns,

Often we Christians individually and collectively fail to take responsibility for relieving social evils like poverty, hunger, war, or racism because we think so much in terms of the enormity of the task and the smallness of anything we could do to relieve it. What is one blanket contributed to a night shelter if a hundred are needed? How can putting ten homeless people in the church basement on cold nights make any difference compared to the need—especially when the church down the street is putting up fifty? That we even fall into this temptation to substitute thinking big for looking for the small steps we can actually perform is itself the result of forgetting the goal of the Christian life, which is to love God and neighbor—the specific, particular individual neighbor in need, as well as whole groups of neighbors we have never met. (Bondi, *To Love as God Loves*, 48)

Place and Provision

[David Fraser] Finally, how are place and provision related? We believe God will always provide us with what is needed to accomplish God's call on our lives, whether this provision is money, time or courage alone. God will never call us to a certain place, provide us with the gifts and abilities to accomplish the work of the kingdom of God in that place and then fail to give the material, emotional and spiritual support we need to accomplish our task.

At first glance these statements might seem both comforting and unrealistic. Perhaps this is because we tend to view provision monochromatically rather than polychromatically. North American culture, for example, usually defines provision in terms of material abundance; the more we have the better off we are. While material provision can be a sign of God's blessing, to limit provision to material abundance is short-sighted. If provision is viewed through only one lens—monochromatically—we are likely to remain blind to the varied ways God provides for us and the link between Christ's provision and our particular task in extending the kingdom. A polychromatic understanding of provision might look something like this,

- A. God first provides a gift of years in which we exercise our spiritual gifts and fulfill the tasks of our vocation.
- B. Then God provides for our needs as the years pass with their varied circumstances—triumphs and defeats, tests and challenges.

Viewed polychromatically, God's provision will manifest itself within the context of our gift of years, our spiritual gifting and natural abilities, and our specific tasks and vocations in extending the kingdom. The provision made for the martyr called to die in the jungles of Ecuador will differ from the provision given to the person called to develop a business over a lifetime. Thus, provision includes spiritual and emotional components as well as material ones. For some, for example, this might mean that God will provide the courage, faithfulness and insight to perform a given task. When the task is completed, our journey as pilgrims and stewards of the kingdom is over, at least within the boundaries of the present life.

Economic provision will vary. Jesus might call some of us to a life of identifying with the poor—perhaps even to a vow of poverty. Others might be called to a life of short, intense ministry. God's provision will vary accordingly. The fundamental principle? Provision will be provided for the specific place to which God calls us and for the needs of the particular personality in and through which God chooses to work.

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Email Assignment

When you have finished all the readings, workbook exercises, and journaling of Unit 8, write a response to the following two questions:

On one page, write out clearly an honest snapshot of your character and personality: What kind of person am I? What are the dominant patterns and habits that structure the way I live and relate to people?

On a second page, reflect on issues of place and provision: What are my major gifts? Where do I feel most at home? What's my special niche, the distinct contribution God is calling me to make to the kingdom? What provisions do I possess or need to seek in order to maximize that gifting and calling?

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Readings

Discipline in Focus: Celebration

Celebration is a festive, joyous jubilation, an expression of the delight we feel as slaves made free, as debtors released from their burden, as blind persons who have received their sight, as those who have received the best possible gift available to humans.

Celebration expresses a sense of pleasure, enjoyment and delight. For example, it happens when we see a person who has mastered a skill and demonstrated it by an outstanding performance: the athlete who breaks a world record, the piano player who wins a competition, the child who has learned to ride a bicycle for the first time. It is time for a party! It is an expression of freedom from anxiety or care.

Paul tells us we are to rejoice always in the Lord. Instead, we see many burdened with anxiety, filled with heaviness and numbed to the spirit of joy God sends upon God's people. Celebration happens when we sing, dance and laugh with each other. Weddings and christenings are times of celebration that come readily to mind. Yet we have too little celebration in the corporate life of the Church.

In part, we take ourselves and our own small achievements too seriously. We substitute the small pleasures and false achievements of our world for what God offers to us. We have loved the transient and the creature instead of the Creator. When we have lost what we put our hopes and longings into, we have been distressed and frustrated.

Why does evil appear so attractive? A number of responses could be given. Dallas Willard, in *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, focuses on those who are repelled from the faith by Christians who have:

- "unfeeling, stiff, unapproachable, boringly lifestyles, obsessive, and dissatisfied" (p. 80). "At times a lesser good might be foregone in light of a new task to be learned or attitude to be cultivated, but the overall attitude of the spiritual life is to be one of joy and satisfaction as creatures made in the image of God live under his rule in his kingdom. That which is "unspiritual" is not the body and its created legitimate needs. Rather, it is a way of living that proceeds "without regard to its place in the spiritual rule of God through his creation" (p. 80).
- "Such failure to attain a deeply satisfying life always has the effect of making sinful actions seem good. Here lies the strength of temptation. This is no less true if the failure is caused by our efforts to be what we regard as 'spiritual.' Normally, our success in overcoming temptation will be easier if we are basically happy in our lives. To cut off the joys and pleasures associated with our bodily and social existence as 'unspiritual,' then, can actually have the effect of weakening us in our efforts to do what is right. It makes it impossible for us to see and draw strength from the goodness of rightness." (p. 80)
- "'Spirituality' wrongly understood or pursued is a major source of human misery and rebellion against God." (p. 81)

Compare: Agnes Sanford's thoughts on the minister who finally falls into some grave sin: "the minister did not remember that he was dust...as God so mercifully does." He failed to take

into account the needs of his body, which for a while "wanted to forget all about God and play golf." (Willard, p. 81) We are not made to be "on go" all the time. Strength comes to us only in the rhythm of serious, disciplined hard work followed by celebration, party and laughter. It is interesting to remember that one of the virtues expected from those wishing to serve in Mother Theresa's order is joy.

At this juncture, the discipline of celebration comes to mind. (Willard, pp. 179-181f) "It is the completion of worship, for it dwells on the greatness of God as shown in his goodness to us. We engage in celebration when we enjoy ourselves, our life, our world, in conjunction with our faith and confidence in God's greatness, beauty, and goodness." (p. 179)

Willard writes:

Celebration is not the whole life or discipline of the faithful, and it requires supplementation and correction by the rest of a balanced practice. But this world is radically unsuited to the heart of the human person, and the suffering and terror of life will not be removed no matter how "spiritual" we become. It is because of this that a healthy faith before God cannot be built and maintained, without heartfelt celebration of his greatness and goodness to us in the midst of our suffering and terror. "There is a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance" (Ecclesiastes 3:4). (p. 180)

Listen to Uncle Screwtape's rebuke of Wormwood (from C.S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*) for allowing his "patient" to read a book he really enjoyed and take a walk in the country that filled him with joy:

In other words, you allowed him two real positive pleasures. Were you so ignorant as not to see the danger of this? The man who truly and disinterestedly enjoys any one thing in the world, for its own sake, and without caring two pence what other people say about it, is by that very fact forearmed against some of our subtlest modes of attack. You should always try to make the patient abandon the people or food or books he really likes in favor of the "best" people, the "right" food, the "important" books. I have known a human defended from strong temptations to social ambition by a still stronger taste for tips and onions.

We've won many a soul through pleasure...All the same, it is His invention, not ours. He made the pleasures: all our research so far has not enabled us to produce one. (quoted in Willard, p. 181)

Remember Michal's response to David dancing before the Lord in the Ark, 2 Samuel 6? David was so ecstatic that he sang and danced before the Lord with all his might. His royal wife watched him from the balcony window and despised him. She thought he made a fool of himself, so engrossed was he in dancing before the Lord. He wasn't modest enough before the young women in the crowd.

Might it not also be true that those who close themselves off from joy and healthy pleasure also shut themselves off from the pain and need of others? The adjectives cold, brittle, uncaring and compassionless belong together. Note the many feasts on the church (ecclesiastical—Roman Catholic and Episcopal—more liturgical denominations) calendar—celebrating God's actions on our behalf and in us. To be sure, some ways of celebrating carry us farther from God rather than stronger in God. The Mardi Gras or Fat Tuesday celebrations just before Ash Wednesday are often no more than occasions for getting drunk or acting immorally.

Yet even the sinful use of feast days acts as a reminder that we were made for joy. The Bible suggests that what leads to joy is obedience. The secret of a happy Christian life is doing the will of God. The end result of engaging the spiritual disciplines is not exhaustion and grimness. Rather it is a joy that cannot be pushed into some small corner of life.

Celebration is a corporate discipline where we learn how to express our joy and how to enjoy the abundant gifts and pleasures God created. This world is a carnival of sights, sounds and surprises. When we no longer can be moved to tears or to dancing, something has died inside us.

Foster suggests a number of practices to encourage celebration:

Unit 8: "Person, Place and Provision"

1. We need times where we dance, sing and shout. This can be part of special worship services but it ought to find its way into other times in the community of faith as well. When children are happy, they are noisy!
2. Laugh. We need humor, jokes and comedy. Wholesome laughter seems to have healing effects in the life of people.
3. Accent the creative gifts of fantasy and imagination. Children seem more naturally to let themselves and their minds go, to have fun in games and art. We need to celebrate the creativity of others and allow ourselves the enjoyment of entering into the fun worlds of others.
4. Family events such as thanksgiving, Christmas or even special milestones in life (securing a new job, a promotion or raise, the finishing of a major project) can be occasions for joyous celebration.
5. Take advantage of your culture's festivals. We need not act as though they have been made captive to the world's agenda and the devil's business. We can creatively and joyously take them captive for Christ and fill them with the joy of God. This is what seems to have happened to both Christmas and Easter, whose dates coincided with pagan festivals.
6. We can create our own mini-extravaganzas, bringing the art, music, creativity and fun of our body of believers into an event of fun and celebration of the gifts God has given to the body. An arts festival can feature the creativity and work of many more than simply the professionals.

Spiritual Formation
Unit 9
The Cardinal Sins:
Radical Solutions for Radical Sins



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Unit 9

The Cardinal Sins: Radical Solutions for Radical Sins

Unit 9 Contents

- Learning Outcomes and Steps to Complete Unit 9
- Lecture Notes and Workbook
- Email Assignment
- Readings: Discipline in Focus: Simplicity

Learning Objectives

In this unit, you will:

- Become reacquainted with the traditional Christian concern with sins that are the root or magnet for many other sins, sins that came to be considered "cardinal" sins.
- Consider your own tendencies and vulnerabilities to these cardinal sins.
- Begin to develop responses to those areas where you are weak.

Steps to Complete Unit 9

Read...

- Reader for Unit Nine: Discipline in Focus: Simplicity
- *Devotional Classics*, pp. 65-72 (Merton); pp. 136-142 (Calvin); pp. 251-257 (O'Connor); and pp. 288-294 (Sundar Singh)

Respond...

- Complete the various journaling assignments.

Complete the final email assignment and send your work to the professor.

Lecture and Workbook

[David Fraser]: Unit Nine focuses on cardinal sins, also known as the seven deadly sins. Christians throughout the centuries have identified cardinal sins as particularly powerful, persistent and pervasive.

In Unit Eight, we considered the allurements our various cultures offer us in their vision of the "good life." We also examined our personalities in terms of habit patterns and giftedness and considered the place God calls us and the provisions God makes for our activity in those places. We reviewed the reality that personality, place and provision fit together. They fit together in a way that, as we live with God, we find all we need in order to do God's will in God's good time. Spiritual formation is a matter of allowing God to transform our personalities as we undergo dynamic transformation.

Unit Nine considers the most subtle—and powerful—sins that seem to slip into the highest levels of Christian leadership, spoiling much of what has taken years to build.

The Tragedy of Moral Failure

We may be "preaching to the choir" when we talk about cardinal sins to a group of dedicated, active Christian leaders. After all, we assume Christian leaders live at a place far along discipleship's path. We suppose the growth of Christian leaders in grace and faith should have taken them beyond matters of cardinal sin.

Unfortunately, we have experienced too many disturbing breakdowns by the people who serve in leadership positions: competent, compassionate, gifted men and women who slam into a moral wall at 600 miles an hour, failing in front of the very people they have been seeking to engage in the Kingdom of God.

None of us can begin to think of ourselves as immune to the tragic blandishments of sin. Sin is not found simply in the grubby pickpocket or in the criminal decisions made in the offices of large corporations. Sin is also not limited to the sexual abuse of children, the blinding genocide of ethnic hatred, drug trafficking or the small cruelties of marriage that lead to divorce. Sin is incomprehensibly attached to the very good things we seek to do for others. It is like a parasite that hitches a ride in the circulatory system that nourishes our body. Yet, now that circulatory system becomes the conduit of sickness and trauma.

The early pastoral wisdom of the Christian movement sought to identify a short list of sins that seemed particularly perverse, persistent and pervasive. This list has some variation, but there has been a common agreement across many centuries that these sins are among the most serious. Their seriousness has to do with their ability to grow in the most sacred gardens as well as in the vilest ones. We do not have to be debauched or demonic sinners in order to fall victim to these sins which attach themselves to our inner selves. Drawing strength from what seem to be the best of motives and the best of God's gifts to us, they slowly squeeze life and light out of our existence.

Cardinal sins are the center of many other sins. Each cardinal sin opens a door in our being that allows six more sins to enter. They are also cardinal in that they threaten our eternal wellbeing. In modern times, they are more frequently called the seven "deadly" sins. They are not minor infractions or flaws. The Roman Catholic tradition considers cardinal sins "mortal" because they exclude people from heavenly bliss if people do not confess them and repent. Cardinal sins are major issues, whether or not we agree with the Catholic assessment.

Seven Deadly Sins

In the reading section of this unit, we have provided a brief overview of the seven deadly sins. Be sure you have read the section before going further, specifically noting the chart. We have used, in the first column, the most characteristic name of each sin. In the second column, you will find a short, incomplete definition of each sin. The third column tries to characterize what it might mean to abstain from the sin. It answers the question, "If I'm not being prideful, what am I doing?" The fourth column tries to characterize what is involved in doing the contrary of the sin, not just abstaining. In the case of pride, for example, I am not simply abstaining from prideful behavior; I am engaging in behavior that models positively how we as humans ought to be in that area of life. I am cheering the success of others; I'm building up the importance of others, and I'm feeling pride in the accomplishments of others.

Take sloth, another example. Sloth is inertness, an idleness or indifference to life. It is the inactivity that comes with being completely unmotivated. We remain active if we abstain from sloth. In our activity, we exercise the virtue of fortitude by doing significant work, even when we do not feel like it. In one sense, we protect ourselves from sloth when we refuse to withdraw from ordinary affairs, and we keep busy with everyday affairs. Yet busyness is hardly the ideal. Positively, we are well outside sloth when we are energetic, highly motivated, joyfully and pleausurably engaging our activities in a purposeful way. The contrary of sloth means we enjoy being active and find satisfaction in accomplishing things. We care deeply about life and are busy in life’s affairs.

Think About It

Please study the pages on “The Seven Deadly Sins” in your Reader.

[Chris Hall]: Kierkegaard once wrote: “Christianity did not come in order to develop the heroic virtues in the individual, but rather to remove self-centeredness and establish love.” The cardinal sins are all manifestations of our self-centeredness. They highlight our need to continue to learn to love as God loves. The spiritual disciplines are therapy for our sin-sick souls; they are paths that enable us to bring to the surface deeply rooted sins of which we were unaware. The disciplines allow God to give us the grace to change.

Pride

Pride has been seen by many as the great root sin of all sins. Adam and Eve were tempted by the promise they could become like God if they ate from the forbidden fruit.

In the modern world, pride has an ambiguous status because it is—or can be a synonym for both negative and positive character. It can mean self-respect, self-confidence, dignity or self-esteem, but it can also mean arrogance, haughtiness, egotism, vanity and conceit. Here, we are thinking of pride in its negative meanings.

The absence of sinful pride is known as *humility* and *modesty*. Yet in our time these two virtues of humility and modesty have their own negative associations: servility and obsequiousness, self-effacement, social withdrawal and self-victimization. We have been using humility and modesty in their positive senses as an appropriate realism about who we are. This realism prevents us from overestimating our talents, insight or place within the world and the Kingdom of God.

Gregory the Great set pride at the head of the list of the cardinal sins, seeing it as the root of all the other evils. The essence of pride was, as Gregory put it, an arrogance wherein a person “favors himself in his thought, and walks... with himself along the broad spaces of his thought and silently utters his own praises.” (Lyman, 136)

The Root of All Other Evil

The English author Chaucer considered pride to be the root of all other evils. He listed its various forms:

- overweening pride found in malicious disobedience to the commandments of God,
- boastfulness about the harm or the good the sinner has done,
- hypocrisy in concealing the bad and pretending the good,
- maliciousness in scorn for neighbors and also for the precepts governing righteous conduct,
- arrogance in beliefs about his own good nature and high station,
- impudence in disdain for moral instruction and a complete lack of shame over sins,
- insolence in refusal to acknowledge the judgments of others, elation in a refusal to submit to a master or recognize an equal,
- contumacy [indignant refusal to obey or comply] in an indignant hostility to every authority,
- presumptuousness in undertakings,
- irreverence in withholding honor where it is due,
- pertinacity [stubbornness, obstinance] in defense of follies, and

- overconfidence in wit, babbling in an ever-constant stream of ego-inflating conversation.

Pride is an exaggerated estimation of oneself; it is an expression of conceit. It shows itself in boasting, swaggering, arrogance, snobbery, exclusiveness, vainglory, impudence, pleasure in doing harm, ostentation, self-elevation, patronizing or neglecting others.

To the prideful, the works and achievements of others are displeasing. The prideful find satisfaction only in what they have done. Other people consider proud people disdainful. To the proud, honors offered by others seem trivial, coming from people who do not recognize true greatness. The proud are, in the end, supremely self-sufficient egos.

In fact, we sometimes talk of pride as egotism, the valuing of everything in relation to one's personal interest, a self-centeredness accompanied by a denial of the relevance and value of other people. Egotism is a self-proclaimed exaltation of oneself. Pride is a type of narcissism, a complete self-absorption that turns away from others and enters into the small world of oneself.

Ways Pride Manifests Itself

- *Pride in adornment*, the presentation of self that must be just so. The adornment enlarges and intensifies the impression of the self. In medieval times the problem was male preening, the overly expensive and elaborate clothing that accentuated the male body and physical sexuality, eliminated by the Protestant work ethic and French revolution when men came to dress simply and modestly while women were made into objects of beauty. The male body was no longer considered an object of beauty and desire. Instead, women received that honor.
- *Pride of knowledge*, the encouragement of meritocracies, the aristocracy of talent. Here people believe their knowledge is superior; they believe they no longer need to listen to voices in the past, or to contemporaries. They do not want different perspectives on knowledge. We may be prideful because of our education, or we may identify those who we should listen to on the basis of their education.
- *Pride of position*, where persons who become Principals or Presidents, Bishops and Chief Executive Officers think of themselves as more important and worthy of more consideration than others. While we often talk about servant leadership in Christian circles, often the reality is that a leader considers others his or her servants, rather than serving others.
- *Pride of race and nationality* rears their ugly heads in our day as in history. It shows itself through missionaries who consider themselves superior to the people they serve. It is also evident in Christians whose identity as a Zulu or a Xhosa, a Hutu or a Tutsi, a Bosnian or a Serbian is more important than their identity as a child of God.
- *Pride of possessions*, where wealth marks our own sense of importance.
- *Pride of achievements*, the desire for temporal immortality and fame, to produce a monument that will outlive the short life span we have on earth, is seen in the desire to live after death in our children, our works, or our accomplishments, whether the accomplishments are good or evil. Pride of achievement is a madness born out of pride.

We could add to this list, but it is enough to begin to suggest the various ways in which we become infected with the transient matters of this age and its powers, instead of being infused with the Spirit of God. We repeat the sin of Adam and Eve by wanting to be more than God has made us to be.

[David Fraser]: Pride is a particularly difficult danger zone for most of us. I found as I went through this exercise that I had more danger zones in pride than any of the other following danger zones. My colleagues and students have repeatedly told me pride is one of the chief areas where Westerners fail repeatedly and consistently. Deeply instilled with pride of culture, technology, history, race and education, we are often unaware of ways in which we are arrogant and prideful.

Perhaps your issues are found here but in a different manner. In the West, we often find we have socialized women in such a way that they lack proper self-esteem and initiative. They feel themselves to be worthless and inferior and need a proper sense of their dignity and worth before God. We men in church and Christian circles are still in the process of learning how our

overweening pride and arrogance damages generation after generation of gifted and talented women.

G. K. Chesterton once wrote, "The one spiritual disease is thinking that one is quite well. If the Spirit of God has given you a vision of what you are apart from the grace of God, you know that there is no criminal who is half so bad in actuality as you know yourself to be in possibility." As we move through these sins, we should not be surprised to find we have the spiritual disease of thinking ourselves quite well.

Greed

The second cardinal sin is greed. In its most general sense, greed refers to an inordinate desire, an insatiable longing for the possession of something. It is a sin that has to do with an improper love of possessions, a distorted relationship to things. Greed is associated with the excessive eagerness to accumulate wealth and obtain money. The avariciousness that accompanies greed is often inflamed by competition. We are stimulated to greed by emulating the wealthy and rich. But greed incredibly has no limit. It engenders a permanent restlessness, a desire for more and more and more.

As we were working on this unit, the long rule of Mobutu Sese Seko was coming to an end. Incredibly, he accumulated an estimated personal fortune of \$5-6 billion dollars through his greedy plundering of Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo). When is enough, enough? Or, what about the greed that took over at the giant corporation, Enron, leading to its disastrous downfall.

Mammon and Money

Greed produces a nagging apprehension that what one has or gets is not enough and never can be enough. The particularly sinful quality of avarice is portrayed as a shift from the worship of God to the worship of money (mammon). Money is capable of taking on a peculiar and demanding sacred quality that makes it competitive for our ultimate allegiance. Just as religion is capable of inspiring powerful and vivid passions, enabling people to undertake dramatic sacrificial or ascetic actions, so money has the same capability. The love of money births treachery, fraud, deceit, violence, perjury, social conflict and hatred. No wonder Paul says that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. (1 Timothy 6:10)

Greed is capable of establishing patterns of undivided commitment, all-encompassing behavior and total absorption of an individual or group's personality. Accumulation is an expression of the desire to secure one's life against insecurity, to ensure immortality, to gain power and status. The miser hangs onto money; the spendthrift spends beyond necessary for nonessential things.

Types of Greed

1. *Avariciousness* stresses greed for riches and often implies miserliness, clinging to resources instead of sharing with others.
2. *Acquisitiveness* suggests excessive effort in accumulating wealth or material possessions. Many individuals focus life energy and career hopes on moving upward financially. Pastors hear the voice of God calling them to larger and wealthier churches. People chaff at having less than their peers and complain that God is shortchanging them.
3. *Covetousness* is, perhaps, greed's most general manifestation. Covetousness is a longing, a strong desire for what one does not yet have. Often it refers to a particular greed for something that another rightfully possesses. What they have, I want.

Greed distracts us from what is important in life, distorting our vision, giving us a false image of our needs. It narrows our vision and imagination as it did for the man who built larger barns to hold all the materials of his abundant harvest—he couldn't imagine what else to do! (Luke 12:13-21)

Greed's opposite positive is glad gift giving that aids others in need and strengthens the initiatives of the Kingdom of God. The person who is liberated from greed demonstrates the qualities of *generosity* and *liberal heartedness*, both expressions of the virtue damaged by greed. Greed's opposite is giving from one's own storehouse.

[Chris Hall]: As many of us have discovered, we don't have to be rich in order to be assaulted by greed's power. This insatiable longing afflicts even the monastery with its vow of poverty. What did you discover as you thought honestly about the place of greed and covetousness in your life? Do you find your identity tied up with a certain life-style, a certain achievement of material comfort and security? Jesus warned repeatedly about the dangers of the love of money. Wealth is a threat to our ability to enter the kingdom of heaven. We have often not taken greed seriously enough in Protestant circles.

Sometimes we confuse what Jesus really wants us to do. We use professional or full-time Christian ministry as a means for acquiring money and power in this life instead of a means to serve Christ and his Kingdom. We wrap our own greed into a career of Christian ministry, always on the hunt for a larger paycheck and a larger crowd to pay attention to us.

I think of the words of C.S. Lewis, "When I invited Jesus into my life, I thought he was going to put up some wallpaper and hang a few pictures. But he started knocking out walls and adding on rooms. I said, 'I was expecting a nice cottage.' But He said, 'I'm making a palace in which to live.'" The palace Jesus is building is made up of us, our lives, not some large house or secure bank account. Part of knocking walls out and adding on rooms is aimed at our greediness.

Lust

The third cardinal sin we want to consider is lust, a widely acknowledged sin in the Christian tradition. In the West, lust is thought to be an almost equivalent to an uncontrolled desire for sex. Lust marks the boundary between the controllable and the spontaneous, the spirit and the body, the rational and the irrational.

Part of the problem concerning lust is that it seems independent of the will. Unruly, lust happens even when we don't want it to happen. Lust seems to have a mind and a will of its own. It is the experience with the independence of lust within us that makes it seem so dangerous. Lust appears even more difficult to master than other sorts of sin.

We all see how people with the best of intentions have broken the moral guidelines aimed at limiting lust. Great Christian leaders have fallen victim to lust, they have irreparably damaged marriages and churches because of the uncontrolled yearning for intimacy and sex.

The Christian tradition has made marriage the place for sexual satisfaction, while often holding abstinence as the highest ideal and best life. Abstinence considers postponement of sexual relations for all unmarried individuals reasonable and pleasing to God.

Lustful Behaviors

Lust inhabits many forms of behavior, including virtually any sexual behavior outside heterosexual marriage. Lust may destroy the life of the individual engaged in its practice as well as the lives of others. Lust can become an all-consuming obsession, interfering with interests, energies and duties necessary for life.

Lust is not genuinely interested in its partners; it is primarily concerned with appeasing an appetite for sex that we are unable to subdue. It is a desire to satisfy and gratify the senses, an unrestrained passion and an overmastering desire that breaks the boundaries of legitimate sexual expression. Lust leads to cruelty and exploitation, the seeking of intimacy without an intention to sustain the relationship. Rape is one of the most dramatic forms of sexual lust, as much a matter of power and control as it is sexual. We are surrounded by an advertisement and entertainment industry that has discovered how weak we are in this area. We are bombarded by images and innuendoes that attempt to reach beyond our self-control; we act out of our lust rather than out of our love.

If pride reflects too much regard for oneself, lust reflects disregard for the other.

Chastity and Marriage

As is the case in all the cardinal sins, there is a positive alternative to lust. For the single person, chastity is the positive alternative to lust. Chastity is the healthy and wholesome experience of one's own sexuality without a passionate longing for sexual relationships outside marriage. Chastity is experiencing contentedness in having extra energy and time for other people, and for God. Married people do not have the same time and energy.

For the married person, the positive alternative to lust is the growing intimacy that expresses itself in sexual oneness with a marriage partner. Here, too, we find contentedness marked by a sense of not being driven or distracted by sexual temptation. It is a freedom from leading a double life, one that leads to frequenting prostitutes or fantasy worlds of pornography and entertainment.

Think About It

Lust

List places where lust has space in your life, whether it be an inner restlessness and dissatisfaction over your current sexual situation, or some habitual practice that brings you to lusting in your heart in ways you know displease God—or even some parallel or double life you are now living that is driven by lust. Think about places of ministry that might throw you into relationships and situations where you sense temptation beckoning because of your own vulnerability.

What are you doing to bring a sense of control over lust in your life? What do you do when you sense the pressures of this inner power beginning to assert itself? Is your approach effective? Are there things you effectively avoid or places that provide healthy intimacy and fulfillment? Think about the positives. Where do the positives cut across danger zones?

Reflect and answer in your journal.

[David Fraser]: John Wesley once wrote, "It was a common saying among the Christians of the primitive church, 'The soul and body make a person; the spirit and discipline make a Christian.'" This is nowhere truer than in the matter of lust. We cannot help being sexual beings. God made us sexual beings in order that we might be imagers of God's divine character and activity here on earth. We do that as male and female. Our Christlikeness is expressed, to some extent, in how we live out our sexuality. Our sexuality is a critical measure of how we orient ourselves in our attitude and concern for one another. It is stunning to begin to try to think of Jesus as a lustful male, pursuing women because of a disorderly yearning for sex. He simply was not like that! And yet he was a man, a sexual being just like we are. In the midst of our struggles with our sexuality, we need to remember Jesus and his example of chastity and contentment.

We have now taken you through three important cardinal sins. *Pride, greed and lust are disorders of our relationship to power, money and sex.* Traditionally the Church has recognized these as among the most important shaping forces of human life. In the Catholic Church, the *vows of obedience, poverty and chastity* were meant to provide the most thoroughgoing and ultimate paths of discipline. Obedience meant the breaking of prideful self-assertion and seeking power over others. Poverty meant leaving behind any acquisitiveness and covetousness, any desire to define one's worth in terms of money. Chastity gave to God all the possibilities and rewards of married sexuality as a holy sacrifice so time and energy could be dedicated to the work of the kingdom.

The Protestants dealt with these areas but under a different vision. They did this through proper order in community life, with *accountable leadership* and the respectful acceptance of responsibilities in the place of pride. As far as greed was concerned, Protestants focused on the *industrious engagement* in productive work that benefited the community and provided resources for the needy. For lust, they spoke of *fidelity*, faithfulness in committed marriage as the ordinary rule of life.

Three More Sins to Study

We are not going to spend the time to develop each of the remaining cardinal sins as we have the first three. You will find on the following pages descriptions of gluttony, envy and anger. Following each written description is a time for reflection, where we ask you to list the zones of danger and the positive self-engagemenst present in your life as you deal with those sins. Read

the descriptive pages concerning each of these three sins and then write out your own response to each one, reflecting upon yourself.

Gluttony

The glutton is one who exhibits almost insatiable desire and enormous capacity for engorgement. Normally this means gluttony in eating and drinking. But we also say so-and-so is a glutton for work or for punishment. Gluttony is also related to addictions and addictive behavior to the point where a person is so fixated on some pleasurable good of human life that it becomes out-of-balance.

Gluttony is excessive and greedy absorption in the immediate appetitive pleasures of the self. True gluttony relates to our free choice of action, that is, when we have the ability to decide to indulge or abstain. In contrast, addictions are compulsions that are beyond our full control. We may have entered the addiction voluntarily but now have lost the capacity to choose.

Addictions range in severity from eating for "comfort" rather than to fill a physical need, to repeated overindulgence in alcohol, resulting in an individual who can no longer even "choose" due to a compelling and controlling power that has developed internally. The person who is occasionally drunk still can choose *not* to be drunk. The alcoholic has lost control and needs a major intervention to change his behavior. The alcoholic has lost control and needs a major intervention to change behavior.

The glutton is one who elects to gorge. Gluttony is a form of fleshly overindulgence, sinful because it indulges the body at the expense of the mind, soul and neighbor. Gluttony is a form of self-absorption related to seeking more intense pleasure by gorging on something meant to satisfy a normal appetite.

One check on gluttony has been the culturally specific physique ideals (the lithe, strong, fat-free body). Those individuals considered obese or fat have been reviled as gluttons in Western cultural ideals. But this is not always a good measure of the glutton. Cultural ideals vary and in some cultures, the well proportioned, "full-figured" are idealized. And there are some who are large beyond their control.

The glutton is a person who pays more attention to cuisine than to basic life concerns; who eats too fast, chews too little, eats at times other than regular meals, eats far more than is acceptable. The glutton may be the person who is satisfied only with gourmet food and drink. Food and drink have come to define the person's identity as they demand the luxurious or the exotic. Such a person may be angry or discontent when food or drink is not up to some standard of excellence.

Binge drinking, another manifestation of gluttony, is the habit of drinking alcoholic beverages to extreme excess in order to become completely "stone drunk." Binge drinking violates temperance and moderation.

Gluttony does not savor. It devours. It finds pleasure not so much in taste as in amount. Gluttony's self-destructive side takes in amounts dangerous to health and balance. Gluttony is a careless attitude toward life and beauty, the insatiable desire for more.

Positive alternatives to gluttony are *sobriety* and *temperance*. These virtues do not waste food or take pleasure only in the exotic or the gourmet. People who practice sobriety and temperance consider food and drink gifts from God. We can enjoy them to satisfy legitimate appetites, and to maintain health and energy for the Kingdom of God. Fasting is a discipline aimed at exposing the degree to which we are habituated to bodily satisfactions. Fasting can also be aimed at other obsessive, overly indulgent habits—such as gluttony in the use of computer games, the internet, television, gambling etc.

Envy

Envy is the discontentment we feel when we perceive another person possesses some object, quality or status we value but do not own. We compare ourselves unfavorably to another and our self-esteem is impugned, our desire frustrated. Envy relates to our pride when someone gains power, recognition, or fame that we desire. We feel envy even when the person is not to blame for our lack.

Envy emerges out of the dual experience of covetousness and impotence: you experience or possess something I value yet I cannot secure for myself. Comparisons are the

source of great discontent. Envy is rooted in the perception of differences in possessions, valuing that which one does not possess combined with the inability to obtain it. Envy sees another as having what we long to possess while realizing we are impotent to acquire it.

Envy can be a form of protest to the injustice of the world. Those who enjoy prized things do so without right and those who lack are deprived without justice. Yet most frequently envy is not a matter of justice at all. Envy seeks satisfaction simply by depriving the other of the prized good (if I cannot have it, neither shall another!) even if they deserved the good in the first place.

Envy relates to scarcity, things prized but not widely available. Beauty makes one sought after while another sits on the sideline. High intelligence and elite education parades itself in another while I am stung with the shame of a less quick mind and an inferior status degree. Envy lurks in my spirit when a friend is invited to a party and I am not. I may live for years in the shadow of a successful brother or sister. Envy constantly gnaws at my spirit with discontent as I strive to overtake and outshine my successful sibling.

Envy is different from emulating others, admiring their excellence and wanting to work hard to achieve. Envy is a hostile attitude. The success of others is felt a slander to one's own ego and worth. I wish the other harm, failure, or obscurity, even when that harms brings me non good. I can't stand someone else having more or better than I have.

People who are afraid of envy (the evil eye in some societies) avoid ostentation or conspicuous displays of wealth. They keep from displaying their success and achievements lest those displays stimulate envy in another and the inevitable gossip and actions to pull down the successful.

Envy is even present between the genders. Being male or female, we look at the other and see their advantages in social arrangements. We resent and are discontent at the limitations of our gender and wish to have the freedoms and powers of the other. As two genders relate to each other, a host of envies and jealousies, winners and losers, abound.

Envy is discontentment or ill feelings toward another because of that person's advantages or possessions. Greed is directed toward things; envy is directed toward other people. Envy forms when we believe the other person's advantage or possession diminishes or brings disgrace upon us. It is the feeling of being inferior and resenting the people who show us that lack in ourselves. In the parable of the prodigal son, the elder brother felt an immobilizing envy at his younger brother's treatment.

The positive virtues that counter this vice are *contentedness* with what we have and are, and the *honoring of others* who are worthy of honor. Envy is negated when we celebrate the gifts, achievements, and good fortune of others. In love we long for others to achieve and then emulate their good qualities and success. We don't trivialize their importance or success. Rather, we hold them up as models and experience joy because of their good fortune.

Anger

Anger is one of the most common and destructive sentiments in the modern world. Anger is a response to humiliation, a defense of self in the face of actual or impending loss of esteem. It is a response of hostility and fury when some highly valued good is injured or threatened. Anger may indicate someone has improperly crossed a boundary and unjustly harmed a right of yours. It may also be an expression of a pride-filled ego that is not getting its way.

We have many words for anger: irritation, ire, wrath, hostility, rage, fury, resentment, malevolence, hatred, prejudice, paranoia, etc. Turned inward, anger becomes grief, sorrow, bitterness and even depression.

Anger is a feeling that results from being injured, mistreated or opposed. Rage is a violent outburst of anger in which self-control is lost. Fury is an overwhelming rage of such a frenzy that it borders on a sort of madness. Indignation is righteous anger aroused by what is unjust. Wrath is deep indignation with the desire to punish or get revenge. Anger is a sin when it erects barriers between others and us, especially those who wish to express their love and support to us. Self-destructive anger is especially dangerous, where the wish is to hurt oneself.

Anger blames. It awakens the powers of the self to mobilize for battle. It longs to vent, to spew words meant to wound in revenge for the pain it has felt. Children blame parents and parents blame children. Colleagues feel their person and rights are not adequately recognized

and they seethe with resentment. Anger shouts when we've been betrayed just as irritation grumbles when someone butts in line ahead of us. We are angry and live in an anger-filled world.

Anger is linked to many of the other cardinal sins, particularly pride and envy. It is aroused by greed and lust. It may strike out in violence and hatred. Its destructive power is well known. An angry tongue can set a whole social network on fire.

Christian thought, in line with biblical statements, acknowledges that anger is not always sinful. It may be a justified response against evil or a signal that injustice has happened. God is portrayed as angry at the damage done to creation by the sinful rebellion of his creatures. Part of godliness is learning an anger that is not selfish, capricious, petty or damaging in its expression. Yet much anger is an expression of folly and self-interest. Even when we are angry for the right reasons about the right things, we may engage in sinful actions. When anger is considered as a cardinal sin, the concern is with its danger and abuse.

Given our tendency to self-deception and rationalization, a fine line exists between justified and unjustified anger. We are often unaware of anger's true motives. Nor are we wise in our response to the perpetrator of an injury that has angered us. Once aroused, anger spins out of control.

We live in a culture that encourages anger by espousing pride, instilling competitiveness and speaking long and loud about our rights. High material and status expectations make us very susceptible to anger since they lower the threshold of tolerance for perceived injuries. We are pampered and told to stand up for our rights. When things don't go right, we are taught to fix the blame on someone or some system.

Warfare is often an expression of anger. Public territory, organized as the modern state, is the stake, the environment, and the theater of operations for warfare. Collective anger can lead to great conflict over slights. Home places are established and defended angrily, making anger and violent cruelty common bedfellows.

To oppose anger, the classic writers speak of *love, humility, patience, forgiveness, compassion, empathy, tranquility, non-violence and showing mercy*. The tendency to anger is countered by dispositions of an even temperament, humor, aversion to cruelty, self-criticism and self-control. Most approaches to dealing with the sinful form of anger are to attack it by dissipating it once it has awakened, being a peacemaker. The next step to counter anger is to create habit patterns that make anger less and less likely as a response to injury.

[Chris Hall]: These sins challenge us at fundamental levels. Gluttony raises the question of our relationship to our own physical appetites as well as to addictions that seem characteristic of people in our age. Envy asks us about covetousness with regard to our friends and neighbors. Anger reaches into our emotional center and creates smoldering resentments, cold furies because of wrongs in our past. Anger involves explosive events that sever relationships.

What have you discovered about your own present tendencies and temptations? Or your present practices of the positive qualities of loving others in ways that turn you away from self-indulgence, self-pity and self-absorption?

Sloth

We saved the seventh cardinal sin, sloth, for last because it is the sin that undercuts the active sins. Called "*acedia*" by the Latin Church, sloth literally means "without care." It is a state of the soul where we no longer care about our duties to God, to self, or to others. Sloth is a state of sluggishness and dissolution of the will to live and enjoy. It manifests itself in a wide range—from idle indifference to work or accomplishment to peevishness and restlessness of spirit. Somehow the spirit of life has vanished and our emotions are flat.

Sloth Defined and Described

Karl Barth, a modern Swiss writer, explains pride as the tendency of human life to seek to be more than it was designed to be (to be God). Sloth is the tendency of human life to be less than it was designed to be, to live like an animal or lower than an animal. Sloth refuses to take up the responsibility of life, engaging its challenges and bending our energies to live to the fullness of our capabilities and powers.

Sloth refers to becoming indifferent to one’s duties and obligations to God manifested in lack of affect, or a lack of feeling about oneself or others, a state of boredom, rancor, apathy and a kind of passive inertness or sluggishness. Sloth paralyzes an individual physically with idleness, indolence and indifference to work. Sloth contrasts with zeal, the joyful, energetic, timely performance of our duties to God and to other humans.

Apathy is when we are unable to invest ourselves emotionally in what we are doing, the products and fruits of our productive creativity. Apathy is a form of self-absorption such that we are unable to attend to the needs of others. Apathy carries with it the notions of negligence, indifference, restlessness, listlessness, boredom, misery or dejection. It is more than idleness (which we may need in the midst of our workaholic existence). Apathy is dispirited, an emptiness of feeling.

The earliest catalogue from Vagrius (d. about 400 A.D.) distinguished *tristitia* (a sadness, sorrow, melancholy) and *acedia* (an aimless indifference to our responsibilities to God and fellow humans), both of which he felt held particular terrors for the hermits. Sloth threatens the reality that we are to serve God with joy rather than sadness. The fleshly demands might be difficult to undercut and subdue and so we grow weary and discouraged when we do not succeed. The danger of spiritual dryness (*taedium cordis*) is particularly dangerous and even more difficult to subdue.

Later sloth came to refer to the failure to attend church, to gravitate toward attending a fair or tournament on Sunday, to refuse being cloistered in monastic seclusion or other states of life. Emotionally and cognitively, sloth is a lack of expression for the world, for the people in it or even for one’s self. It is an alienation of feelings from the self and then from the world. It is found in despair, somnolence, idleness, tardiness, negligence, indolence, or peevishness. It is a languishing and holding back, a refusing to undertake works of goodness because the conditions for undertaking these works are too difficult and grievous to suffer.

- **Passive Expression:** Sloth may be inaction, a withdrawal of one’s self, thoughts, talents and endeavors from service of society or God. Passivity means I may not indulge the flesh, but neither do I resist evil or do good. My inaction means I fail to contribute to the good. The assumption behind this belief is that humans are willful creatures, not fated or determined, but able to act. Sloth is a failure to participate, to actively seek to shape the future in line with the coming Kingdom of God.
- **Active Expression:** Sloth is associated with a restlessness of spirit, a nagging anxiety and despair over the world, a melancholy that issues in aggression and trouble making. Unspent energies and unrealized hopes lead to restlessness, a gnawing boredom. The results are gratuitous conflicts, intrigues, deceit, and even maliciousness. Bored with one’s own life, one begins to intervene in those of others, with whom one can identify and have sport or cause trouble. Active slothfulness scatters our energy and destroys our capacity (e.g., through drugs, drinking, carousing) to perform the will of God. We actively avoid fulfilling the potential for good.

For the monk, slothfulness was the deadliest of sins since it meant a loss of interest in God and in eternal things. *Acedia* is the sin that believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing—there isn’t even anything to die for. Passive *acedia* lacks emotion and is listless; active *acedia* is indifferent, disregarding distress, lacking concern that we contribute to that distress.

In the modern age, the Protestant ethic made sloth a central moral failure, especially in the sermons and admonitions of the Calvinists of seventeenth century England. Waste of time became a deadly sin. Loss of time through sociability, idle talk, even more sleep than absolutely necessary for basic health, was seen as sloth. Sloth became the opposite of intense investment of one’s energy in productive work, whether for God or for the good of fellow humans.

Sloth’s Modern Manifestations

- **Work Monotony:** Flat, devoid of interesting rhythms and change and colorless work where people come to engage in horse-play, minor sabotage, foolish pranks, petty arguments over minor matters (such as opening the window) and workroom group productivity norms. Where we once were privileged to work from a calling, now most of

us are condemned to work. Our job becomes a means to earn money, to be tolerated and not a calling to joyfully engage.

- **Education Boredom:** The standardized theater of learning has evoked boredom—apathy, lack of interest, carelessness, the internal contracts of minimum work for maximum grades, slouching in seats, steeped in reverie, avoiding challenges, taking "Mickey-mouse" courses (courses with no challenge and little content for learning).
- **Inappropriate leisure:** Leisure is time for unstructured choice where private pleasure and enjoyment come to the forefront. How and where should time that is released from "work" be used? Such spare time is spent not in creative, fulfilling activity but consumption. The more time left, the greedier and more powerful the cravings of the appetites. The appetites become more sophisticated and concentrate increasingly on the superfluities of life. Sloth manifests itself in the twin dilemma and sensibility of modernity—that work is meaningless and leisure is nothing but a deadly diversion to hide life's emptiness and absurdity.
- **Stereotyped outcasts:** the hobo, the homeless, the lazy good-for-nothing, the vagrant and thief, the social parasites, or the con artist. These we treat to various patterns of rituals of degradation, seeing in them (but not our culture or ourselves) the ways in which sloth penetrates our own use of time and approach to contributing to the good. They come to epitomize for our world those who waste the energies and time God has gifted them with.
- **"Giving up" syndrome:** in tribal worlds the impact of the modern world devastates the cultures and beliefs of non-literate peoples, sometimes leading to a complete demoralization and "culture-death." The people in those groups come without the tools or inner dispositions to compete in modern terms; the modern world offers them virtually no attractive roles or place to become dignified and valued actors. One response is the hopeless withdrawal, the descent into alcoholism, into self-destructive inactivity and dissolution.

Reflect on Your Own Experience

Overall Assessment of Major Points of Danger

Looking back through your reflection pages, what are your primary areas of temptation and vulnerability? Where do you see yourself, given your personality, place and provision, at risk to the cardinal sins? What are your major danger points? Why?

Reflect and write in your journal.

The Fruit of the Spirit

[Chris Hall] Our last exercise asks you to not leave this danger zone confrontation on a downward note. Spend about 10 minutes in a short meditative Bible study. Consider Galatians 5:22-23,

These are the positive fruits of the Spirit that displace and leave no room for the works of the flesh. As you discipline the unruly members of your body and spirit, you become sensitive to the ways in which the world seeks to squeeze you into its mold. You become open to the power of the Spirit instead of the power of this age. Then God will gain control of your inner spirit and outer behavior. More and more of the fruits of the Spirit will appear and flourish in your life and relationships.

As you meditate on the Galatians passage, identify two of the fruits in particular that you want to mature in your life in light of the particular danger zones you've explored in your unit reflection.

Email Assignment

When you have finished all the assigned readings, including the reading about Simplicity, your journaling, and the workbook exercises, write a paper answering the following questions:

1. Francis Moloney writes: "Biblical poverty, chastity and obedience are the vocation of every man and woman, and they are...our way to authentic humanity." State where you sense your primary struggles will be in combating the cardinal sins. Where are you most vulnerable to money, sex and power? Why? Answer in one page.
2. On a second page list the provisions of God available to you. These provisions empower you to meet the major challenges of spiritual formation. They strengthen you where you are vulnerable. Be as practical as you can. In what ways has God helped you move away from the controlling influence of the cardinal sins? These steps may include developing supportive friends or taking significant steps in spiritual formation. What are they?

Readings: *The Seven Deadly Sins* *Simplicity*

The Seven Deadly Sins

Sin	Short definition	Negative: self-denial	Positive: self-engagement
Pride	Ego-inflation, arrogance, conceit, vanity, desire to control others	Meekness, lack of self-importance, refusing to advance oneself, vow of submission	Humility, serving, celebrating and advancing others
Greed	Inordinate desire, insatiable longing to possess	Giving up goods, refusing property, vow of poverty	Generosity or liberality to others, giving of our resources lavishly, a life marked by simplicity
Lust	Unrestrained physical passion, an overmastering erotic desire rooted in gratifying the senses	Continence, suppression of sexual desire, vow of chastity	Chastity if single, faithfulness if married; loving sexuality within a committed relationship (For those for whom chastity is not a gift)
Gluttony	Insatiable appetite and capacity for excessive sensual gratification, especially eating and drinking	Fasting from various appetitive pleasures, abstention	Sobriety, temperance, healthy pleasure in every day gratifications
Envy	Discontent, ill feelings and resentment because of another's advantages or possessions	Don't put down other people and their good fortune, don't belittle, trivialize others	Contentedness, celebration of the gifts and achievements of others, advocating their advantage, emulating others
Anger	Irritation, ire, wrath, hostility, rage, indignation	Refusal to respond in kind, acting harmlessly, enduring patiently	Being merciful, blessing others, wishing them well, feeling compassion for and wishing happiness for others, forgiving
Sloth	Indifference to life, idleness, inertness, loss of meaning, hope, purpose	Fortitude, perseverance, refusal to give up or stop acting even though one feels indifferent or hopeless	Zeal or energetic, motivated action that brings joy; focused, purposeful action

Sometimes anger, pride and envy are classed as weapons of the devil, while gluttony, lust and sloth are the tools of the flesh. Greed is the lure of money the world uses to entice us. Anger separates us from ourselves; pride separates us from God, and envy separates from others. Gluttony and greed beguile and entice, hollowing us out without satisfaction. Lust enslaves while sloth torments us with hopelessness and despair. Pride (power), greed (money) and lust (sex) have often been seen as the three great powers in human life. They are countered in the Catholic tradition by vows of obedience, poverty and chastity, and in the Puritan tradition by the virtues of order, industry and faithfulness.

Discipline in Focus: Simplicity

Read the key texts for understanding simplicity:

Matthew 6:19-24 (treasures in heaven); Matthew 6:25-33 (don't worry); Luke 12:13-21 (the rich fool).

In many ways, simplicity is a matter of deciding what is important. That is, "simple people" have decided what is important and what is irrelevant. They know what is central and what is peripheral, and what is necessary or superfluous. They know to whom they are devoted and to what truths they owe their fundamental allegiance.

Contemplate Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21, NIV)

Why does Jesus forbid his listeners to store up treasure on earth? For one thing, he says, such treasure can be lost. Thieves can "break in and steal." Moths can attack our possessions. Rust can corrode them. Jesus is pushing his would-be followers to seek for riches that last.

Jesus also teaches us that those things we put at the center of our lives—in this case money or riches—will capture our heart. That is, our heart will be where our treasure is. As Foster comments: "He is not saying the heart should or should not be where the treasure is. He is stating the plain fact that wherever you find the treasure, you will find the heart." (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, Rev. ed., p. 83)

Further on, in Matthew 6:24, Jesus again zeroes in on the issue of money, No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth (Matthew 6:24, NRSV).

We would like to think we can serve two masters. Perhaps we say to ourselves, Jesus is actually saying, "Be careful in your attitude toward your money. I don't mind if you are wealthy. I won't be disappointed if you spend the majority of your time making money, even if you end up spending most of it on yourself. Feel free to build a large house. A well-padded bank account won't distract you from hearing my voice. And of course there is the future to provide for. Be wise and prudent. However, try not to forget about me."

Surely this seems a reasonable interpretation. And yet the nagging imperative of Matthew 6:19 still haunts us. Maybe Jesus doesn't desire to be reasonable. "Don't store up treasures on earth." We ask, "When does financial responsibility cross over into storing up treasure?" Jesus warns us it impossible to serve both God and wealth. (Matthew 6:24) How can I tell if I'm serving wealth? How much money can I possess before I qualify as a wealthy person? Do all wealthy persons serve wealth in the manner Jesus forbids?

We long to come up with a comfortable and convenient formula to answer these questions. Perhaps Jesus is more concerned about my spiritual health than my comfort level. "Stop kidding yourself," he seems to say. "Why are you hoarding your goods? Why are you afraid to share? Why are you afraid of trusting me?"

Jesus in this sermon continually pushes the issues of trust, allegiance, devotion, focus, and security to center stage. "Don't place the pursuit of money at the center of your life," he commands. Why? Because we will end up trusting money as our source of security. "Of

course," we respond, "but surely we need to eat and drink. We need to provide for our families." Jesus agrees. In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus acknowledges our need for food and clothing. But he exhorts us not be consumed with anxiety about these basics.

Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. (Matthew 6:31-32)

Gentile folk who follow other masters and seek other kingdoms strive after food, drink, and clothes. Christ presents a radically different position. The "corporate flesh" and our sinful nature warn us to protect ourselves. Christ commands us to lose ourselves. "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it." (Mark 8:35) Our culture—and our fallen self—insist that our position and possessions are the sum and summit of our lives. Jesus reminds us "one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." (Luke 12:15, NRSV) It is striking to observe the "rich fool" is one of the few people Jesus designates as a fool. What had this man done to deserve the epithet, "fool?" First, God had blessed the man's land and he had an abundance of crops. What was he to do? It never seems to enter the man's mind that perhaps God had blessed him so that he might bless others. The idea that he might share his abundance with those in greater need never occurs to the rich man.

Instead, the man's response to his fortunate situation was to hoard his crops. "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods." (Luke 12:18, NRSV) Note carefully what the man deduces from his abundance. "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." (Luke 12:19, NRSV) Nothing could have been farther from the truth. The rich man felt safe because his barns were full. Now he could relax and take his ease. His sense of well-being was clearly based on the crops stored in his barns. The more crops he possessed, the safer he was. Because his barns were full, he deduced his life was secure, a deduction Jesus taught only a fool would make.

Jesus brands this equation between material abundance and security and fulfillment as utter foolishness. The man's gift of years had run out. That night his life would be required of him. "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" (Luke 12:20, NRSV) The man, consumed by greed and riddled with self-deception, had done the very thing Jesus forbade his hearers in Matthew 6:19. He had stored up treasures on earth, but forgotten God in the process. (cf. Luke 12:21)

Jesus, then, warns us to be very careful with money. Why? Is money inherently evil? No. Rather, because wealth and prosperity too easily provide us with the opportunity to forget God. Money finances our sinful propensity for self-deception; wealth viewed and employed wrongly buffers us from the reality of our spiritual poverty.

In light of the snares that so easily trip us up, Jesus exhorts us to settle a fundamental question. Whom will we follow? What kingdom will we seek? Christ's command, of course, is to seek first God's kingdom. "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:33, NIV) Provision, Jesus promises, will be made for our pilgrimage as we make Christ's kingdom and its extension a central organizing priority in our lives.

Christ calls us to be "single" in our thinking, as Kierkegaard writes, "to will one thing." Too often, though, because of blurred vision we remain divided in our loyalties. We hear the call Christ issues to faithfully seek his kingdom and yet it is so difficult to forsake the idols we have loved for years. Consider the idols we have worshiped: self-sufficiency, celebrity, wealth, prosperity, beauty, status, power and pleasure. Not all are inherently evil. They become idols, however, when we treat them as gods who save. Elizabeth O'Connor writes concerning money:

The First Commandment and all the scriptures on the worship of idols begin to lay bare our own primitive selves. Some of us have looked into the face of our idols and found that one of them is money. Though we, along with millions of other churchgoers, are saying that Jesus saves, we ask ourselves if we are not in practice acting as though it were money that saves. We say that money gives power, money corrupts, money talks. Like the ancients with their molten calf we have endowed

money with our own psychic energy, given it arms and legs, and have told ourselves that it can work for us. More than this we enshrine it in a secret place, give it a heart and mind to grant us peace and mercy. (Elizabeth O'Connor, *Letters to Scattered Pilgrims*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, p. 254-55)

Compare the words duplicity and simplicity. Webster defines duplicity as "the quality or state of being double." Simplicity, by contrast, is "the quality, state, or fact of being simple, that is, absent of affectation or pretense." Defined theologically, a duplicitous person is a person of divided loyalties. This person tries to lead two lives. One life attempts to reflect the values and priorities of the kingdom of God. The second models itself after the values of the surrounding "corporate flesh." The result is a person torn in two, one who is double-minded, pulled in two directions, split in allegiance and devotion. Of course, the attempt to live in two worlds is never successful. As Christ puts it, we cannot serve two masters. The result is an ever-increasing gap between what we say and how we act. Our words and actions fail to fit together. We lack integrity.

Jesus exhorts this divided and disunited person, one much like you and me, to resolve the fundamental issue of allegiance. Until this issue is resolved, i.e., our willingness to seek first the kingdom of God, we will remain divided in heart and will fill our lives full with possessions that reflect our divided hearts. Foster writes:

Because we lack a divine Center, our need for security has led us into an insane attachment to things. We really must understand that the lust for affluence in contemporary society is psychotic. It is psychotic because it has completely lost touch with reality. We crave things we neither need nor enjoy. We buy things we do not want to impress people we do not like. Where planned obsolescence leaves off, psychological obsolescence takes over. We are made to feel ashamed to wear clothes or drive cars until they are worn out. The mass media have convinced us that to be out of step with fashion is to be out of step with reality. It is time we awaken to the fact that conformity to a sick society is to be sick. (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, Rev. ed., p. 80)

What contrasts can we draw at this juncture between the perspective of the world and that of the kingdom? As we have seen, in western culture we are defined and valued by what we do and what we possess. By way of contrast, in Christ's kingdom, our concern is not so much what one does or possesses. Our central concern is what Jesus calls us to be. As Foster writes, "Stop trying to impress people with your clothes and impress them with your life." (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, Revised ed., 90)

A well-known bumper sticker in the United States reads, "The one who dies with the most toys wins." On the contrary, Christ teaches that our lives do not consist of the abundance of one's possessions. To which voice will we give our allegiance?

Foster makes a crucial distinction between inward and outward simplicity. One (the outward) naturally flows from the reality of the other (the inward). Inward simplicity reflects our commitment to the kingdom of God, the fundamental "first thing" of our lives. Furthermore, once the issue of who and what I choose to trust has been settled, secondary issues of faithfulness take on greater clarity.

How will I spend money? What clothes will I wear? What car will I drive? In what house will I live? Questions such as these pertain to outward simplicity. We can only answer them by settling the crucial decision for inward simplicity, seeking first the kingdom of God. Once I have made the decision as to whom my master will be, peripheral questions regarding finances, vocation, residence, and lifestyle can be answered in a more coherent manner. Things become clearer because the most important decision has been made. Dietrich Bonhoeffer saw this truth clearly:

To be simple is to fix one's eye solely on the simple truth of God at a time when all concepts are being confused, distorted, and turned upside down.

What reliable signposts indicate that we are moving toward inward simplicity? Foster contends that "freedom from anxiety" is a reliable indicator we are moving in the right direction, a

freedom characterized by three aspects: "If what we have we receive as a gift, and if what we have is to be cared for by God, and if what we have is available to others, then we will possess freedom from anxiety. This is the inward reality of simplicity." (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, Rev. ed., p. 88)

Inward simplicity must come first. Otherwise we will soon become brittle, legalistic, unpleasant people. Joy and freedom are the genuine fruit of inner simplicity. I am reminded of a video detailing the life and ministry of Mother Teresa. Mother Teresa's order had recently been given a mansion in one of the wealthier neighborhoods of San Francisco. She and two or three other sisters arrived to examine the property. They were met by a number of local aficionados who proceeded to give them a guided tour. As they walked through the house their new friends highlighted the costly rugs, ornate fixtures, and even elaborate hot water system. The amused response from Mother Teresa and her friends was inevitably a gentle chuckle. "Oh, no, dear ones, we don't need that." The gentle and joyful spirit Mother Teresa radiated helped her new friends realize she wasn't rejecting their friendship or their generosity. She simply understood well what she needed in order to accomplish the work God had called her to do. Expensive rugs would require cleaning. Hot water would drain funds away from other needy projects. Teresa's inner simplicity helped her to teach about outward simplicity in a positive, non-judgmental fashion.

We see a general principle operating in Mother Teresa's life. She knows who she is, and what God has called her to do. She has resolved the fundamental issue of "seeking first the kingdom of God." Her experience of inner simplicity radiates into the external world. In fact, it would be fair to doubt whether Teresa had experienced inner simplicity if the externals of her life did not reflect concretely this inner reality. The inner reality, though, grounded in the grace and love of God, assures that the concrete choices Teresa makes are couched in joy and love—not law and death.

Richard Foster speaks of the freedom that simplicity brings. In his *Study Guide to Celebration of Discipline* he specifically mentions how simplicity frees us from "the tyranny of the self," "the tyranny of other people," and "the tyranny of things."

What is the "tyranny of the self?" Do you find yourself orchestrating events or situations to place yourself at the center of attention? Foster writes that the self "clamors for attention, self-recognition, applause. Through artful deception it appears to be younger, wiser, richer, more saintly, than is actually the case. It will go to extravagant lengths to seem to belong to the intelligentsia. In meetings it will quote authors it has never read or maintain a discreet silence in supposed superiority over so uneducated a group." (Foster, *Study Guide for Celebration of Discipline*, p. 50)

How free do you believe you are from the tyranny of the self? Foster suggests the following questions provide a helpful gauge.

- "Am I pretending to be an expert where I am only an amateur?"
- "Do I really read the books I quote?"
- "Do I use rhetoric as a curtain to conceal my true intentions?"
- "Do I give the impression of being more godly (or more profane, whichever will give more status in the group) than I truly am?"
- "Do I try to impress people with my degrees, titles, or honors?" (Foster, *Study Guide for Celebration of Discipline*, p. 50-51)
- What about "the tyranny of other people?" How much time and energy do I spend "to ensure that others will have a good opinion" of me? Foster comments "instead of becoming good, we resort to all sorts of devices to make people think we are good."
- "Can I allow an unfavorable comment about myself to stand, without any need to straighten out the matter?"
- "In recounting events, do I shift the story ever so slightly to make myself appear in a more favorable light?"
- "Must I always make excuses for my behavior?"
- "Do I aim at excellence in my work without regard for what people say or think?"
- "Can I accept compliments freely without any need to shrug them off in self-conscious modesty?" (Foster, *Study Guide for Celebration of Discipline*, p. 51-52)

Finally, we have the tyranny of things. How much control do our possessions have over us? To what degree do we depend upon what we own for our sense of well-being and self-definition? Foster argues, "out of fear that others might discover who we are, we create an artificial world of ostentatious display, extravagant ornamentation and pretentious style. We call upon the beautician, the tailor and the dressmaker to create an impression of perpetual youth. We buy clothes, cars, and houses beyond our means in a frantic attempt to appear successful." (Foster, *Study Guide to Celebration of Discipline*, p. 51)

Write in your journal about the following questions from Foster's *Study Guide for Celebration* to explore your relationship with your possessions:

- Am I living contentedly within my income?
- Do I act my age?
- Am I a compulsive buyer?
- Do I try to impress people with gadgets?
- Do I buy what I can afford and what my responsibility to the poor suggests? (Foster, 51)

As we have already mentioned, any discussion of outward simplicity risks the danger of degenerating into judgmental legalism. We desire clear guidelines for how we should spend our money. What size house should I own? How much should I spend on an automobile? How much, if possible, should I put into a savings account for the future? Fortunately, there are no hard and fast answers to these questions. Why "fortunately?" Because if there were clearly defined rules to follow, we would quickly divert our attention from ourselves. We would look to see how well other people were doing in cultivating the simple life. "Look how he's dressing. How shocking!" "Can you believe the type of automobile she's bought? How insensitive to the poor!" "Look how much he weighs. You'd think he'd learn to control his appetite, especially in an age of hunger."

Legalism never brings life. Perhaps there is a better concept than law to keep in mind as we make concrete decisions about external simplicity. I have found the word "appropriate" to be helpful as I struggle to live simply. Is it *appropriate* for me to make this purchase in light of larger considerations? As we respond to this question, we must remember that our "larger considerations" might well be different from our neighbor's.

Take, for example, the purchase of a car. In light of the biblical view of simplicity and the realities of modern life, what type of car should I buy? Should I buy one at all? A number of possibilities present themselves. One would be to buy the cheapest car available. I once made this choice while a pastor overseas. Unfortunately, as matters turned out, I spent more in repairs over the first year I owned the car than I did to purchase it! Many appointments were disrupted because I had broken down on the road. Had I made a wise choice? Or would a better choice have been to spend more money initially and less for repairs? I now believe the latter choice to be the better one. In this case the more appropriate decision would have been to save money over the long haul by spending more initially on a reliable vehicle.

Another question comes to mind, particularly in light of the notion of appropriateness. Are there certain boundaries that the concept of appropriateness lays out for us? That is, could the purchase of an \$80,000 Mercedes ever be considered appropriate for a believer practicing the discipline of simplicity? Are we in danger of legalism by asking such a question? If so, we still would need to map out carefully the ethical terrain if we made a decision to purchase such a vehicle. A number of questions would need hard answers:

- Why do I feel I should spend \$80,000 on a vehicle?
- What does such a purchase represent to me? Are other factors besides economics influencing my decision?
- Even if I feel justified in buying the Mercedes, how will the world around me perceive my decision? Other believers? The poor?
- If I had the opportunity to directly discuss the decision with Christ, how would I explain my decision to him? What might his response be?
- Is such a purchase justifiable in light of my life as a pilgrim heading toward my true home? Does an \$80,000 Mercedes fit into the paradigm of the Christian as a pilgrim?

- Am I buying this vehicle because of its usefulness or because of its status?

The discipline of simplicity addresses the fundamental issues of trust and anxiety. If this is true, how might trust and anxiety be related to the type of car we decide to drive, the clothes we wear and the food we eat? Do I remain enslaved to habitual patterns of behavior because I'm afraid to trust God? Am I allowing my money, home, friends, possessions, job, status, body or food to serve as a buffer between God and me? Am I afraid of what God might ask me to surrender if I was to "seek first the kingdom?" Why am I afraid? Why do I choose to trust the things I do? These are all very tough questions. But the path to freedom in Christ lies in honest answers to them.

Perhaps the following practical "steps toward simplicity" from Foster will facilitate our call to faithful discipleship, particularly in a world so clearly divided between "haves" and "have nots."

1. Buy things for their usefulness rather than their status. "As for your clothes, wear your clothes until they are worn out. Stop trying to impress people with your clothes and impress them with your life." (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, Rev. ed., p. 90)
2. Reject anything that you sense inappropriately controls you, i.e., addictions. Be ruthless with addictions. Take note of "undisciplined compulsions." Seek help and accountability from others. Shun ruthlessly anything that distracts you from seeking first the kingdom. Foster comments:
Learn to distinguish between a real psychological need, like cheerful surroundings, and an addiction. Eliminate or cut down on the use of addictive, non-nutritional drinks: alcohol, coffee, tea, Coca-Cola, and so on. Chocolate has become a serious addiction for many people. If you have become addicted to television, by all means sell your set or give it away. Any of the media that you find you cannot do without, get rid of: radios, stereos, magazines, videos, newspapers, books, etc. Refuse to be a slave to anything but God. (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, Rev. ed., p. 90-91)
3. Develop the habit of giving things away. De-accumulate. Are we inappropriately attached to certain possessions?
4. Learn to enjoy things without owning them. Note the issue of trust involved in our relationship to what we possess or don't possess. Somehow we feel we will enjoy something more if we possess and thereby control it. We feel safer if things are firmly within our grasp.
5. Develop and cultivate an appreciation for nature.
6. Use plain honest speech. Let your yes be yes and your no be no. "If you consent to do a task, do it. Avoid flattery and half-truths. Make honesty and integrity the distinguishing characteristics of your speech. Reject jargon and abstract speculation whose purpose is to obscure and impress rather than to illuminate and inform." (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, Rev. ed., p. 93-94)
7. Remember: simplicity cannot be practiced effectively or safely, apart from the other disciplines. How, for example, might prayer, study, service, and worship be related to the discipline of simplicity?

Spiritual Formation
Unit 10
***Forgiveness and Reconciliation:
Remedies for Individuals and
Communities***



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Unit 10: Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Remedies for Individuals and Communities

Unit 10 Contents

- Learning Outcomes and Steps to Complete Unit 10
- Lecture Notes and Workbook
- Email Assignment
- Readings: Confession

Learning Objectives

- Explore one of the most fundamental and difficult processes of the Christian life: forgiving another who has done harm to you.
- Learn to distinguish true from false forgiveness as well as the different sorts of things that do and do not require forgiveness.
- Take steps to begin forgiving those with whom we remain at odds because of past hurts and harm.
- Practice the Spiritual Discipline: Confession.

Steps to Complete Unit 10

Read

- Your Reader for Unit Ten: Discipline in Focus: Confession. Confession is an express admission of guilt that names the wrong and acknowledges its harm. It is our own witness to what we have said, thought, and done in sinning against God, our fellow human or the creation.
- From *Devotional Classics*, pp. 207-212 (Pennington); pp. 244-250 (J. Taylor); pp. 271-278 (Bonhoeffer); and pp. 302-308 (Guyon)

Respond

- Complete the various journaling assignments.
- Note the reflection questions in the text, *Devotional Classics*:
- Respond to the questions under Bonhoeffer in *Devotional Classics*, p. 275, Reflection questions #4, 5. Also, you might try the exercises on p. 307, 1 and 2.
- Pick a passage of scripture that is particularly rich in what it says about God's forgiveness of us, and "pray the scripture" before you write in your journal.

Complete the final email assignment and send your work to the professor.

Lecture Notes and Workbook

[David Fraser]: We are all wounded by unfair hurts and by others' sin. Without forgiveness we live with un-remedied anger and pain. Without reconciliation we stay apart from those who have harmed us, and we no longer experience community. One of the tragic things we repeatedly find is division and discord in the community of those who call themselves Christian.

In Unit 9 we spent some time examining the seven cardinal sins that receive special consideration in the Church. The devastating results of pride, greed, lust, anger, envy, gluttony and sloth can be found not only in general history but even in our own family histories. On both sides of my family there are those who are not followers of Christ and among them there is a tragic history of sexual misconduct and repeated divorce. When one of my grandfathers learned that I was thinking of studying the Bible and becoming a Christian pastor, his immediate response was, "Why would he want to do that? You can't make any money doing that." He was a wonderful man in many ways. He had a beautiful baritone voice and had sung in churches of virtually all denominations without ever coming to faith. Money was his god. Unfortunately, it has led to some major bitterness and family fights among his children as they have also pursued money as the great good of life.

The practical reality is that sin is active. It drastically affects us in our own lives. Those close to us are being harmed and hurt. Even in our Christian organizations the effects of our own sins and the sins of those who work with us and have authority over us are devastating. We hurt because of the slights as well as the fights that we have had with one another. We hurt because of the betrayals and humiliations that occur. We hurt because of the unfavorable decisions and incompetency that affect us adversely. We hurt because we have been damaged in the process of living and working with others.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

In this unit we want to confront what may be the most significant untended business in our Christian communities, forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness involves "an unlearning of the habits of sin as we seek to become holy people capable of living in communion." (L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, p. 63) Forgiveness is an ultimate act of faith, an invitation to imagine a future that is not bound by the past nor condemned to repeat it. It is a healing process whereby God and we together remove ourselves from the hurt and pain and extend to another the possibility of a new relationship.

Forgiveness encompasses many things but above all we know that it is at the heart of our Christian faith in the cross of Jesus Christ. A spirituality that is not rooted and centered in the Cross is a false and invariably flawed spirituality that will not do.

Case Studies

Before we work on this central issue of our spiritual formation, we want you to take some time to write out what you already are convinced is true in this matter of forgiveness.

On the following two pages, you will find a number of short case studies where forgiveness is the issue at stake. After reading them, we want you to take some time reflecting on the meaning, nature, and process of forgiveness. Following the four case studies, you will find a page with questions and space for writing your reflections on these materials.

Case Study Number One

A story about Conrad Concoars, a professor at Badnose College in Waterloo, Iowa:

"Concoars was smitten by Ogvla Grymjek on his first visit to a Pentecostal bookstore in Slovakia. He was spending a sabbatical looking into whether the Slovaks might use Iowa hybrid corn seed to get a new start in free enterprise agriculture. Ogvla's family, Gypsy not far back, had thrown her out at the time she converted to the Pentecostal faith. She was all too ready to have her dreams come true when Concoars talked of taking her back to America with him. They were married in Bratislava and were off to Iowa as soon as a visa came.

"Back in Waterloo, Concoars took Ogvla's 'Americanization' into his own hands; he turned her into his child, to have and to humiliate as the mood hit him. Teaching her the language and the amenities was only one channel for humiliating her in mean and crazy ways. For instance, he had his own method for teaching her the proper thing to say to older colleagues at faculty socials.

"When I introduce you to an older lady,' he would tell her, 'always bow slightly and say very slowly, "I am extremely stupid."' Concoars invited curious friends to dinner before Ogvla had learned to cook American food in an American kitchen, and when the meal began he would say things like, 'Of course, my little Ogvla, when she gets behind a stove, thinks she is still in Bratislava making stinking cabbage soup for the Holy Rollers.'

"Ogvla's pain increased with her increasing consciousness of what was being done to her. She enrolled at Badnose where faculty families could study without paying tuition and began with a course called 'English for Non-English-Speaking People.' She was on her way to a degree. Halfway into the program, however, she took a detour of sorts, a job off campus as something like a clerical assistant at a law office. Then something really bad happened.

"Concoars was fired for offering women students the opportunity to trade sexual favors for good grades. He had been censured before for harassing female staff persons. Ogvla knew about this, and she had heard, too, that someone had seen him getting close to a woman student in the parking lot. Until now, she was afraid to say anything to him. But when the Waterloo sky fell on Concoars, she just packed some clothes and walked away, alone, with nowhere to go but back to her Pentecostal refuge. The well-meaning minister asked her to consider forgiving Concoars. 'Forgive him,' he said, 'or you will never be happy again.'

"I shall never forgive him, never, never,' she told her minister. 'He stole me from my country and he made me ashamed of myself; no I shall never forgive him.'

"In a few years, Ogvla rose above the herd of filing clerks to become a legal secretary. But inside her own spirit she sank into a black pool of shame and rage, afraid now to trust any male hand stretched out to her.

"Then Concoars came back. He had located Ogvla, followed her for a few days, and then came knocking. 'After all I did for you, it seems to me that you owe it to me to forgive me and let bygones be bygones,' he whined. 'I took you out of your misery, didn't I?' 'If it were not for me you would still be back there with nobody but your Slovak Holy Rollers for family. Sure I made mistakes, but you've done all right for yourself anyway, seems to me, so why not forgive and forget and start over?'

"Now the Pentecostal minister, the only man she trusted, made a second appraisal of Ogvla's situation. 'No. You mustn't forgive him. Not now, not until he repents. Nobody should get forgiven until he says he is sorry.' Which left Ogvla where she was—alone, enraged, wounded, shamed, and with no chance for healing until Concoars had a change of heart.

"Did the minister make sense? Would Ogvla have been a dupe if she had forgiven a brute too mired in self-deception to see the meanness of the wrong he had done to her? Would it have made sense for Ogvla to forgive Concoars even though the chances were that, if she let him back, he would have gone back to his old ways as surely as an addict goes back to his dope?" (Lewis Smedes, *The Art of Forgiveness*, pp. 88-90)

Case Study Number Two

Pope John Paul II

One January morning in 1984 Pope John Paul II went to Rebibbia prison in the city of Rome to visit a prisoner named Mehmet Ali Agca. A few weeks earlier as the Pope was mingling with the crowds in the Vatican, Mehmet had shot John Paul in the chest. Now John Paul came to stand in front of Mehmet's cell and say, "I forgive you."

Case Study Number Three

On the way out of a synagogue a tailor encountered the rabbi. "Well, and what have you been doing in the synagogue, Lev Ashram?" the rabbi asked.

"I was saying my prayers, rabbi."

"Fine, and did you confess your sins?"

"Yes, rabbi, I confessed my little sins."

"Your little sins?"

"Yes, I confessed that I sometimes cut my cloth on the short side, that I cheat on a yard of wool by a couple of inches."

"You said that to God, Lev Ashram?"

"Yes, rabbi, and more. I said, 'Lord, I cheat on pieces of cloth; you let little babies die. But I am going to make you a deal. You forgive me my little sins and I'll forgive you your big ones.'"

Case Study Number Four

C.S. Lewis, known as "Jack," the Christian scholar and writer, was badly hurt by a cruel school master who took delight in turning the lives of his charges into a living hell. Lewis could not forgive this man for most of his life. Not long before he died he wrote this letter:

Dear Mary,

...Do you know, only a few weeks ago I realized suddenly that I had at last forgiven the cruel schoolmaster who so darkened my childhood. I'd been trying to do it for years; and like you, each time I thought I'd done it, I found, after a week or so it all had to be attempted over again. But this time I feel sure it is the real thing....

Yours, Jack.

Think About It

The Meaning and Nature of Forgiveness

What is forgiveness? Is forgiveness to be extended to all who cause us pain and hurt (including God)? Are there preconditions for our offering forgiveness to others (must they repent or be sorry for what they have done to us)? Does forgiveness trivialize the seriousness of the harm done (did the Pope's action undercut the seriousness of the murderous act of his assailant)?

Write out a brief statement of your current understanding of forgiveness: what is it; what sorts of things need forgiveness; when should forgiveness be offered; what is the goal or purpose of forgiving others?

[Chris Hall] Forgiveness seems a simple matter when we mutter the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our debts or trespasses as we forgive our debtors or those who trespass against us." Forgiveness is at the heart of the prayers recited by all Christians globally. Yet facing the practicalities of extending forgiveness and receiving it in our own families, church communities, work settings and civic life, seems complex and difficult.

When we are the one involved, we often discover how our emotions do not cooperate with our theology and ethics. We may know, as C.S. Lewis did, that we ought to forgive someone who has done us serious harm. We try. We say the words silently and repeatedly or even aloud to the person. Nevertheless, we still find resentment, bitterness, hatred and hurt bubbling up within.

Or we may be like Ogvla, completely unwilling to extend forgiveness to a person who seems incapable of repenting for what he has done to us. We may have concluded with her pastor that forgiveness is not to be given unless and until there is a signal of repentance from the offender. But then how would C.S. Lewis ever forgive the teacher who harmed him so long ago, now that he is dead?

We do not want to minimize the challenges involved or the wisdom and tact necessary to bring true forgiveness about in a relationship that has been seriously damaged. Yet one of the clear marks of a maturing Christian is the ability to forgive appropriately and completely. In this unit we want at least to map some of the territory we need to cross if we are to become forgiven forgivers or take the first practical steps to begin learning the habit of forgiving.

The Example of David

You know the familiar Old Testament story of David. Brought into the king's court, soon David's successes stimulated a raging envy in King Saul. Envy turned into murderous hatred, and Saul sought David's life repeatedly. King Saul mobilized the resources and soldiers of the realm to capture and kill David.

Yet David continued to forgive Saul. When he had the opportunity he did not kill Saul.

Take some time to read part of that story, found in I Samuel 26. While it does not display all the features involved in forgiveness, the story does show forgiveness in action, embodied in David's choices.

[David Fraser] A number of things impress us about this story. David, clearly betrayed by Saul, is unwilling to treat Saul with enmity. He continues to name and treat Saul as lord and King in Israel, as the Lord's anointed. Nonetheless, he wisely does not place himself back into Saul's power. He reminds us of Ogva's caution in returning to someone who has a habitual pattern of harming others.

Saul, the authority and power, shows us a leader in the wrong. The wrong a leader can do is magnified because of the power and resources available to carry it out. A leader's sin may be the same sin as that of the ordinary person but the effects of that sin are greatly magnified.

Saul admits his behavior and that of David's do not have the same moral quality. He admits David is in the right. Saul offers David reconciliation, yet David refuses it. In this story some signs of repentance on Saul's part seem to be present. We discover later that these signs are only temporary and David is right not to respond immediately and accept the offer of reconciliation.

Four Stages of Forgiveness

We want to acknowledge our debt to the writings of Lewis Smedes on the matter of forgiveness. His books, along with those of David Augsburger, Gregory Jones and Charles Stanley have been particularly helpful in shaping our own understanding and practice of forgiveness. We want to follow Dr. Smedes' suggestion that there are four stages involved when forgiveness becomes an essential part of our lives.

Stage 1 of Forgiveness: We Hurt

Acknowledging that forgiveness surrounds hurt and pain, we must ask, what kind of hurt do we forgive?

We are to forgive hurts that cause us suffering. No one really forgives unless they have been hurt. Many hurts in everyday life do not need forgiveness. Some hurts we can simply swallow or shrug off, chalk up to the risks of living as creatures of sight and sense in a crowded and competitive world.

Hurts that do not require forgiveness include things like annoyances of someone being late for an appointment or of a child who forgets to clear his place at the table or of a traffic tie up that causes us to be late. Annoyances are not serious enough hurts to require the act of forgiveness.

Nor are the hurts we feel when we are outshone, when someone else succeeds where we fail. We do not forgive some one because they outshine us in the affairs of life or the gifts and talents they possess. God does not ask us to forgive the person who gets the promotion we desired or the recognition we hoped people would give to us. We don't forgive the person who is better looking than we are or who has better clothes. They don't need forgiveness.

Nor is forgiveness given for slights we receive. There will always be people who will not notice you the way you want to be noticed: friends who cannot remember your name; pastors who do not praise some well-done job in the church; parents who do not notice you have grown up and are an adult.

These are all hurts, but they are not deep enough to require forgiveness. They require tolerance and humility on our part, the good humor that recognizes that little hurts are as

common to human life as fleas are to a dog. In the average life they are overcome without the drastic action of forgiveness.

For forgiveness to come into action, a person must suffer a hurt that is both moral and deep. These are deep hurts because they damage the fiber of even the strongest ties that hold us together in community. These are moral hurts because they are unfair, wrongful and unjust. They are the hurts we cannot ignore because of the way they threaten our relationship with one another. These are personal hurts.

In our story the necessity of forgiveness is very clear: Saul seeks continually to kill David, even though David has never lifted a hand against Saul. David is not simply annoyed or slighted or outshone. Saul is causing him intense and repeated suffering. The only response that can deal with this kind of hurt is forgiveness. Furthermore, only David could forgive Saul the sin. It was a sin against David, not against some other person. Saul was seeking to kill his loyal and gifted servant, David. It was David who had to exercise forgiveness for this personal hurt.

Dr. Smedes suggests three typical kinds of actions that must be met with the miracle of forgiveness because they cause harm and hurt deeply enough to need the healing of forgiveness:

1. The Act of Disloyalty

A person is disloyal to you when he or she treats you like a stranger when in fact you are a partner, family member, or friend. Invisible ties of loyalty and affection bind each of us to others. When someone close to us treats us like a stranger, a wall is built up between us and we speak of being let down, abandoned, forsaken.

It happens when a husband or wife has an affair. It happens when a friend promises to loan you money and then reneges at the last minute when he finds he can make a better profit elsewhere. It happens when an important family member fails to show up for your marriage. Disloyalty happens when someone who belongs to you by some invisible tie of promise and commitment fails, treating you like a stranger or outsider.

2. The Act of Betrayal

But a more serious act is the act of betrayal. We are disloyal to people when we let them down. We betray them when we cut them to pieces. Peter was disloyal when he denied he knew the Lord. Judas betrayed the Lord when he turned him over to murderous enemies.

You betray me when you take some secret I have told you and reveal it to someone who can use it against me. You betray me when you promise to be my confidant and friend and then gossip my secret shame to others. You betray me when you ridicule me in front of significant people before whom I have no defense. In these cases someone who belongs to you by invisible bonds of love or loyalty treats you not like a stranger, but worse—like an enemy.

3. The Act of Brutality

The person who rapes another brutalizes her. The person who tortures political adversaries brutalizes them. A husband who never sleeps with other women yet beats his wife and claims credit for fidelity commits brutality. A father who would never desert his family yet batters his children; or a parent who verbally abuses a child for no good reason, telling them they are rotten to the core and never will be any good, these brutalize.

These kinds of wrongs can be met only with forgiveness. They are hurts that cause a person to suffer. We should not degrade the reality and significance of forgiveness by flattening it out to fit just any painful moment. Forgiveness is for those times we suffer because someone forsakes, betrays or brutalizes us.

Let's not get stuck on these distinctions. A number of the everyday frictions of life only require the easy and readily extended grace of little forgiveness, for they are only little hurts. But there are also major devastations of sin that require that sort of painful and difficult forgiveness we see modeled on the cross. Here, we are focused on forgiveness that is difficult, painful and often slow.

On the following pages we have provided you with short notes on this first stage of forgiveness in order to fill in the picture of the kinds of hurts that require forgiveness. After reading those notes, you should have a clearer picture of what things necessitate forgiveness. We have left space on a following page where you can reflect on your own life and the hurts you have suffered. Spend some time thinking about your recent experiences (or your repeated experiences). What about the three matters Dr. Smedes says require forgiveness? Are there such situations and experiences in your life? *What Needs Forgiveness? Those things that cause us deep, unfair, personal pain.*

The first stage of forgiveness is hurt.

When someone causes us pain so deep and unfair we cannot forget it, we are pushed into the crisis of forgiving. This hurt has three dimensions:

The pain is personal. We can only forgive people, not nature (even though nature often hurts us), not systems (which can corner and crush us). People are the only ones who can be held accountable for what they do. They are the only ones who can accept forgiveness and come back to us. I can forgive only the people who have hurt me. I have no right to forgive those who have hurt others. Only their victims have that right. I can be outraged at what they have done and condemn them (e.g., Hitler, Idi Amin, Saddam Hussein, Mobutu Sese Soko etc.). Often the hurt we feel the most is the pain of the people we love the most. If you hurt my children, you hurt me. In any case if you do not feel the hurt yourself, you do not need the healing forgiveness brings.

The pain is hurtful. Forgiveness is love's remedy to be used when we are hurtfully wronged by a person we trusted to treat us right. There is a difference between suffering sheer pain and suffering painful wrongs. We suffer many pains that come simply because we are vulnerable people living in a crazy world where fragile spirits sometimes accidentally collide. Pain is unfair when we do not deserve it or when it is not necessary:

- Some people aim to hurt us because they think we deserve it. For example, James Wilkes Booth shooting President Lincoln or Lee Harvey Oswald shooting President Kennedy).
- Some people hurt us compulsively. The alcoholic who cannot control his or her action; the teenager killed when hit by a car whose driver is high on drugs.
- Some people hurt us with the spill-overs of their own problems. The children caught in the cross-fire between parents whose marriage is ending.
- Some people hurt us with their good intentions. The philanthropist medical doctor who puts his family on the edge of insolvency by his generosity to others.
- Some people hurt us by their mistakes. Professionals who botch their job.

The pain is deep. Only deep hurts need forgiving (and we cannot be exact as to how deep a hurt). Only we know when we feel the bruise, but we need to distinguish at least several layers.

Misdemeanors of Personal Relationships

- Annoyances and nuisances, such as the person ahead of you in the ten item shopping line with fourteen items. Better to swallow annoyances and leave forgiveness for the deeper levels.
- Slightings and snubs, such as when people do not remember your name when they should; people who know you walk past without a greeting; people forget appointments with you. Better to shrug off these annoyances.
- Coming in second, such as when someone has more talent, more advantage and more success than you. You feel hurt because they received the promotion and you didn't. We do not forgive others for their success, even though we may hurt down inside because a friend moved ahead of us.

Note: Misdemeanors may become major when people repeat those misdemeanors as a pattern to demean you.

Major Infractions Strike Deeply

- Disloyalty occurs when I belong to a person, yet treat him or her like a stranger. We all belong to several circles of friends within which bonds of loyalty develop, sometimes unspoken. We promise to be there for the other, and then we are not. I say I will do something for you and then I don't. A child lying to parents treats those parents like strangers. Hurt occurs when the lie is discovered.
- Betrayal occurs I belong to a person, yet treat her or him like an enemy. Peter was disloyal when he denied knowing Jesus; Judas betrayed Jesus when he sold him out. A friend telling my special secret of my private shame betrays me; a husband who belittles his wife in front of guests commits a minor treason in the marriage; a colleague who promises to aid my career and scuttles it—all these betray me.
- Brutality occurs when someone I do not know brutalizes me (a rapist, an armed robber who invades my home.) The hurt is deep. It is even deeper when someone close to me brutalizes me (incest, violent abuse). A husband who never sleeps with other women yet beats his wife and claims credit for fidelity commits brutality. A father who would never desert his family yet batters his children; or a parent who verbally abuses a child for no good reason, telling them they are rotten to the core and never will be any good these brutalize. Words can brutalize. That's why Jesus signaled the importance of words by telling us the spiritual dangers of calling another "you idiot" or "you worthless ..."

Think About It

What Needs Forgiveness?

In the light of this definition of the first stage of forgiveness, can you identify specific events and persons in your life that have caused you deep, personal, unfair hurt? At this point, in your journal, write down the major matters that have caused deep personal or unfair hurt, whether or not they have been settled or resolved.

Forgiveness Is Not Natural

[Chris Hall]: Forgiveness is not a natural act. The wreckage of broken relationships littering the social landscape is testimony, in part, to the difficulty we have admitting our sins against one another. We have difficulty seeking forgiveness and extending forgiveness to those who sin against us whether they seek our forgiveness or not. How many folks carry bitterness to the grave with them, unable to forgive some wrong they felt done to them? How many husbands and wives sit uneasily beside each other, the quietness a witness to years of accumulated unforgiven hurts? Forgiveness is an act that does not come naturally to us.

What did you discover as you sought to explicitly identify the major hurts in your life? Are you a candidate in need of forgiving others? One of the reasons we need to exercise forgiveness is because of our response to those major hurts. Dr. Smedes says the second stage of forgiveness occurs as we respond to the pain and suffering inflicted upon us.

The Second Stage of Forgiveness: Hate as a Response

Hate is our natural response to deep, unfair pain. With passive hatred, we do not want to harm or kill the other. We simply do not want them to succeed. We cannot wish them well. With aggressive hatred, fury drives us out of our wits. We hope for others to receive pain and harm (for him to catch herpes; or for the friend who has betrayed us to be fired from work).

In either case, hatred separates us from those to whom we ought to belong, shoving them away with the inner force of violence. In some cases hatred divides our inner self, for we may both love and hate the same person at the same time: love the warmth and tenderness in private and hate the public put-downs; a father we reach after for love yet whose aloofness we hate as he keeps his love just beyond our reach.

Hatred needs healing because it is deadly if allowed to run its course. Healthy anger is a dynamic energy that sets us in motion to help us clarify our values, priorities, beliefs, boundaries. Anger is an energy that pushes us to make things better. Hatred wants us to make things worse, to stifle and diminish the other person.

Hatred is a hard sickness to cure because we hate people, not merely the evil they do. Often when we deny we hate them, we detour around the crisis of forgiveness, pretending we

are too good or too spiritual to hate. We dare not risk admitting the hate we feel because we dare not risk forgiving the person we hate. We pretend we are at peace when inside we rage. Hatred lasts long, even after a person is dead. It travels with us, stirring us up repeatedly. Often hate does not have the decency to die when the people we hate die. It is a parasite living off our energy, not theirs.

Hatred is a hard sickness to cure because it is aimed most often at people who live inside the circle of our committed love and because we hate people we blame. Convinced we have been hurt unfairly and unnecessarily, we are very righteous in our hatred—they deserve it. Holy hatred is the most difficult sort of hatred to cure.

Your Own Experience

Spend some time collecting your feelings, especially about those matters you identified earlier as you wrote about what events needed forgiveness in your past experience. If you have experienced deep, personal, unfair hurts, then it is not surprising that you feel anger, even rage and hatred. We've listed a number of Psalms of David as an expression in scripture of the passionate feelings that stirred within him. We may think that his forgiving actions toward Saul came out of an easy interior life that was automatically ready to forgive and forget. The Psalms teach us better. Listen to a few of the choice words in Psalm 59, composed when Saul ordered that David's house be watched so that Saul might kill him: (vs. 11-13a)

Do not kill them, or my people may forget; make them totter by your power and bring them down, O Lord, our shield. For the sin of their mouths, the words of their lips, let them be trapped by their pride. For the cursing and lies that they utter, consume them in wrath; consume them until they are no more!

David is aggressively angry. He wants Saul and his allies to perish, to be consumed. After all, they deserve it! You may want to read more of that Psalm and others by David to get in touch with the wounded cry of those who have been betrayed.

Think About It

Why Do We Need to Forgive?

Notice the words of David in Psalms 35, 58, 59, 69 and 109. Anger and hurt are expressed in powerful terms that have come to be known as imprecatory Psalms. David wishes his enemies were dead, but not easily. He wants them humiliated, orphaned, disemboweled, etc.

Anger, a dynamic response of those who are living to the pain they have been given, is a sign we have been violated in some way. Think about events that have happened to you and the people involved. If you are unwilling to label your feelings hatred, then locate where there is anger, hot recent anger or cold anger stored from events long ago. How do you feel about the people that have caused you deep, personal, unfair hurt? (Write your response in your journal.)

[David Fraser]: I want to suggest the reason David was able to spare Saul's life twice was because he knew the inner reality of forgiveness. He did not limit forgiveness to the reality that God forgave him, but he knew the transforming experience of having forgiven Saul for his constant and brutal sins. David also teaches us that forgiveness does not always lead to reconciliation or to the forgetting of the past. I think we often carry about some distorted ideas of what forgiveness means and when forgiveness happens in human relationships. We discover in the Psalms of David that forgiveness came in the midst of powerful feelings of injury, anger and hatred. The second stage of hatred is an accompaniment of the hurts we feel.

Of course, there are lesser degrees of unfair hurt that we also have to face. Sometimes we feel only a mild degree of hostility or irritation that nonetheless separates us and strains our relationships. Even those levels of negative emotional reaction need to be healed. And they also may require the smaller degrees of forgiveness.

The third stage of forgiveness brings us to the first major benefit and goal of forgiveness.

The Third Stage of Forgiveness: We Begin to Heal

What happens when we forgive? We begin the healing process within ourselves. Dr. Smedes has aptly called this process the miracle of spiritual surgery! Forgiveness of others is something that happens first of all within your own spirit. It is plastic surgery on your memory. When you forgive someone, you slice away the wrong from the person who did it. You recreate him or her in a new way in your thinking and feeling. At one moment you see the person as the despicable cause of your deep suffering and hurt. But in the moment of forgiveness you change that identity and see them not as the one who *hurt* you, but as one who *needs* you. Once branded in your memory as a wrong and unfair person wrong, forgiveness identifies them as weak in their needs.

This is what David has done. David sees himself as a helpless partridge, a bird with a distinctive call. The hunter pursued him simply by running after him until he was too exhausted to fly (I Samuel 26:20). Saul is his pursuer. This is the same Saul who had brought David to his court, whose evil spirit had been stilled numberless times by David's soothing music, the Saul who was David's father-in-law. They were bound together by a hundred ties of family and service and loyalty. Yet, Saul treats David like an enemy. He has betrayed him and seeks his death.

But David has worked the miracle of spiritual surgery! He does not call Saul, "My enemy." He does not speak as does his nephew Abishai: "Now I can pin this betrayer to the ground!" Rather, he protects him and calls him again and again, "the Lord's Anointed." (I Samuel 26:9, 11, 23) Saul's essential identity is not "the enemy." Instead, he is first of all the Lord's anointed and in deep need of the miracle of transformation.

Of course David was unable to change Saul. Forgiveness does not first of all change the wrongdoer. What the wrongdoer has done sticks to what he or she is. But when you recreate them in your own memory, there within you, they have been made anew.

Forgiveness works the miracle of changing the landscape of history for the one forgiving. Many times when we have been deeply and morally hurt, we feel the only weapon we have left to us is our hateful contempt for the person who hurt us. We believe our only consolation is to see the person hurt and suffering in return. Forgiveness seems unfair because the person who has sinned against us gets off too easily. Somehow they should suffer as much as we have suffered, in order to know how the pain felt!

But lust for revenge only glues us to the unfair past. An act or series of unfair, hurtful actions have occurred. Those acts are the inevitable past. If we choose, we can stick to that past, multiplying its wrongness. Revenge repeats the past, reliving hurt repeatedly.

What we discover when we strike out instead of forgiving is alienated people never keep score by the same mathematics. Each individual feels wounds received are much deeper than wounds given. Forgiveness totals the score at zero and ends the endless summing of the score to see who has suffered the most. Forgiveness transforms the past by turning off the videotape that keeps replaying hurt and reviving pain. Forgiveness sets us free from the past, ending suffering's recurring cycle.

Forgiveness is Not...

1. Forgiveness *is not forgetting the hurts*. Some hurts are too trivial to remember and some are so horrible we suppress them completely, unable to even recall them happening to us. Forgiveness happens only when we remember and then forgive. Forgiveness removes pain from the past, taking the steam out of the desire for revenge.
2. Forgiveness *is not excusing*. We excuse people for minor annoyances or for things that were beyond their control. When you know that I am emotionally scarred because I was beaten silly when I was a child by a drunken parent, you excuse my neurotic quirks. You know I am not fully responsible. Forgiveness happens only when we do not excuse, but blame. We forgive a past that could have been different, should have been different.
3. Forgiveness also *is not smoothing things over*. Forgiveness is not passively ignoring hurts, denying that disloyalty or betrayal has happened, redefining the past so that all there is to do is to excuse people and not to blame them. Forgiveness happens only when we have things

in our past that cause us to scream our anger and hate, only when we cannot ignore or repress those memories because they rub us raw, stirring up the demon of vengeance.

What Happens When We Forgive?

A miracle of spiritual surgery occurs when we forgive. We cut away from the person who wronged us the harm that he or she did. We erase from our hearts the hurt that keeps playing its true and angry tune. Forgiveness is the one thing that can change the inevitable past. But forgiveness is not forgetting, excusing or smoothing over the past.

David recalls events that have happened and are happening. Pursued and suffering, he says God should look upon his heart and value his life as much as he has valued the life of Saul. He asks for vindication from God because, having forgiven Saul and recreating him as the Lord's anointed instead of his enemy, he, David, will not seek his own vindication. David will not glue himself to the wrong and the hurt of the past. God must take care of that. For David sees himself protecting the life of his enemy, even while sadly knowing the true goal of forgiveness will not be reached.

On the following page of your workbook, write about your own experience with forgiveness. Think back in your own experience. Do you have an event you remember where hatred and anger were passionate because of some deep, personal, unfair hurt? Did you come to the place of full forgiveness? What happened to your inner emotions and energies when forgiveness occurred? Is Smedes correct that forgiveness is like spiritual surgery, a miracle that releases us to be whole and happy again?

Notes from Dr. Smedes:

When you forgive, spiritual surgery cuts away the wrong done to you. Then you can see the "enemy" through new eyes.

- We receive new insight, an ability to see the deeper truth about the offender, that they too are fallible, weak, needy human beings, more than just people who hurt us. They even possess many other qualities.
- We receive new feelings. When I forgive, the wrong done becomes irrelevant to how I feel about that person now. The wrong does not count or matter. We cannot pry the wrongdoer loose from the wrong, but we can release the person only in our memory of the wrong. [Note the Bible's drama of forgiveness—the bundle of sins put on the scapegoat; the wiping away of sin like the washing of the face.]

You may forgive someone and be the only one healed. You do not always have the power to woo the offender back into relationship. Forgiveness is first an editing of our own memory; a releasing of our present from the painful past; an honest forgiveness and release, even when it is done only on the forgiver's side. The person you forgive may be completely indifferent or unwelcoming of your forgiveness. He or she may not ask for forgiveness or even want it when it is extended.

Think About It

Recall your own experience. Do you have an event you remember where hatred and anger were passionate because of some deep, personal, unfair hurt? Did you come to the place of full forgiveness? What happened to your inner emotions and energies when forgiveness occurred? Is Smedes correct in saying this process is like spiritual surgery, a miracle that releases us to be whole and happy again? Write your answer in your journal.

The Fourth Stage of Forgiveness: We Open the Door to Possibilities

[Chris Hall] When we forgive, *we open the door to the possibility of reconciliation.*

Forgiveness aims not simply at changing things inside me when I forgive another person. Sometimes, as is the case in our story, that is as far as forgiveness can go. Sometimes the person we forgive is dead. Sometimes the people we forgive do not ask for or want our forgiveness. But the goal of forgiveness is a new beginning, starting over a relationship that has been damaged.

The miracle of forgiveness is fulfilled when two alienated people reach out to one another and are reconciled. It is the beginning of a new journey together as friends and partners. Forgiveness is never a new beginning in paradise. It is a beginning over at the place where the relationship was left by the wrongdoing. We often begin again without having really understood what happened – how much was excusable and how much was treatable only by forgiveness. Loose ends that are still untied and nasty, nagging questions remain unanswered. But reconciliation has happened and a new beginning is possible.

In the case of David and Saul, Saul could not and would not free himself from his demon of jealousy. Though he could cry about his unfair and foolish actions of seeking David's death, he would not turn from his folly. Reconciliation was not possible even though David forgave Saul his many betrayals. Reconciliation requires changes in two parties: repentance on the part of the one who has done wrong and forgiveness on the part of the one who has suffered the wrong.

Even when forgiveness cannot reach its goal of reconciliation, God calls us to forgive. Jesus commands us to forgive our debtors, with no strings attached. He does not say, forgive them only if they grovel and repent. He expects us to forgive people who hurt us no matter how warped are their ideas about what they did or how little they understand the suffering we have felt because of their action.

I think the reason we are asked to forgive with no strings attached is because God wants us to be free from our painful past without having to wait for the guilty persons to come to their senses and repent. God wants us to stop stewing in our resentments and get on with living life as positively as possible. Why should I let the person who hurt me continue to control me and cause me further pain? Why should that person determine whether I can remedy the sore spot he or she has caused?

Furthermore, the perpetrator is responsible for his or her own responses to wrongdoing. If the person does not choose to restore the relationship and enter into peace and loyalty with me again, he or she must live with their own decision. Nonetheless, I will forgive for my own sake and in obedience to God's command. They will have to be responsible for our continued separation and alienation.

We have only just begun an exploration of the depths of forgiveness. David displayed it in his every action while Saul acted the fool who could not turn from a sin that was not only destroying the relationship with David but destroying his own life as well. David shows us that we are to forgive deep and moral wrongs that hurt us; that forgiveness works a spiritual miracle within us by ungluing the wrong from the wrongdoer and by turning off the constant replay of pain within; that we are to forgive even when forgiveness is not completed by its goal of reconciliation.

But we need to recognize one point, lest all this talk lead you to think forgiveness is easy. One of the cases we provided for you at the beginning involved the Christian author, C.S. Lewis. He had a horrendous teacher when he was a boy. He hated that academic sadist with a passion for most of his life. But a few months before he died he wrote a friend, "Dear Mary... Do you know, only a few weeks ago, I realized suddenly that I had at last forgiven the cruel schoolmaster who so darkened my childhood. I had been trying to do it for years." Forgiveness is not an easy thing and in some instances, forgiveness takes years, even decades, of God working on us and with us to bring us to the place where forgiveness can happen.

Deep Forgiveness

We must discover how deeply God forgives us, for in the end we find the capability to forgive as we are forgiven.

Corrie Ten Boom was a woman stuck in the World War II years in a concentration camp, humiliated and degraded, especially in the delousing shower where the women were ogled by the leering guards. But she made it through that hell and eventually felt she had, by God's grace, forgiven even those who had leered at her.

As a result, she preached forgiveness for all, no matter what the crime. Then one Sunday in Munich she was greeting people and a man came toward her with outstretched hand. "Ja, Fraulein, it is wonderful that Jesus forgives us all our sins, just as you say." She suddenly recognized the face as one of those leering, lecherous SS Guards of the shower stall. Her hand froze at her side. She thought she had forgiven all, but as she faced one of the guards in the

flesh, she could not forgive. Ashamed and horrified at herself she prayed, "O Lord, forgive, me, I cannot forgive." As she prayed she felt forgiveness in that moment, accepted by God in spite of her shabby performance as a famous forgiver. Her hand was suddenly unfrozen, her hatred melted and her pain removed. She forgave as she was forgiven. That is all we can do.

Reconciliation: the Goal of Forgiveness

Just below we have given you a summary of some of the basic insights of Dr. Smedes in this fullest expression of forgiveness. Reconciliation is the goal of forgiveness. When God forgave us in Christ, the intention was that we be brought back from our hostility and alienation into full fellowship with God. So too, human forgiveness aims at the same outcome. Yet there are conditions under which this happy outcome cannot be accomplished. Conditions must be met. Read the notes from Smedes and then turn to the page after that where we ask you to reflect on your own experiences with reconciliation.

Notes from Dr. Smedes:

Abolishing the moral impediment to fellowship is the key to the full completion of the process of forgiveness. The wrong done to us is what came between us. If we ignore, deny or seek to deal easily and quickly with that wrong as if it did not matter, we take our first step into an opiated life where nobody cares. If the healing work of forgiveness has given you new insight and feeling--what next?

The next step is that the two parties must bring about an honest coming together, a reconciliation. What must cross the wall of separation? Most importantly the forgiven must bring truthfulness.

1. The perpetrator must truly understand truly the reality of what they did to hurt you. You cannot expect them to agree with every little detail of what happened, but they need to know the pain you suffered at their hands was real and deep enough that you felt things could not go on as before unless something removed it.
2. They must be truthful with the feelings you have felt. What they hear intellectually must percolate to the bottom of their heart. They must feel pain at your pain and hate themselves for what they have done.
3. They must be truthful in listening to you. An open mouth only gets halfway. They must also have an open ear, to hear your claims and complaints. At first they may try to reshape what you are saying so that it is a message they want to hear. You must listen to their response long enough to be convinced they hear you.
4. They ought to be truthful about your future together. Promises made and trusts engaged have been violated in the past. Promises need to be remade only if they can realistically be kept. If promises are forthcoming, they need to be truthful—with an intention to uphold those promises.

Realism tells us the coming together and reunion is shaped by the time and circumstances of the reunion. What has happened between the time of the falling out and the time of forgiveness is also important. Sometimes we can crawl back into the same wondrous relationship with new vigor. Other times loyalty is renewed but not the old spontaneous joy and excitement. Sometimes people have made new commitments, making the old relationship impossible (a divorced spouse has remarried her lover and reestablishing the old marriage is impossible, even if the animosity has evaporated).

Think About It

What Happens When We Forgive

Reconciliation is the ultimate goal and test of the power of forgiveness. While reconciliation is not the only benefit of forgiveness as we have seen in Stage Three of forgiveness, forgiveness finds its full fruit in the bringing back together of those alienated by sin's harmful hurts. Reflecting on your experience when you have forgiven another, has it led to reconciliation? Did the relationship return to its old vitality and trust or was there a process of relearning and rebuilding trust? What conditions do you think facilitate and validate reconciliation? Write your answer.

[David Fraser] At this point we have to say we probably all need two or three weeks working on issues of reconciliation. We live in a world that seems to break increasingly into feuding, warring factions, even among those who profess the name of Christ. Reconciliation is a top priority when we think about peace-making and the unity of the body of Christ, much less getting along in our families and with the colleagues with whom we work.

An Example from Nelson Mandela's Life

We are not able in the short time we have in this unit to consider the practicalities and necessities that are part of bringing reconciliation about. God knows how much we need reconciliation to happen. I'm reminded of the story Gordon MacDonald tells of one of the black South African leaders he met who had spent years of his life at Robben Island, five years in the cell next to Nelson Mandela. The South African leader commented,

"Every few years the government would search out and jail all the young black leaders. They would sweep them out of sight and eventually dump them out on Robben Island. But for us it was a profitable strategy. Because that was where we got our education. From Mandela and the others."

"What do you remember most about those days?"

"Remember most? Learning how to forgive! You see, all of us who came to Robben Island came straight from school. We were angry; we were ready to kill the white man, any white man. In prison we lost our names; we were only numbers to the guards. And they kept their guns pointed at us all the time. Each morning we marched out the gate to the rock quarry, and in the evening we marched back. The days always belonged to the guards."

"But the nights were different. The nights belonged to us. During the evening, we who were young sat with the old men. And we listened while they taught us their histories, their tribal languages, their dreams for the black person in South Africa. But most important, Mandela taught us you can never accomplish anything as long as you hate your enemy. Hate his politics; hate the evil behind those politics; hate the policies that put you in prison. But never hate the person. It takes your strength away."

"You stopped hating?" I said.

"Not right away. It took me almost five years to forgive...five years of learning with the old men. But when I did forgive, I was a different person. I know I had forgiven when I could go to holy Communion on Friday and invite the guard to lay down his gun, come and receive the sacrament with me." (in G. MacDonald, *The Life*, pp. 133-34).

It is that spirit, the reality of forgiveness, needed direly in virtually all our para-Church structures and Churchly organizations. The division, the petty bickering, the alienation and factionalism, the nursing of hurts long experienced—all of these matters fester, crippling our witness and spiritual vitality. We must learn to forgive and be forgiven or we shall no longer be called the Children of God.

A number of practices and attitudes are often confused with forgiveness. We want to state them so as to alert you to their presence. We will not spend time developing or working on them here. See the following page with examples and take some time reviewing them.

We have so much yet to learn on forgiveness. In this unit we wanted to begin the process of unlearning the habit of harboring hurts as we seek to become holy people capable of living in communion with one another as well as with God. Forgiveness is a central habit of community life. It is necessary when we suffer deep, personal, unfair hurt. It is necessary because unforgiveness stimulates in us an anger and hatred that inflicts the pain of that hurt

upon us again and again if we are not released from it. Forgiveness is necessary because unforgiveness alienates us from the good others can be to us and do for us.

Forgiveness benefits us because it begins the healing process that releases us for joyful, energetic activity in the Kingdom of God. Forgiveness with repentance holds out the possibility of reconciliation and new community.

We cannot pretend we have come as far as we would like. But you have had a chance to reflect on your own experiences with human forgiveness and to reflect on the life of David as he sought to relate to a bloodthirsty, murderous Saul.

On the page following Dr. Smedes’s notes on what forgiveness is not, we have given you a final assignment. After you have completed the readings and exercises for this unit, compose answers to the two questions you find there. Share your answers with your mentor or spiritual group.

After the final assignment you will also find comments on the spiritual discipline of “Confession.” The comments are there to encourage you in pursuing this important spiritual discipline.

Notes from Dr. Smedes—On what forgiveness is NOT

- It is not forgetting. If you forget, you will not forgive at all. We can forget small pains. The pains we dare not remember are the most dangerous pains of all, for we cannot remember them to forgive them. They fester inside like time bombs that go off, eventually blowing us—as well as those around us—apart. Forgetting is easier after we have forgiven, but it is not a test or precondition of forgiveness.
- It is not excusing. Excusing is the exact opposite of forgiving. We excuse people when we understand they were not to blame; extenuating circumstances meant they could have done no differently than they did. Forgiving is tough. Excusing is easy—a mushy, gutless, soft unrealism and denial.
- It is not smothering conflict. There is a lot to be said for managing conflict, but we cannot confuse the technique of smoothing things over with the art of forgiving those who transgress against us. Quieting troubled water is not the same as rescuing drowning victims. Smothering conflict is not the same as helping people forgive each other.
- It is not accepting people. We accept people because of the good they do. We forgive people for the bad things they did to us. We accept people socially by admitting them to our social circle, because they qualify socially. We do not forgive them by admitting them. Some professionals (such as psychotherapists) accept their clients and ignore their oddities, but they do not forgive them since their clients do not hurt them. We accept people personally as our friends and our spouses because they are worth a lot to us despite a lot of things we might not like about them. But when we forgive, we do more than admit people to our social concourse or overlook their blemishes. We forgive them. We can accept our friend with bad breath and overlook it, but adultery is something to be forgiven.
- It is not tolerance. Forgive me, and you heal yourself. Tolerate everything I do, and you are in for a lot of trouble. We can forgive someone almost anything. But we cannot tolerate everything. The Pope forgave the man who attempted to assassinate him; but he did not ask that the judicial system set him free. I can forgive the student who plagiarizes, but the paper will still sustain an F. The priest who sexually abuses children may later be forgiven by them, but he should not be allowed to continue in ministry as though he were a good risk with other people’s children. Every group must decide what it will or will not put up with, and we must remember that we don’t have to tolerate what people do just because we forgive them for doing it.

Email Assignment

When you have finished all the assigned readings, as well as the workbook exercises and journaling, answer the following questions. Send your assignment to your professor.

On one page answer the following question: As you think back in your life, locate the issue(s), event or person you would identify as the most difficult to forgive. Write out what

occurred, including the pain and anger you felt. What happened? Did you forgive? Are you still learning to forgive? Are you in the midst of it? Be as descriptive as you can.

On a second page answer the following question: Think about your ministry context. What challenges do you face experiencing the confession of sin and the offer of forgiveness and reconciliation? Can you think of any occasions where the alienation and tension between people has been dealt with by the ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation? Is it needed in your context because it is not practiced? Either describe a case of its practice or outline steps you can take to create space and encouragement for confession, forgiveness and reconciliation to take place.

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Reading: Confession

The biblical understanding of confession and its importance is modeled in several key texts. Isaiah warns of the danger of a lifestyle divorced from honesty about sin. God refuses to hear the prayers of Israel because of unconfessed sin. ". . . your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear." (Isaiah 59:2) David experienced healing and forgiveness after his sin with Bathsheba only when he owned up to his transgression. "While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer." (Psalm 32:4) A new beginning starts when David acknowledges his horrendous action. "Then I acknowledged my sin to you and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and you forgave the guilt of my sin." (Psalm 32:4-5)

The experience of a modern Christian reflects the same dynamic David relates. P.T., a young, single, Christian lawyer working in a large southern city in the United States, found himself tangled in an awful cycle of sin. After a long workweek, P.T. experienced deep loneliness over a series of endless, isolated weekends. Finally he succumbed to temptation and contacted a local "escort service."

Soon he found himself entrapped in an addictive pattern of behavior and experienced a tremendous sense of guilt and self-loathing in his sin. Ironically, his self-loathing, embarrassment, and enjoyment of sexual intimacy kept him from sharing his actions with anyone else, much less God. In his isolation, the sin only seemed to get worse. Guilt led to isolation, isolation to hopelessness, and hopelessness to even greater self-loathing.

Soon deep self-deception kicked in. No one else struggled with sins such as this. How could God or anybody else love someone who committed these sins? P.T. was sure that if another Christian ever discovered what he had done and continued to do, he would be hated and quickly deserted. Left to himself in his isolation, the cycle of sin continued. He couldn't free himself on his own. The pattern of sin / guilt /hopelessness /self-loathing continued. P.T. needed someone to represent Jesus Christ, Christ's call to discipleship, and Christ's forgiveness to him in a genuine, concrete, unshockable manner.

Consider the case of M.G., an unmarried mother of four children. M.G. had been a member of a cult for fifteen years. Members of the cult had convinced her that references to love in the Bible meant physical love. Fifteen years in the cult left her with four children by three different men. What was she to do? To admit her behavior was wrong seemed to erase the past fifteen years. And yet to continue living as though nothing sinful had occurred left M.G. in a spiritual fog, unable to discern the truth. What was she to do? Only when M.G. had the opportunity to name her sin for what it was in the context of a loving Christian community did the fog lift. M.G. experienced forgiveness and renewal.

Jesus models an appropriate response to sin along with a loving acceptance of the sinner. Take a close look at John 8, John 4, Luke 15 and Luke 19 for striking examples of how Jesus helped people to face their sin and then leave it behind.

In John 8, the woman caught in adultery represents a classic case of Jesus dealing with sin. Here we have a woman caught in the midst of adultery, a capital crime in Israel. There is no question about what behavior she had engaged. Her accusers want her executed. She had been caught in the act of adultery. There seems to be little ambiguity involved in her personal guilt. Where, though, is the man who committed the sin with her? She was clearly a ploy in a

larger plot. Jesus’ opponents hoped to cause Jesus to lose face, to be shamed and dishonored by whatever judgment he brought. Mercy would indicate a lax attitude toward the Law of Moses. Judgment would turn away many of Jesus’ followers who hoped to find mercy and forgiveness from God in the kingdom Jesus was introducing. How does Jesus bring forgiveness and reconciliation to the woman? What is his response to her accusers? How does he deal with the spiritual blindness caused by their self-righteousness? By what avenue, through what means, does she finally experience forgiveness?

Jesus’ words in John 9:35-41 are relevant here, particularly to those still trapped in self-deception, unaware of their own brokenness before God. Jesus warns against a type of spiritual blindness that believes it can see and perceive God at work when actually it discerns nothing. In reality, self-righteousness—the perception of another’s faults while remaining blind to one’s own sins—leads to a broader inability to see. Jesus has just healed a man born blind from birth and all his Pharisaic opponents discern is that Jesus appears to have violated the Sabbath. They claim to see, and their guilt remains.

Examine closely the following texts, all examples of great sinners and their response to Jesus:

- Luke 19 Zacchaeus the Tax Collector
- Luke 18:9-14 The Pharisee and the Tax Collector
- Luke 15 The Parables of the Lost Sheep, Coin, and Prodigal Son
- Luke 7:36 Jesus is anointed by a sinful woman
- Luke 5:12 The calling of Levi to become a disciple
- Matt. 11:25 The promise of rest for the weary

Have you noted how sinful people seemed to flock to Jesus? Why did they do so? What did they expect to receive? How did Jesus deal with their past? The story of Jesus’ meeting with the Samaritan woman in John 4 is helpful. Jesus brings up the topic of the woman’s sinful past, but in such a way that she is able to hear the message he has to offer to her in the midst of her sin. Can you think of a single instance in the Gospels where Jesus berates or condemns someone who is attempting to be honest about their sin?

Key questions to explore:

1. Sinful people ran to Jesus with their sin. Somehow they sensed he would deal with their sin in an appropriate way and yet still accept them. What about your own experience? Do you have people you can talk to about struggles, old habit patterns, sinful behavior? Secondly, as you examine your past years as a Christian leader, have those you worked with approached you with their struggles? Or have they tended to avoid you? Is your ministry or organization one where people experience the freedom to confess sin and move on? Or do people remain isolated in their sin, living secret lives of despair for fear of ever being found out?
2. Jesus’ harshest words are not reserved for those who long to confess their sin, but for the self-righteous—those who are quick to spot the sins of others but remain blind to their own. Are there patterns of behavior, habitual sinful responses, reoccurring temptations that you have yet to face? Do you find yourself pointing your finger at others in these same areas?

What does Christian compassion look like? It models Jesus’ own attitude and actions, representing Jesus to others, dealing with sin openly and honestly rather than ignoring it or condemning the sinner. Jesus never acts as though sin were not sin. To do so would have robbed his audience of the hope of deliverance. It would also have wounded their consciences. In my own past, particularly as a young Christian, it was those people who lovingly confronted me with my own sin that I remember most fondly. The last thing I needed my close friends to do was to tell me the attitudes and behaviors strangling my spiritual life were nothing to worry about. I knew my harmful patterns of behavior were killing my spiritual life and wounding the heart of God, but I needed help to break free. I was unable to do so on my own. I was fortunate to have friends who loved me enough to respond to my struggles with wisdom, love, sensitivity and appropriateness.

How does one go about making a good confession? Richard Foster offers particularly helpful advice. Take a close look at his chapter on "Confession" in *Celebration of Discipline*. All of the following steps are important facets of a good confession:

1. Remember God's Character. God is holy and loving. It was when the prodigal son recalled his father's character that he was willing to return home.
2. Be specific. Foster writes, "A generalized confession may save us from humiliation and shame but it will not ignite inward healing." Most people who confessed their sin to Jesus were specific and open about what they had done (Zacchaeus, the woman at the well). At the same time, don't allow a desire to be honest and specific to overwhelm you with details or push you into exaggerated introspection. God is aware of much more in our character and past than we will ever perceive ourselves. Francis de Sales writes: "Don't feel worried if you do not remember all your little peccadilloes in confession, for as you often fall imperceptibly, so you often are raised up imperceptibly."
3. Sin can be both internal and external (pride, avarice, anger as well as sloth, gluttony, lust, fornication, drunkenness). We tend to focus on external sins. At times we obsess over certain sins that particularly prick our conscience, while remaining blind to other sins just as significant and damaging.
4. Appropriate sorrow will accompany confession. Paul writes, "For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." (2 Corinthians 7:9b-10) Paul recommends genuine sorrow over sin, but not a sorrow grounded simply in the pain of sin's consequences. We need to allow people the space and freedom to mourn their mistakes and to weep where weeping is called for. If someone is confessing a sin to you and expressing appropriate sorrow, allow the confession to take its course. Don't try to rush matters, either with you or with a person who has come to you to confess their sin. When you sense the time has come to move beyond grief, introduce the wonder of God's forgiveness into the situation. A godly sorrow finds its resolution in the fundamental tenets of the gospel.
5. Determine to avoid sin in the future, a key aspect of repentance and confession. Consider Jesus' words to the woman caught in adultery, "Go your way, and from now on do not sin again." (John 8:11) Ask God to renew your will to avoid sin and to incline your will toward good. Foster writes, "It is the will to be delivered from sin that we seek from God as we prepare to make confession. We must desire to be conquered and ruled by God, or if we do not desire it, to desire to desire it. Such a desire is a gracious gift from God." (*Celebration of Discipline*, 152-153) Remember God's heart. Foster writes, "He is like a shepherd who will risk anything to find that one last sheep. We do not have to make God willing to forgive. In fact, it is God who is working to make us willing to seek forgiveness." (*Celebration of Discipline*, 153)
6. Acknowledge confession's termination point. Once we have named our sin for what it is, expressed appropriate sorrow and made restitution when necessary, move on. Do not take our sins with us like a tortoise carries its shell. They are to be left behind as we look to the future. Confession is "not to be a permanent habit of self-condemnation." Foster rightly insists, "Confession begins with sorrow but ends with joy."
7. Map a strategy for avoiding past sins. What specific factors led to the sin? What escape route did God provide that you avoided? What are the links in the chain of desires and responses that led to the sin? How can they be cut so that the sin does not reoccur? Be ruthlessly honest with yourself at this point. Often we will need our closest friends to help us to break deeply ingrained patterns. For many of us, only an organized system of accountability will help us finally break free. Where do you need to be held accountable for your behavior? Who do you trust enough to perform this role for you?
8. People will come to you with their struggles with sin. The last thing they need is for us to turn away in shock or dismay at what they have done. How can we hear the call to purity while avoiding the danger of self-righteousness and a judgmental spirit? Foster and Bonhoeffer suggest learning to live under the cross. Bonhoeffer writes, "Anybody who lives under the cross and who has discerned in the cross of Jesus the wickedness of all people and of his own heart will find there is no sin that can ever be alien to him. Anybody who had once been

horrified by the dreadfulness of his own sin that nailed Jesus to the cross will no longer be horrified by even the rankest sins of a brother." (*Celebration of Discipline*, 154) Living under the cross will deliver us from a sense of superiority and offense as we hear the confession of a sister or brother. Foster counsels, "Therefore there is nothing that anyone could say that would disturb us. Nothing. By living under the cross we can hear the worst possible things from the best possible people without so much as batting an eye. Live in that reality and we convey that spirit to others. They can come safely to us. They know we can receive anything they could possibly reveal. They know we would never condescend to them but instead understand." (*Celebration of Discipline*, 154-155)

9. Surround the entire process of repentance and confession with prayer. Pray for honesty, protection, forgiveness and courage. Pray for love. Pray for wisdom and discernment. Make new beginnings. Freedom from deeply ingrained habit patterns is possible. The future lies before us, but only if we deal with the past and present honestly and repentantly. Pray that God might make a new start for you today where change is necessary. Begin to take concrete steps that will make your new start a lasting reality.

Spiritual Formation
Unit 11
The Life of Integrity:
Discernment, Steadfastness and
Forthrightness



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Unit 11: The Life of Integrity: Discernment, Steadfastness and Forthrightness

Unit 11 Contents

- Learning Outcomes and Steps to Complete Unit 11
- Lecture Notes and Workbook
- Email Assignment
- Readings: Discipline in Focus: Guidance

Learning Objectives

- Explore the wholeness of life involved in becoming a person of integrity
- Consider the steadfastness of character that leads to making and keeping vows
- Examine one important precondition for discernment of right and wrong: purity of heart
- Assess your own sense of the degree to which you are living in integrity

Steps to Complete Unit 11

Read

- Your Reader for Unit Eleven is “Discipline in Focus: Guidance”. Guidance or spiritual direction is the help one person gives to another in order to encourage that person’s spiritual development. It can occur in a variety of ways, including a direct, one-on-one relationship, within the context of an institutional set of rules and even within a small cell group of people. In each way, people are seeking to open themselves more fully to the guidance of God and the scripture. Many times spiritual direction occurs as the leadership and community of the people of God come together and corporately receive direction for their lives and ministry.
- From *Devotional Classics*, pp. 87-93 (Buttrick); pp. 339-344 (Athanasius); pp. 357-362 (Hammarskjöld); pp. 363-368 (Norris)

Respond

- Complete the journaling assignments. You might want to work on the exercises Hammarskjöld (*Devotional Classics* p. 361) suggests, especially as you sense how far short you currently fall from a life of full integrity. Perhaps keep some “markings” for your own struggles with issues of integrity (whether discernment, steadfastness or forthrightness). You can feed your journal entries by keeping God before your eyes, making a thorough confession, and praying the Tax Collector’s prayer.

Complete the final email assignment and send your work to the professor.

Lecture and Workbook

[Chris Hall]: In Unit 9 we considered the seven cardinal sins, those powers and temptations that can rob us of integrity. In Unit 10 we spent our time focused on forgiveness, sometimes the only remedy available for the wounds we suffer because of people careening about in our life under the control of the cardinal sins.

In Unit 11 we consider what some believe to be the single most serious crisis in modern Christian leadership, the crisis of integrity. If forgiveness may be the most untended business in our Christian communities, the lack of integrity may be the most damaging characteristic of our leadership. People on the inside and outside of the Christian movement are unimpressed with the honesty, consistency and right living of those who take the name of Christ. Christians frequently seem only a tiny bit better in their conduct and ethics than those who surround them. Their families seem afflicted with much of the same disintegration as others.

When the people in the surrounding world no longer view the Christian community as distinctive in its manner of living, it is no wonder they turn away from it to seek other gods. They have little evidence that there is a living God in the midst of those who are followers of Christ.

I want to begin with Bible study. Below, we have listed a number of passages that use the word "integrity." You will want to pay attention to the context and parallelism as you seek the meaning and importance of integrity. Take twenty or thirty minutes to read the passages and make notes on what integrity is and what it does within our lives according to these passages of scripture.

Think About It

The Meaning and Importance of Integrity: Biblical Passages

In your journal, consider the following passages in their context and state what you learn about the meaning and importance of integrity. We've grouped the passages as an aid to seeing several of the essential components of integrity. The New Revised Standard Version is our reference. Other translations use the terms "blameless" or "uprightness".

Psalms 26:1; 101:2; Genesis 20:1-7; Proverbs 20:7 (general notion of integrity)

Proverbs 10:9; 11:3

Job 2:3-10, Psalm 7:8; Proverbs 19:1, 28:6

Titus 2:7, Malachi 2:6

Three Facets of Integrity

[David Fraser]: We can't consider all the aspects of the verses you just surveyed, but we want to draw three clear facets of integrity out of them. The facets comprise a threefold-cord that provides an indication of wholeness of character. The general notion of integrity is found in its symptoms. These symptoms include blamelessness, uprightness and many other virtues. Integrity means a balanced wholeness, a purity and consistency where nothing is lacking. But when used of the person of integrity in the Bible, there seems to be three essential elements that make up integrity. Let's start with Proverbs 11:3, "The integrity of the upright guides them, but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them."

This text occurs in a context where two ways are contrasted, a way that leads to life and safety and another that leads to destruction. In this case integrity (*tummā*) is seen as reliable guidance for the upright; whereas perversion (*selep*) or crookedness destroys the treacherous. What brings life and salvation is righteousness. Integrity and crookedness are contraries.

Conclusion One

Our first conclusion is that integrity begins with the ability to discern what is right and wrong, requiring the wisdom to exercise the humility to listen to what God desires of life. It clings to divine wisdom. We cannot say people have integrity when the principles that guide their lives

are evil or wrong. Hitler may have carried out his persecution and execution of the Jews and others in complete consistency with his own principles, but he was seriously wrong in the principles he followed. People of integrity are first of all people who have opened themselves to learning what is authentically right or wrong. They commit themselves to principles that align their lives with this knowledge.

Then consider Job 2:3-10. In this case we discover poor Job, the object of God’s boasting and Satan’s testing. All of his worldly goods have been removed including his treasured children and his health. God acknowledges that Job still retains his integrity, committing to do what is right, despite the temptation to curse God. Even his wife suggests that he be done with God and righteousness. His response is telling, “Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” His response suggests the second component of integrity.

Conclusion Two

Integrity means we act on the principles of right, even when conditions are adverse. Integrity appears when we see persons who stick to their course of action and their beliefs even when it is personally costly to do so. This characteristic is known as *steadfastness* and mirrors the quality of God who remained faithful to God’s own nature and character, even when it meant sending God’s unique Son to die on the cross in order to bring us the gift of forgiveness, justification and eternal life. We expect people of integrity to stay the course, despite changing tides of events. They have thought through their commitments and come to believe that some things are right, regardless of how difficult life may become when they continue to follow them.

So a person of integrity is one who not only has discerned what is right and wrong but also acts out the dictates of what is right, even when the action becomes personally costly.

Now take one last passage, Titus 2:7. In this text, speaking and teaching are viewed. Titus’ teaching is not only in agreement with sound doctrine, but he also speaks with “integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned.” The priest of Malachi 2 is one whose lips are not false but who walks with God in integrity and turns many from sin. The gold of his life must back up the currency of his words. There are many connections here that we cannot develop at this point, but part of what integrity means is that we say what we mean and we live what we say.

Conclusion Three

The third element of integrity involves telling others what we are doing, to what we are committed and why we are acting as we do. In this case integrity involves telling the truth in love. Our words are dependable—and not misleading—because we are dependable and trustworthy in what we say. Integrity means a kind of *forthrightness of speaking* that does not waver when there are those who make it costly for us to act and speak according to what we know is right living and speaking before God.

From these passages we can characterize integrity as the wholeness of response to God. Integrity leads to discerning what is right and wrong. It is committed faithfulness to what is right, even in the face of adverse circumstances. It exercises forthrightness or plain speaking in telling others what we are doing and why.

We have another passage of scripture for you to examine in the light of what we have discovered so far: I Kings 9:1-9. This is the story of God’s appearance to Solomon after he had finished building the temple. Note especially 9:4, but the whole context helps fill out the meaning of walking with integrity of heart.

Read 1 Kings 9:1-9.

[Chris Hall]: Let me note a few things that ought to be apparent from this passage:

1. *Integrity is rooted in our inmost being.* It is in our hearts, but it does not stay there. Integrity also is manifested in the uprightness of outward behavior. Obedience to the commandments and ordinances of God is a natural and inevitable outcome of a heart of integrity. Integrity is a congruence of our inner and outer being evidenced in what we think, what we say and how we live. They all fit together. We are one piece.
2. *Integrity by itself does not provide us with a guide to what is right and wrong.* That is given to us in the revealed will of God. It is in the commandments and ordinances of God that exist within the dynamic of a personal encounter and relationship with God.

We may say that integrity receives and rejoices in the knowledge of what is right learned in the long journey of a life that walks with and before God.

3. *Integrity does not mean being perfect.* David was hardly perfect, yet God saw him as one with integrity of heart. Despite his sins David loved what is right and turned from his sins in repentance when he was confronted with them. Integrity is a wholeness of person, where the inner and outer correspond, where words and deeds match each other. There is a reliability of character that does not change over time or because the way gets tough or costly. Nor does sin deflect the person from continuing to seek the Lord and to seek living uprightly.
4. *Integrity is a key ingredient in the success of our human projects and goals.* Solomon had built a magnificent temple. He was engaged in organizing a kingdom over which he hoped his children and grandchildren would rule. The warning he is given ultimately comes to pass. The city and the temple were laid to waste after Israel and its leaders no longer followed the Lord or walked before God with integrity of heart.

All of these scriptures indicate to us the importance of integrity. Integrity is associated with maturity, with wisdom and with insight. Integrity is not something that comes easily. Nor can any of us say that we have arrived. It is something we continue to pursue as we grow in our faith.

Yet we know integrity is an extraordinarily valuable commodity in life. In many ways it is an indication that the work the spiritual disciplines are designed to do in us has borne fruit. If we have been formed into Christ’s image, then we will be people of integrity, as well as people of love, graciousness and prayer. Integrity is a fruit of the proper use of the spiritual disciplines.

The Opposite of Integrity

The opposite of integrity is labeled crookedness in the Bible. In Proverbs 11:3, integrity marks the upright whereas crookedness marks the treacherous. The term treacherous is a word frequently translated elsewhere as the “faithless.” These are people who are unreliable, whose character is not straightforward, but warped and crooked. They do not have a fidelity to what is right so that they can be counted on to be and do what is right, regardless of how difficult the situation might be.

The opposite of integrity thus conjures up an image of corruption. Something that at one time was whole, pure and reliable has been damaged or made impure. Something alien and foreign has polluted integrity. Corruption results in acts where we get away with things we know to be wrong.

We can call these matters duplicity or to coin a word, “unintegrity.” Crookedness or corruption refers to actions and character traits that undermine or corrode integrity—things that undermine our fidelity to the commitments we make as we discern the will of God. We all struggle with these matters.

Think About It

Examples of “Unintegrity”

As you think through your life and experience, can you identify key people and behaviors you would say are clear and powerful expressions of lack of integrity? Can you think of examples in the Bible? In what ways were the Pharisees examples of “unintegrity?” Can you think of examples of lacking integrity for each of the three elements: lack of discernment, lack of steadfastness and lack of forthrightness?

Examples of “Unintegrity”

[David Fraser]: In our larger civic life together it is not hard to think of examples of “unintegrity.” Part of the contemporary crisis is the fact that many of us live in so-called “Christian” nations. A large plurality of the population professes Christian commitment, yet we are flooded by unrighteousness. The differences between communities of faith and the larger non-Christian world seem very small. Think about these examples:

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- We say we are committed to the truth, but then we shade the stories we tell about why we did wrong, making ourselves appear to be victims rather than responsible wrongdoers.
- We say we are committed to the truth, but then our fundraising literature polishes up what is going on with evangelistic exaggerations or even blatant falsehoods.
- We say we are committed to the sanctity of marriage, and yet many of our marriages end in divorce, explaining each divorce as the “will of God” for our lives.
- We are told by scripture to honor those who stand in authority above us, but we slander our bosses’ character, spread unfounded rumors and despise them.
- We say we believe righteousness exalts a nation and proceed to excuse the misbehavior and corruption of top officials, saying their private life is irrelevant to the public interest and good.
- We live in nations governed by the rule of law, and yet millions of us cheat on our taxes.

Let me tell the story of a colleague who shall remain anonymous. It is a true story. He had finished a doctoral degree in theology and was teaching in a seminary early in his career. A particularly attractive position opened up in a Christian college about 400 miles away, one that would provide more support for his wife and new child. He interviewed for the job and was treated very well on campus. To his delight, he was offered the position.

Having moved his family to the campus, he discovered that his assigned duties did not correspond to what he had negotiated with the president of the college. He had been assigned a couple of courses over what he had been told would be his teaching load.

So he went into the president’s office to get the situation corrected. The conversation went poorly from the very beginning. Clearly, the president was in no mood to discuss the matter, despite what had been negotiated only several months earlier. Finally, the president exploded, “Do you have it in writing?” “No,” said my colleague. “Then get out of my office and don’t talk about it ever again.”

To say the least, my colleague was devastated. He had assumed that Christian leadership would act according to what was agreed whether verbally or in a written contract. He had neglected to get the details down in writing. Now he met a Christian leader who lacked integrity and would only respond to what was in a written contract. The president’s verbal statement in recruiting the faculty member did not correspond with the actual work duties.

Unfortunately, this sort of situation is not rare in Christian organizations.

These are all easy examples of “unintegrity.” Some of them can be corrected by a simple dose of the honesty that ends self-deception. Others are correctable by insisting on consistency. One of the effects of sin on us is to produce a kind of civil war within us. Our inner commitments do not get translated into external behavior. We say one thing and then when it is costly to follow what we said, we do something else and make up excuses.

Integrity is found where a person has thought through commitments to what is right, and follows through on those commitments even when it is personally costly. Integrity is found when a person has exercised discernment and learned what is good and right, and steadfastly sticks to the right while being forthright in saying what he or she is doing and why.

Now, we can talk about various sorts of integrity:

- professional integrity,
- business integrity,
- journalistic integrity,
- religious integrity.

Each of these categories requires something a little different from us, but all of them have the three-fold quality we have spoken of as integrity in general.

We find ourselves set in a world hungry for people of integrity—people who know and do what is right even under adverse circumstances. Integrity is what builds trust in community. We learn upon whom we can rely, whom we can count in terms of a character that acts consistently. It doesn’t matter whether we look at mass communication, political life, contracts in business and the quality of products we purchase. We want integrity!

Integrity touches a wide range of issues. Look at several examples of integrity in order to begin exploring our own integrity.

Making and Keeping Vows

Begin by doing some Bible study to gain greater clarity on this area of making explicit, verbal commitments. The passage we've chosen for examination is part of the larger story of Saul, a man with little integrity. I Samuel 14:24-46 tells the story of Saul taking an oath meant to secure victory for Israel. Take about twenty to thirty minutes to look through the passage above. What does it tell us about making commitments and then sticking to them, come what may.

Think About It

Saul: The Commitments of a Man Without Integrity - I Samuel 14:24-46

In what ways does Saul display a lack of integrity? Or is he the person of integrity in this affair whereas the people of Israel who ransom Jonathan lack integrity? What is the difference between being a person of unswerving conviction and a fanatic whose unwillingness to change causes even more harm and evil than someone unreliable?

Truth Telling and Promise Keeping

[Chris Hall]: The well-being of every human group is dependent on its members speaking the truth in crucial situations, keeping their promises in matters of serious importance.

We forge networks of trust by telling the truth and keeping promises. These networks are the foundations of faith; they hold every human community together.

In marriage and commerce, in politics and international affairs, wherever people must trust one another, lying or breaking one's word casts doubt on the ability to sustain cordial, fruitful and effective relationships.

The fact that we extract oaths of office or vows in marriage ceremonies or sworn testimony in courts of justice indicates we know a dark secret about our fellow humans and ourselves. Deceit and unfaithfulness saturate the grease that lubricates much social interaction. We feel we cannot get along without what we call "white lies" any more than we can get along without coffee, tea or aspirin.

Jesus turned to his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount and said: be so honest that your "yes" means "yes" and your "no" means "no." Adding an oath to your words like "so help me God," "I swear to God," or "it's the truth" cannot change the intent of your heart. If you are deceiving yourself and attempting to deceive others, a vow or an oath won't make the situation right. If you are so changed by Christ living in your life, then people will soon discover your word is as good as gold.

The story we read in I Samuel touches on the issues of truth telling and promise keeping. This story is one of several examples illuminating when it is better to break a promise than to keep it. By the time we get to Chapter 14, we already know that Saul is an impulsive, impatient man. He has made excuses for disobeying the clear commands of God. He engages in religious piety without being genuinely committed to the rule of God in his life.

You will find more extensive reflection notes on this story from I Samuel 14 on the next four pages of the workbook. We ask you to take time to read over them, and then we will summarize a few salient points about integrity in terms of the analysis you find there.

Notes on Saul's Character and Vow-Making

We are in a set of stories that intend to show us Saul's character and to contrast it with Jonathan's character. In 1 Samuel 14 we see a great deal of religious activity on Saul's part: he lays a religious oath on his soldiers that they not eat until the evening; he builds his first altar to the Lord to set right the sin of some of his troops eating meat with the blood still in it; he consults with the high priest with the sacred Ephod to see whether he should continue to pursue the Philistine troops; he swears an oath before God and seeks to carry out that oath, even when it means the death of his own son.

We are not used to such religious zeal in Saul, and we must ask, "Why?" What are his intentions and motives in this sudden burst of religiousness? The clue must be sought in the preceding chapter where Saul has been scolded by Samuel for his hasty offering of the sacrifice at Gilgal. Samuel has told him that God will not continue the dynasty of kings through his sons because of his disobedience in not waiting for Samuel to come to make the offering to the Lord. Saul is still stinging from that announcement, and he has brooded over it. Having disobeyed

God and been judged, he now decides the best course of action is to prove his devotion to God by getting more religious. His burst of religious activity comes within a day of Samuel's announcement.

Sometimes we in the Church are so concerned about getting people involved in the religious activities of life that we forget to ask what it is that motivates people in those activities. What are their true intentions? You have undoubtedly known a person who has been basically a rather lukewarm Christian—not a disbeliever—whose life is struck with a tragedy and suddenly for a short time becomes very religious—reading the Bible, praying daily when he had not prayed for months, attending Church, giving offerings. Then after a short time the zeal and discipline wanes. The individual returns to a more usual indifference and neglect of God.

Saul was that way. He had a great fright from Samuel's words of judgment, and so he plunged into heightened religious activity to prove he was religious. Perhaps he hoped God would see his zeal and reverse the decision that took away the dynasty. But instead that he flounders about and makes things worse by his religiousness. I believe it is fair to say that the reason for this is that his being religious was really a matter of avoiding God. We see this very clearly in the next chapter of I Samuel, but already we have hints of it here. God has spoken a word of judgment, and what we find is not repentance, not a seeking for God's forgiveness, not a humble acceptance and acknowledgment that he has not been living in faith, but a sudden burst of religious activity.

This is a passage dealing with Saul's character. Impulsiveness is a trait we see again and again in the stories about Saul. He was impulsive and impatient at Gilgal when he couldn't wait for Samuel to arrive and make the sacrifice and his soldiers were deserting in droves. Later we will see how envy and pride will turn his impulsiveness into attempts to murder David and his own son Jonathan. Here we have his impulsiveness expressed in a religious vow, an oath that he lays on his soldiers. Looking across the hills and seeing the Philistine army in uproar and melting away in retreat, he blurts out an oath, "Cursed be any man who eats food before evening comes, before I have avenged myself on my enemies." (14:24)

The soldiers take the vow very seriously and eat nothing, except Jonathan who had not heard of the oath for the day. But when Jonathan hears of the oath, he lays a serious charge against its wisdom, "My father has made trouble for the country." (14:29) It was a stupid blunder on Saul's part. We may suppose it is a grandiose gesture meant to impress God; all will fast this day, not even stopping to eat, and will press the enemy to the utmost limits. God will look upon this self-denial and give Israel the victory.

What made the oath a foolish and reckless vow was that the victory had already been given. The Philistines were already in flight. There was no need for a vow of this sort. Furthermore, the pursuit of the enemy continues for at least twenty miles from Micmash and lasts the whole day. By the time you have run up and down hills and gullies, fought hand to hand as they did, you would be thoroughly exhausted. Even a little food would refresh and strengthen you for further pursuit. Jonathan recognizes this. He says, "How much better it would have been if the men had eaten today some of the plunder they took from their enemies. Would not the slaughter of the Philistines have been even greater?" (14:30)

Saul may have laid this oath upon his army to impress God with his religiousness, but his action results in lessening the victory God had already given. Saul is like a train that has jumped its tracks, unable to stop. He plunges forward this way and that, the momentum of his position and impulsive character carrying him forward. But he no longer is King with blessing of God. When he tries to act religious, as though he were serving his office with God, the results are counterproductive, leading him into blunders and difficulty.

Saul is not the only impulsive and reckless vow-maker in the Bible or even in our own experience. How many of us have been foxhole religious fanatics! We reach for God's help when the bombs begin to fall and the issues become life or death. We make great promises and vows to God if God would only keep us safe. In quieter times, we find ourselves more able to live life without promising God anything. Even our New Year's resolutions often are impulsive vows, kept more in the breaking than in their fulfillment!

But we have several other rash vows in the Bible: you might remember the story of Jephthah in Judges 11. He went to war with the Ammonites and vowed to the Lord, "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I

return in triumph will be the Lord's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering." (Judges 11:30-1) The shocker was that what came was his only child, a daughter, who emerged to meet him. She submitted to his vow after two months of mourning with her friends.

Then there is King Herod in the New Testament: When Salome danced at his birthday party, "He promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked." (Matthew 14:7) The shocker here was that she asked for John the Baptist's head on a platter. Because of his foolish oath and fear of losing status in the eyes of his guests, Herod beheaded the Baptist.

These oaths, like Saul's, were foolish because their maker did not take time to think to the end of possible consequences. Jephthah and Herod would never have made those promises had they known what keeping them was going to mean. How many of us look back at our foxhole vows and know we would not have made them in a quieter, more thoughtful circumstance. We have not kept those vows. Our intention was not to yield our whole selves to the Lordship of Christ, come what may, life or death. It was a deep desire for insurance against the worst. When the worst passed and we survived, then we went quickly back to ignoring God most of the time and forgetting what it was we vowed to do.

What surprises me in this passage is that God indicates how strongly God is for promise keeping, for the integrity of vows, even when they are reckless and foolish. The book of Ecclesiastes in 5:5 says, "It is better not to vow, than to make a vow and not fulfill it." Saul has laid a vow on the army. When the one soldier who hadn't heard the vow accidentally breaks it, God stops giving guidance through the priest to Israel's King. God takes Saul's oath seriously. That is the frightening aspect about our making vows or swearing by the name of God.

We still make vows in the name of Christ. We stand before the altar and make marriage vows; we sit in Church and take vows to care for the children of fellow Christians who dedicate themselves to God—and to be supportive of new members. We must be sure God takes them far more seriously than we can ever imagine. Promise keeping is not a great virtue in our cultures anymore. Our great value is self-fulfillment.

After making marriage vows, we plunge into marriage, unaware of the pain and trouble, the conflict of egos and the crucifixion of self necessary to make a marriage really work. Though we have pledged fidelity "for better and for worse" oftentimes when neither better nor worse comes and we are bored with one another, we very quickly break our vows and seek new partners. We are surrounded by thousands of lawyers who specialize in showing us how to get out of promises, contracts and agreements we have made which we have come to see as no longer profitable or self-fulfilling. We pursue avidly everything except keeping our word and then wonder why our lives seem so devoid of God's presence and guidance.

Saul's oath was an impulsive action that should never have been made. But having been made, God took even a foolish vow seriously. Here's the really incredible part of this story. Having discovered that God no longer will speak to him because someone has violated his impulsive oath, Saul then takes a second, even more foolish oath. "As surely as the Lord lives, even if the sin lies with my son Jonathan, he must die." (14:39)

The first vow simply put the violator of the oath under a curse. This second vow puts the person under a death sentence! And we know the outcome of the search for the violator of Saul's first vow. The finger points at the hero of the day, Jonathan. And though his act was committed in ignorance, Jonathan is ready to submit to the sentence of death, so committed was he to a God who never breaks trust with us humans. For Jonathan it was more important that a promise made to God be kept than that his life be continued! What an astounding man of faith and commitment was this Jonathan. Every time we get to peer into his character, he grows in stature.

But we must also admire the soldiers' stature. They saw clearly what we are able to see as well: Saul's vows were rash blunders from the very first. This second vow was a double blunder and great injustice. If kept, it would have meant not only the needless death of his eldest son, but the death of the person God had used to bring victory that very day. A vow that does this kind of damage cannot be a legitimate vow!

They saw there are times when the only way truly to keep faith with God is to break promises with other humans. You will remember the words of Jesus in the New Testament, "It is far better not to take an oath swearing by God or any of His creation at all." We should be so changed in our character that our word as a simple yes or no is completely reliable because we

are completely reliable people. The real issue gets down to who we are as God's people. What is more than a simple yes or no that is reliable comes from the Evil One, the liar from the beginning who deceived Adam and Eve into breaking trust with God in the Garden.

What we have in the case of Saul is a person whose inner character was not given to God, however religious he was, however many times the name of the true God passed over his lips, however many times he stood before the altar of the true God. He was not a changed character. He was not a person of integrity. His vow did not come from God but from the Evil One. To keep the vow strictly was to create more room for the Evil One to work out trouble and evil in Israel than room for God's good grace and will to be done on earth.

Instinctively, we feel the same reaction to the vows of Jephthah and Herod. They had no right to make vows that might lead, as they did, to the deaths of other people. Let Saul make a vow that meant his abstaining from food for that day. Why should his vow bind and trouble other people? Let Saul offer his life as forfeit in punishment and replacement for the one who has violated the oath of the day. Why should his oath mean the death of someone who had not created the vow or even known about it?

The soldiers did what was right; they rescued Jonathan and would not let the good of promise keeping mean the death of an innocent. It is interesting that the troops themselves take a vow not to allow harm to Jonathan! We have three vows in this story. Only the last has any wisdom and truth in it.

You may ask, when is it legitimate for me not to keep a vow or a promise or contract I have made? This is a complicated question, and there are many circumstances that we could examine. But let me at least make clear from this passage when promise keeping must be sacrificed to a higher good. This is not a matter of getting out of a contract one has made that turns out to be unprofitable, one on which you lose money. This is not the breaking of a covenant of marriage when the initial romance has worn off and the couple is going through a period of disillusionment and conflict. This is not breaking one's agreement to provide transportation to a social event when someone calls up and offers you a free ticket to a sports event you would really rather go see.

In all those cases you are talking about promises you have made which have come to trouble you personally. They have come to be inconvenient and discouraging to you. In this passage, we have a case where the vow does not touch Saul directly, except it involves his son. Saul didn't want to get out of this vow, but he should have! Promise keeping is not legitimate when it threatens the life of an innocent other person.

You know what I am talking about. This situation doesn't happen as often as we think, but it is there. The German citizen who swore allegiance to the Nazi government should have broken his or her word when ordered to participate in the killing of Jews. The mother who swore fidelity to a husband until death do them part must break the vow when the husband turns out to be an abusive father who beats his wife and molests his children. A government employee who is asked to help plot the death of the head of the state of Chile because he is not cooperating with American foreign policy must refuse to keep his vow in order to protect the lives of innocent people whose deaths are unjustly and illegally plotted.

God weighs promise keeping very dearly and strongly. We must be very careful in the vows and promises we make, even when we do not add God's name. As Christians, we are to let our words mean exactly what we are willing to do; we must let our "yes" be yes and our "no" be no. At times when we have made bad promises, promise keeping must yield to an even higher priority. When our foolish vows might lead to terrible injustice to other people, we must not keep those vows. That is when our vows have backfired and we must be humble and honest enough not to make the vow worse because we suppose it would be evil not to keep a promise we have made. We must then be wise in our integrity and not foolish in our consistency.

God helps us to be truth tellers and promise keepers, and God delivers us from those situations where we must break our own word in order to save some life that is threatened if we keep our own vows. If we allow ourselves to be transformed by Christ, we can be sure to have the strengths and grace to keep our promises, even when those promises turn out to be to our very real disadvantage. Our integrity calls us to exercise the deeper wisdom to know when it is more Christ-like to break a vow we have made if our foolish vow will possibly harm and destroy the vitality of another person.

[David Fraser] Integrity involves being truth tellers and promise keepers but not at any price. The price we are willing to pay for our vows is frequently so low that people perceive us (rightfully) as people of little integrity. We are not seen as truth tellers and promise keepers because we sacrifice our commitments when they become too inconvenient or costly for us.

Integrity involves discernment and wisdom. Saul's problem was that he made rash vows that grew out of an impulsive character. He had not matured. The consistency of the evil or the foolish is very different from the consistency of those who exercise integrity. Their commitments are thoughtfully grounded in core values and principles that are responsive to the patterns of life God asks from us.

Integrity and compromise are not enemies. We always need to act on the basis of our principles. Yet there are times when we compromise our principles because we are able to get more of what we believe God wants in a given situation. There is a single-mindedness that borders on fanaticism. It is always unwilling to go half the distance, believing the perfect will of God is the full distance. Fanatical steadfastness sticks with commitments regardless of the consequences. Integrity-based steadfastness discerns places and times when compromise or reversal is essential. Leadership that has integrity entails convincing ones followers that your steadfastness is discerning rather than fanatical. Stephen Carter says:

[Integrity] conveys not so much a single-mindedness as a completeness; not the frenzy of a fanatic who wants to remake all the world in a single mold but the serenity of a person who is confident in the knowledge that he or she is living rightly. A person of integrity [is one] we feel we can trust to do right, to play by the rules, to keep commitments. (Carter, *Integrity*, 1997, p. 7)

Integrity and Compromise

Carter's comments lead us into an area worthy of further exploration. Part of our problem is we criticize people who change their minds as unprincipled and people who do not change their minds as stubborn. We don't always know when integrity requires that we stay the course and when it requires that we change our direction.

We do know compromise is not an enemy of integrity. It is not possible to realize all the positive values and outcomes we seek. The fact that we cannot get all we believe is right and desirable should not lead us to the position where we settle for all or nothing. Sometimes we can get most of what we want, even though it is not the fullness of what we desire. The test is this: does the compromise move toward the ultimate goal or away from it? If the compromise leads toward the goal, we may embrace it, yet also be forthright in saying it is only one step along the path we are seeking to follow. The journey will continue, not end, at this point. We can cooperate in a compromise in order to limit what we see as an evil. Such behavior is not an illicit cooperation with evil. The compromise solution may not provide the full correction we seek, but it may put limits on evil and provide more space and time for the good.

What helps us see integrity when compromises or reversals of commitment are made is that we ordinarily see consistency and reliability of keeping agreements in a person's pattern of behavior. This is especially so when we see someone keeping to principle even when it is personally costly, not seeking exemptions for cases that clearly fall under the principle claimed. Then we can make sense of exceptions when they happen.

Lewis Smedes draws a contrast between what he calls covenant keepers and self maximizers. Covenant keepers are loyal, trustworthy, committed, dependable and even heroic. Covenant making is a uniquely human way to begin an alliance. In a vow you give yourself over to a permanent identity in the face of an unpredictable future. You will change, the person to whom you make a vow will change and your circumstances will change. No one ever marries the right person, for no one is ever perfect. Yet our culture teaches us not to define ourselves by our past commitments but in terms of present needs and future possibilities.

A self maximizer is an open, self-asserting, expanding person. Self maximizers evaluate relationships in terms of what they contribute to one's own growth and fulfillment. When a relationship no longer delivers the goods, no longer seems to be living and fulfilling, then it is time to declare it dead and move on to a new one. Self maximizers turn life into an exciting quest for maximal happiness. God calls us to be covenant keepers rather than self maximizers.

Discerning God’s Will

[Chris Hall]: The life of integrity is not automatic or easy. On the one side, such a life takes the time and energy necessary to engage the scriptures as well as the traditions of our churches. It means that we have taken time to become fully thoughtful, thinking our way through what God wants as well as what the world is like. Integrity means we are able, by reason of practice and experience along with the guidance of scripture, to discern the good and perfect will of God, even in the midst of the pressures and complexities of our situation.

On the other side, integrity requires a transformed interior. We have to be changed by our encounters and experiences so that we are no longer the same people we once were. The internal civil war must be quieted. Discernment is more than a matter of enough good information, whether it comes from scripture, experience or practice.

One of the key images of integrity is wrapped up in the word “purity.” Jesus tells us in one of the Beatitudes, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8) The ability to see God and what God is doing comes when our hearts have been so changed that there is a singularity, a wholeness that is not true of those with divided loyalties. Augustine talked about integrity as loving one thing, being delighted by one thing.

Yet we frequently don’t see God because our eyes are clouded by our heart’s impurity. Discernment is partly a matter of being able to see God at work. Yet we may not see God if we are not pure in heart. We have all known highly trained, theologically articulate people, who nonetheless fail the test of integrity. They cannot see or stick steadfastly to what is right.

Jesus makes this point to us in the Sermon on the Mount. If you allow your hearts to be full of sexual desires and longings, you will look out at others as sexual objects and possible sexual partners. If you allow your thoughts to be controlled by ambition and pride, you will see every situation as a threat to your status. You will see every success of your fellow human as a slur on your importance. Furthermore, you will lose interest in every event unless you are front and center. If your inner life is governed by greed, your vision will see the world as a place to exploit, a ladder to wealth and security.

Two Case Studies

Consider brief stories of two people, one from China and one from Eastern Europe. Below you will find the stories of a Chinese pastor in prison in difficult circumstances and a Lutheran pastor and his wife during World War II. Both couples could envision opportunities to live above the average level of response of their fellow Christians. Read their stories and then reflect on the following page how they demonstrated integrity in the midst of their difficult circumstances.

THE STORY OF A CHINESE PASTOR IN PRISON

At a conference in New England, a Chinese pastor who had spent eighteen years of his life in prison camp for his faith shared his testimony with the assembled crowd. He told them,

“My friends wonder what kind of work I did in the labor camp to keep me physically healthy. I answered them that life in the labor camp was very, very hard. The authorities in the camp put me to emptying the human waste cesspool.

“Most of the prisoners were afraid to approach the cesspool, but the authorities were aware of my background—I was well-educated, from a well-to-do family—and especially because they were atheists and they knew I was a Christian leader. So they enjoyed putting me to work in the human waste cesspool. But they did not know in those years how I enjoyed working there.

“It was no more than two meters in breadth and two meters in length, filled with human waste collected from the entire camp. Once it was full, the human waste was kept until it was ripe and then dug out and sent to the field as fertilizer. Because the pit was so deep, I could not reach the bottom to empty it, so I had to walk into the disease-ridden mass and scoop out the successive layers of human waste, all the time breathing the strong stench.

“The guards and all the prisoners kept a long way off because of the stench.

“So why did I enjoy working in the cesspool? I enjoyed the solitude. In the labor camp all the prisoners normally were under strict surveillance and no one could be alone. But when I

worked in the cesspool, I could be alone and could pray to our Lord as loudly as I needed. I could recite the scriptures including all the Psalms I still remembered and no one was close enough to protest. That's the reason I enjoyed working in the cesspool. Also I could sing loudly the hymns I still remembered.

"In those days one of my most favorite was 'In the Garden.' Before I was arrested, this was my favorite hymn, but at that time I did not realize the real meaning of this hymn. When I worked in the cesspool, I knew and discovered a wonderful fellowship with our Lord. Again and again I sang this hymn and felt our Lord's presence with me.

I came to the garden alone
While the dew is still on the roses;
And the voice I hear falling on my ear,
The Son of God discloses.
And he walks with me, and he talks with me,
And he tells me I am his own,
And the joy we share as we tarry there
None other has ever known.

"Again and again as I sang this hymn in the cesspool, I experienced the Lord's presence. He never left me or forsook me. And so I survived and the cesspool became my private garden." (Cited in Gordon MacDonald, *The Life God Blesses*, pp. 225-26)

THE STORY OF RICHARD WURMBRAND

Late one evening three men conversed in a small flat in Budapest: a Lutheran pastor named Richard Wurmbrand, his landlord, and Borila, a huge soldier on leave from the front where Rumania was fighting as a German ally during World War II. Borila dominated the conversation, boasting of his adventures in battle and especially of how he helped exterminate Jews in Transmistria. He had killed hundreds of them, he said, with his own hands.

Wurmbrand was not a man to remain silent about cruelty, so he protested - quietly and with bite, "It is a frightening story," he told Borila, "but I do not fear the Jews—God will compensate them for what they have suffered. I ask myself with anguish what will happen to the murderers when they stand before God's judgment."

The soldier quickly took offense and the landlord had to prevent an ugly scene, saying both men were guests in his house and steering the conversation to more pleasant things.

Eventually it came out that the Jew-killer was also a lover of music. While serving in the Ukraine he'd been captivated by the songs there and now wished he could hear them again.

Wurmbrand thought to himself, "The fish has entered my net!" He told Borila, "If you'd like to hear some of them, come to my flat. I'm no pianist, but I can play a few Ukrainian melodies."

This Borila, his huge bulk horrible as the smell of death, was a prime example of the evil that conventional religion must turn away from. He was moral pollution, one to avoid at all costs, a subject not just cut off somewhere above the eyes, but morally decapitated. The last thing a man on guard against the evil world would do is invite him into his home, exposing his family to such a spectacle.

But Wurmbrand brought Borila downstairs into his flat and began playing Ukrainian folk songs—softly so as not to awaken his wife and baby son. After a bit the pastor could see the soldier had been deeply moved by the melodies. He stopped playing and said, "If you look through that curtain you can see someone asleep in the next room. It's my wife, Sabina. Her parents, her sisters, and her twelve-year-old brother have been killed with the rest of the family. You told me that you had killed hundreds of Jews near Golta, and that is where they were taken. You yourself don't know who you have shot, so we can assume that you are the murderer of her family.

Borila leaped from his chair, his eyes ablaze, looking as if he could strangle the pastor. But Wurmbrand calmed him by proposing an experiment. "I shall wake my wife and tell her who you are and what you have done. I can tell you what will happen. My wife will not speak one word of reproach! She'll embrace you as if you were her brother. She'll bring you supper, the best things she has in the house."

The pastor then came to the punch line, “If Sabina, who is a sinner like us all, can forgive and love like this, imagine how Jesus who is perfect Love, can forgive and love you!” He urged Borila to return to God and seek forgiveness.

The man melted. Rocking back and forth he sobbed out his confession, “I’m a murderer; I’m soaked in blood...” Wurmbrand guided him to his knees and began praying. Borila, having had no such experience, simply begged for forgiveness over and over.

Then the pastor walked into the bedroom and gently awakened his wife. “There is a man here whom you must meet,” he whispered. “We believe he has murdered your family, but he has repented, and now he is our brother.” Sabina came out in her dressing gown and extended her hands to the huge, tear-stained soldier. He collapsed in her arms, and both wept greatly. Amid the overwhelming emotions of grief, guilt, and grace, they kissed each other fervently.

Finally Sabina went into the kitchen to prepare some food. Wurmbrand thought his guest could use a further reinforcement of grace since he was laboring out from under such horrible crimes. So he stepped into the next room and returned with his two-year-old son, Mihai, fast asleep in his arms. Borila was dismayed. It had been only hours since he boasted of killing Jewish children in their parents’ arms, and this sight seemed an unbearable reproach. He expected a withering rebuke. Instead the pastor leaned forward and said, “Do you see how quietly he sleeps? You are like a newborn child who can rest in the Father’s arms. The blood that Jesus shed has cleansed you.” Looking down at Mihai, Borila felt—for the first time in ages—a surge of pure happiness.

Later after rejoining his regiment in Russia, Borila laid aside his weapons and volunteered to rescue the wounded under fire. (Mosley, *A Tale of Three Virtues*, pp. 36-37)

Seeing Opportunities

[David Fraser] We tend to see the world as we are. Most frightening, we tend to see God through our private lenses, to make God over into our own image. If we cannot do that, we are likely to deny that God exists. The Chinese pastor in prison saw the human dung cesspool as an opportunity to be with God. The cesspool became the Garden of Fellowship in the midst of terrible persecution. Sabina and Richard Wurmbrand were able to see Borila as a potential brother in Christ. Because of that they were able to lead him to the Christ they already knew. Richard was forthright in not hiding his disapproval of killing Jews, yet at the same time he was wise and skillful in carrying out his commitment to share Christ in the most effective way.

How is your eyesight? When you look about your world and life, what do you see? I don’t mean what do you see occasionally—but what is it you see regularly and repeatedly? We are meant to live with the sight of God filling our vision every day.

I remember my son Scott coming home from the environmental biology center at Au Sable, Michigan, after taking an extensive course in ornithology. One morning he said to me, “Dad, I didn’t realize we had so many birds in our backyard!” Until he was trained in recognizing the various species and hearing the songs of the birds, they simply were part of a great backdrop of ignored reality.

We all are surrounded by vast worlds of reality we consistently fail to recognize. The educated eye of the geologist looks at a rock and sees far more than the average person who kicks it out of the way. The trained eye of the chess master looks at the board and sees more than a random distribution of pawns, knights and rooks. The skilled physician taking a pulse and noting the skin tone sees more of a patient’s health than you or I. An individual who has spiritual sight can see beyond the stars—the Bible says that the pure in heart, those who pursue holiness—shall see God. Experience, knowledge and purity make a difference in seeing.

There are none to whom this vision of God cannot be given—all are eligible. But to gain this sight you must take the journey to the place where God can be seen, where God shows Godself. It is the place of purity of heart. Each day we are fitting or unfitting ourselves to see God. This is the greatest vision we may have. A French proverb says, God often visits us, but most of the time we are not at home. Unless we are pursuing holiness, we shall not be at home when the Holy One comes to visit us.

The Greek word for “pure” means unmixed, something without foreign elements of anything else mixed into it. What is pure has no other element that affects it: pure gold is without other metals or alloys; pure wine has no water mixed in; pure grain is without chaff or bits of

dead insects. The pure in heart are those whose heart motives, thoughts, emotions, and desires are absolutely unmixed. Their hearts have been purged of sin and they hunger and thirst for the Righteous One to show Godself.

To clear away the clutter and chaos in our inner being, we are given the cleansing power of the Word of God. The Psalmist gives us one of the avenues by which we can clear our vision:

How may a young person lead a pure life?
By living according to your word.
With all my heart I seek you, God;
do not let me stray from your commands.
I have hidden your word in my heart
that I might not sin against you. (119:9-11)

Integrity is in part the purity of heart that enables us to see the world that surrounds us as full of the possibilities of God's grace. We can see ways in which our commitments to the core values of the Kingdom of God can be moved forward even in the most difficult and narrow of circumstances.

We have been reviewing the three-fold nature of integrity: discernment, steadfastness and forthrightness. It is time for you to do some initial self-assessment. It would be nice if we could get the people we work with to tell us what they really think: are we discerning and thoughtful in what we commit ourselves to? Do we stick by what we know to be right or do we try to get away with what is wrong, especially when doing or speaking what is right is costly? Are we forthright in telling people what we are doing and why? Are we indeed living lives of integrity?

Below we provide you with questions for self-reflection. Take time now to evaluate your own sense of integrity in your life.

Integrity and the Church

[Chris Hall]: When we consider all three elements of integrity, we must admit that it is in great demand in our world today. Part of the challenge we face in the Church is to live lives genuinely reshaped by the grace of God. We can give ourselves to the disciplines of the spiritual life and turn into narrow, hollow, petty pietists whose religiousness is signally unattractive. I do not believe that will happen if we are authentically connected by faith to the Jesus who gave himself on the Cross. But it happens all too often.

Stephen Mosley complains about how the legalism of Christian communities narrows us down into unattractive, petty communities of trivial pursuits. Listen to his words and see whether they don't ring a bell with you:

Too often believers have trivialized goodness by concentrating on their various denominational brands of legalism, becoming a "peculiar people" set at odd angles to the world rather than being an attractive light illuminating it. As a result, our morality calls out rather feebly. It whines from the corner of a sanctuary; it awkwardly interrupts pleasures; it mumbles excuses at parties; it shuffles along out of step and slightly behind the times. Such virtue doesn't play well on prime-time TV or in top-forty tunes. It's often regarded by our secular contemporaries as a narrow, even trivial, pursuit. (Stephen Mosley, *A Tale of Three Virtues: Cures for Colorless Christianity*, 1989, p. 17)

The life of integrity connects us to the foundational principles of goodness and righteousness as revealed in God's Word. It makes us anything but pale imitations of the real thing. Jesus was the paragon of integrity, and people found him anything but dull or uninteresting. They could hardly understand the sort of life he lived, so different and dynamic in comparison to the Pharisaical legalists, the revolutionary Zealots, the pious Essenes or the political Sadducees.

Jesus saw through the complexities of his day and the variety of religious options and ethical compromises and lived a life that was committed to the central matters of right living. He was a person of discernment. He had thought through his values and principles to their conclusions. He was also steadfast, standing strongly and serenely by his commitments, even when it meant his death on the cross. He was not a stubborn fanatic but a reliable truth teller

and promise keeper. What he said was forthright and clear. He served the Kingdom of God and lived in terms of its perspective and power.

We are being invited by the Spirit to become persons of integrity. We should live lives of integrity. On the following page you will find a final assignment. Please answer thoughtfully and carefully the two questions listed there. Share them with your mentor or the group with whom you are working.

After the final assignment pages you will find some help on the spiritual discipline of "Guidance." [See your Reader beginning on p. 32.] This discipline is particularly helpful in discernment, in discovering what the right and wrong are in given circumstances. It is a discipline not frequently practiced in a formal way within Protestant groups. However, guidance is a discipline we have realized is critically important. Acquiring wisdom and experience is something best done within the context of mentoring relationships such as Paul and Timothy or Barnabas and Paul. Jesus mentored and gave guidance to the twelve disciples. We have tried to describe what guidance looks like and encourage you to find a relationship within which that discipline can be practiced.

Email Assignment

When you have finished all the assigned reading, and finished the Spiritual Discipline exercises, answer the following questions:

On one page answer the following question: Would people characterize you as a person of integrity? What sorts of evidence can you point to as indications that integrity is a developing or pervasive quality of who you are in your relationships to others?

On a second page answer the following question: Considering the organization, church or movement of which you are a part, is it marked by integrity? Are there patterns, practices or events that outsiders would see as indicative of a lack of integrity because of not quite speaking the truth or not keeping commitments in a regular and timely fashion or because the organization does not exhibit mature leadership that discerns what is right or best in carrying out its mission? Assess the degree of integrity you might grant to your organization and why. If you are not currently employed, think of an organization you have been a part of in your past—or you may wish to comment on the church to which you belong.

Readings: *Discipline in Focus: Guidance*

Bradley Holt writes,

A spiritual mentor can be a very important help in the spiritual journey. The guilt and shame we seek to hide can be accepted, discussed, and healed in a situation of trust and openness. The gifts and possibilities we are not aware of can be pointed out. Encouragement when life is tough can be very important. Most of all, the grace of God, which we seem to forget again and again, is the most important theme of conversations on one's spiritual journey.

The "soul friend" or "spiritual director" can be a specially trained counselor or more informally a respected friend. Many spiritual directors see their clients about every three weeks. Serving as a companion to another wayfarer is holy work and is especially gratifying when the discernment of God's grace in the person's life brings new spiritual fruit. (*Thirsty for God*, p. 98)

The following article is particularly strong in giving the variety of approaches to guidance and spiritual mentoring as found in church history. Source: "Patterns of Spiritual Direction: James A Davies, *Christian Education Journal* Volume XIII, #3 pp. 49-66:

Guidance is the "help that one person gives an other in order to encourage that person's spiritual development." It also is called spiritual direction.

Among the desert fathers/mothers, the need for such guidance was widely recognized. St. Basil urged that one find someone "who may serve you as a very sure guide in the work of leading a holy life." Augustine claimed that none could walk without a guide. God remains the first and final teacher. Yet a small group (a cell) was important as a context for searching scripture and bringing its wisdom to fruition in a pattern of life.

The individual would also seek out the mentorship of a spiritually more mature father or mother. Often this was a life-long relationship thought of in terms of the parental model. The spiritual parent would shape the inner life of the son or daughter by concern, advice, prayer and practical wisdom about life's affairs.

Spiritual directors were supposed to be persons of holiness, prayer and abilities to discern spirits. Normally this required a person of some length of experience. Directors needed knowledge of temptation, solitude and the life of prayer. The spiritual wrecks that occurred as people sought heroic measures in asceticism testified to the benefit of guidance. History is littered with lives devoured by fanaticism rather than disciplined by faith and humility. The spiritual guide could help the directee toward correcting weaknesses and responding constructively to the varied circumstances of life. The word of the spiritual director was tailored to the needs of the directee and was received with obedience, humility and readiness.

A free and personal relationship, its success depended not only on the wisdom and spiritual maturity of the guide. Success also came out of intimate knowledge that the directee shared. The guide was privy to the inner depths and struggles of the directee so that the word given was individually suited. The teaching is not general or systematic but occasional, personal and individualized.

In addition to the article above, see Richard Foster's comments in Chapter 12, "Guidance," of *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. Another helpful book on the subject is Keith R. Anderson and Randy D. Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Seeking and Giving Direction* (InterVarsity Press, 1999).

Eastern Orthodoxy

In the Eastern Orthodox tradition Ignatius of Xanthopoulos wrote urging disciples to "spare no effort in trying to find a teacher and guide...a man bearing the Spirit within him, leading a life corresponding to his words, lofty in vision of mind, humble in thought of himself, of good disposition in everything, and generally such as a teacher of Christ should be: having found such a man, cleave to him with body and spirit like a devoted son to his father and from then onwards obey all his commands implicitly."

In that tradition the role of the *staretz* ("old man") developed, that of a father/director who displayed wisdom and discernment. The *staretz's* personal prayer and ascetic life developed abilities to see into the hearts of others. Their love for their disciples was transformative. They could identify with the sufferings of others. Sharing in the passion of Christ made them responsible for others.

Roman Catholicism

The Benedictine Rule refocused spiritual direction by institutionalizing it. The Rule provided a stable moral and social order within which the Abbot of the monastic community served the role as chief spiritual guide. The Rule spelled out the external details of life as well as the desired internal dispositions of the heart: obedience, humility and brotherly love.

The role relationship was master and apprentice. Guilt was to be confessed to spiritual elders as well as to the abbot. The abbot was freely elected by the spiritually seasoned of the

Unit 11: "The Life of Integrity: Discernment, Steadfastness and Forthrightness"

community, chosen for his discretion and other spiritual qualities. Individual care of each disciple was emphasized, but the functions of giving guidance were dispersed.

Lay movements such as the Franciscans and the third order of the Dominicans aimed at spiritual direction even outside the circle of the religious professionals. Holy women were recognized as spiritual guides, carrying on an ancient tradition. Catherine of Siena was a spiritual director to a circle of friends to whom she wrote letters of guidance. Julian of Norwich and Catherine of Genoa were influential in their time as well. Often these were strong personalities, mystical in theology and exemplary in life.

Ignatius of Loyola developed a set of *Spiritual Exercises* based on experiential self-examination to be used to guide others through a series of active, ascetical exercises. The disciplined life of the Spirit was to be imparted to others through self-examination. *Spiritual Exercises* is for spiritual directors, meant for them to use as they intervened in the lives of their disciples.

Week one is a time of spiritual purgation and preparation. Week two involves meditation on the kingdom of Christ and its virtues. Week three deals with meditation on the sufferings of Christ. Week four contemplates the resurrection of Christ and the experience of divine love. Later followers supplemented the exercises with *The Directory of the Exercises*, an expanded set of instructions for adapting to the age, capacity, strength and disposition of the person being guided.

The exercises are built on the possibility of people having the leisure to undertake self-contained spiritual exercises under spiritual direction. The structure of exercises is adjusted as the participant goes through the exercises as they have their effects.

Protestantism

Protestant reactions to traditional spiritual direction were aimed particularly at the confessor/judge model that came into being after the Council of Trent. Spiritual direction got reduced to devotional confession in which the goal was as much to secure "orthodoxy," institutionalized in the confessional, to which all good Catholics were expected to come and confess to a priest, emphasizing authority over love and mandated a sort of minimal spiritual direction for all.

The Reformers exercised spiritual direction. John Calvin and John Knox both are examples of Protestants who provided significant guidance to their followers. The Puritans wrote a number of guides for spiritual direction (such as Richard Baxter's *A Christian Directory* and *The Reformed Pastor*).

Modern approaches have moved strongly back to individual, lay-oriented, non-institutional forms of spiritual direction. The concrete religious experience of the individual is focused upon with a stress toward discerning the will of God for the whole of one's life. Psychological counseling has become even more prominent a context for people processing the affairs of life and seeking self-clarification. Some see little distinction between pastoral counseling and spiritual direction.

Yet they are different in very important ways. Pastoral counseling is more crisis-focused, whereas spiritual direction has been concerned with the times where there is no "trouble." It is not emotional distress that triggers direction, but the desire to make progress in spiritual growth. Spirituality is the focus, not simply emotional well-being and psychosocial adjustments. These are not mutual exclusives, but the goal and motivation of the two are often different. Counseling frequently involves fee-for-service and is based in clinics, while spiritual direction is free.

Summary conclusions (p. 64-65 of James Davies)

1. True spirituality is doctrine applied.
2. The life of prayer and contemplation is a way of progress.
3. The linking of contemplation with action is an essential aim of guidance.
4. Careful and informed reading of the masters is advisable for balanced progress.
5. Greater emphasis is needed on Christian community, accountability and sharing.
6. There is a resurgence of the importance of the mystical element in Western Christianity.

Unit 11: "The Life of Integrity: Discernment, Steadfastness and Forthrightness"

7. Increased prayer/study on spiritual direction needs to be part of pastoral preparation and work.

Good spiritual directors should exhibit the following traits:

1. Well-experienced in the spiritual life and direction.
2. Deep, personal prayer life.
3. Spiritual insight and perception.
4. Humility, a self-effacing manner.
5. Nonjudgmental attitude.
6. Deep sensitivity, love and care for those being directed.
7. Recognition and guidance according to each person's unique life path and needs.

Spiritual Formation

Unit 12

Adversity and Crisis: Getting Ready



Development Associates International

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Unit 12

Adversity and Crisis: Getting Ready

Unit 12 Contents

- Learning Outcomes and Steps to Complete Module 12
- Lecture Notes and Workbook
- Email Assignment
- Readings: Brokenness Before God

Learning Objectives:

- Explore catastrophic loss as God's strange means that takes us through suffering to new levels of engagement with Godself and God's Kingdom.
- Be reminded that all the control we take over our lives has meaning only within the control God exercises over our lives.
- Identify the places where we are broken and weak.
- Practice the Spiritual Disciplines.

Steps to Complete Unit 12

Read

- The Reader for Unit Twelve is "Brokenness Before God". Note there is no "Discipline in Focus" for this unit as in previous units.
- *Devotional Classics*, pp. 73-79 (Julian of Norwich); pp. 108-114 (Baillie); pp. 186-192 (Fox); pp. 345-349 (Dillard)

Respond

- Complete the various workbook and journaling assignments.

Complete the final email assignment and send your work to the professor.

Lecture Notes and Workbook

[David Fraser]: We have traveled a great distance in our journey of renewing and rebuilding our spiritual life before God. Most of what we have done to this point has focused on the ordinary, everyday routine that makes up the vast majority of our lives. In the mundane affairs of weekly and monthly events, there is change and challenge. But for the most part, our schedules and affairs are fairly ordinary. The pressures may be persistent and powerful, but they are manageable.

In this unit we come to the extraordinary, the uncontrollable and the catastrophic. Think of a scale from 1 to 10. If green pastures and still waters are a 1 on that scale, most of the time we have been thinking of life lived at about a 5, 6 or 7. There are hills to climb and enemies to challenge, but our table is full of the gifts of God. From time to time our head is anointed with oil, refreshing and restoring us.

In this unit we talk about life at a 10, when adversity or catastrophic loss enters our life so powerfully that it permanently changes who we are and how we live life. We are thinking about events that are so traumatic that we enter what seems a valley of death, where evil is triumphant and the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23 seems a fantasy, terrifyingly absent in our lives.

[Chris Hall]: Unit 8 considered personality, place and provision, presenting us with issues of identity in the face of a culture providing us with powerful images of the good life. Unit 9 explored the seven cardinal sins that appear to be particularly influential destroyers of Christian leaders, even those whose sense of personality, place and provision has led them to fruitful ministry. Unit 10 looked at forgiveness as a major untended business of our lives and Christian communities. What do we do with people who damage us because they have pursued sinful patterns and actions?

Unit 11 served as a summary point, where we thought about Christian spirituality as pointing toward the outcome of integrity. Integrity involves discernment of what is right and wrong, steadfastness in doing what is right and forthrightness in communicating to others what we are committed to, what we are doing and why. Integrity means we are integral people, where our inner life and our outer life fit together as one piece. What we say, what we are committed to and how we live fit harmoniously together. People come to know that we are reliable, dependable people who are committed to things that are right and excellent.

Events That Test Us

In Unit 12 we consider events that are so overwhelming they test our integrity to the limits. We may be strongly grounded in what we believe is true about God. We are consistent and disciplined practitioners of what is right, and we are open in saying to others what we are about. Yet catastrophic loss or adversity tests our integrity as much as it did Job. We believe ourselves committed to doing what is best, but adversity may so overwhelm our good intentions that we lose our integrity. Our experience and beliefs threaten to split us apart.

In this matter we need to be sure we are talking about the same thing. In many corners of the Christian movement, suffering and pain are considered as signs of God's absence rather than God's presence. It is strange that the cross is at the center of our faith, yet we have Christians who experience suffering, whether from brokenness of body or of heart—and this suffering seems to them as a violation of their spiritual rights. They whine, complain and seek the most immediate anesthetic in pain-killing, pain-denying spiritualities that flood the Christian bookstores.

Adversity often introduces you to yourself. The why of pain, problems and suffering is tied up with what God needs to do in our lives in order to reshape and remake us. We desperately want to know why when we are in the middle of this pain. If we knew the whys, we would know better how to answer the more pointed question, "What can I do with my pain, problem and sorrow?" This is not only true for small frustrations, but for the gigantic disasters that happen to us. Let's start with some case studies of adversity and suffering.

Four Case Studies in Adversity

On the following pages of the workbook, read four accounts of difficulties and adversity, two from the Bible and two from contemporary experience. These stories will serve as anchors as we try to think about the place of adversity in our spiritual formation. All of them involve

people who love God and display some of the qualities that are present in those whose habits and practices have brought them to levels of maturity and integrity.

1. The words of Paul as he is struggling to validate his apostolic authority in the eyes of the Corinthians.
2. The story of Naomi who claims that her life has gone downhill, that God has acted harshly toward her, that she should no longer have a name meaning "Pleasant" but should be renamed "Bitter."
3. The story of Gerald Sittser, aged 41, a teacher of Christian spirituality and religion at a Christian college when he was involved in a tragic automobile accident.
4. And finally the story of Diane, aged 47, a successful pastor in a large Baptist church and a parent whose children are not yet fully grown. She has contracted a devastating, fatal illness and is being slowly dragged toward the grave. Her pastoral career has suddenly terminated.

Paul

2 Corinthians 11:16 – 12:10 (NRSV):

I repeat, let no one think that I am a fool; but if you do, then accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. What I am saying in regard to this boastful confidence, I am saying not with the Lord's authority, but as a fool; since many boast according to human standards, I will also boast. For you gladly put up with fools, being wise yourselves! For you put up with it when someone makes slaves of you, or preys upon you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or gives you a slap in the face. To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!

But whatever anyone dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman—I am a better one: with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death. Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I am not indignant?

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus (blessed be he forever!) knows that I do not lie. In Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

It is necessary to boast; nothing is to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows—was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

Naomi

Ruth 1:1-22 (NRSV):

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. The

name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had considered his people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband." Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. They said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the LORD has turned against me." Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." But Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried. May the LORD do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!"

When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her. So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them; and the women said, "Is this Naomi?" She said to them, "Call me no longer Naomi, [Pleasant] call me Mara, [Bitter] for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty; why call me Naomi when the LORD has dealt harshly with me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"

So Naomi returned together with Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who came back with her from the country of Moab. They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Gerald Sittser¹

"Lynda, my wife of nearly twenty years, loved to be around her children. Each one of them was a gift to her because, after eleven years of infertility, she never thought she would have any of her own. Though she earned a master's degree in music from the University of Southern California, became a professional singer, choir director, and voice coach, and served church and community, she could never entirely let go of her longing for children. When she delivered four healthy children in six years, she was overjoyed. She relished the wonder of motherhood.

"In the fall of 1991, Lynda was teaching a unit of home school to our two oldest children, Catherine and David, on Native American culture. She decided to complete the unit of study by attending a powwow at a Native American reservation in rural Idaho. So we piled our four children into the minivan on a Friday afternoon to drive to the reservation, where we planned to have dinner with the tribe and witness our first powwow. My mother, Grace, who had come to visit for the weekend, decided to join us on the excursion. At dinner we talked with tribal leaders about their projects and problems—especially the abuse of alcohol, which undermined so much of what they were trying to accomplish....

"By 8:15 P.M., however, the children had had enough. So we returned to our van, loaded and buckled up, and left for home. By then it was dark. Ten minutes into our trip home I noticed

¹Gerald L. Sittser, *A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows Through Loss* (Zondervan, 1996)

an oncoming car on a lonely stretch of highway driving extremely fast. I slowed down at a curve, but the other car did not. It jumped its lane and smashed head-on into our minivan. I learned later that the alleged driver was Native American, drunk, driving eighty-five miles per hour. He was accompanied by his pregnant wife, also drunk, who was killed in the accident.

"I remember those first few moments after the accident as if everything was happening in slow motion. They are frozen into my memory with a terrible vividness. After recovering my breath, I turned around to survey the damage. The scene was chaotic. I remember the look of terror on the faces of my children and the feeling of horror that swept over me when I saw the unconscious and broken bodies of Lynda, my four-year-old daughter, Diana Jane, and my mother. I remember getting Catherine (then eight), David (seven), and John (two) out of the van through my door, the only one that would open. I remember taking pulses, doing mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, trying to save the dying and calm the living. I remember the feeling of panic that struck my soul as I watched Lynda, my mother, and Diana Jane all die before my eyes. I remember the pandemonium that followed—people gawking, lights flashing from emergency vehicles, a helicopter whirring overhead, cars lining up, medical experts doing what they could to help. And I remember the realization sweeping over me that I would soon plunge into a darkness from which I might never again emerge as a sane, normal, believing man.

"In the hours that followed the accident, the initial shock gave way to an unspeakable agony. I felt dizzy with grief's vertigo, cut off from family and friends, tormented by the loss, nauseous from the pain. After arriving at the hospital, I paced the floor like a caged animal, only recently captured. I was so bewildered that I was unable to voice questions or think rationally. I felt wild with fear and agitation, as if I was being stalked by some deranged killer from whom I could not escape. I could not stop crying. I could not silence the deafening noise of crunching metal, screaming sirens, and wailing children. I could not rid my eyes of the vision of violence, of shattering glass and shattered bodies. All I wanted was to be dead. Only the sense of responsibility for my three surviving children and the habit of living for forty years kept me alive.

"That torrent of emotion swept away the life I had cherished for so many years. In one moment my family as I had known and cherished it was obliterated...

"That initial deluge of loss slowly gave way over the next months to the steady seepage of pain that come when grief, like floodwaters refusing to subside, finds every crack and crevice of the human spirit to enter and erode. I thought that I was going to lose my mind. I was overwhelmed with depression. The foundation of my life was close to caving in.

"Life was chaotic. My children too experienced intense grief and fear. John was seriously injured; he broke his femur in the accident, which required him to be in traction for three weeks and in a body cast for another eight weeks. People from everywhere called on the telephone, sent letters, and reached out to help and mourn. Responsibilities at home and work accumulated like trash on a vacant lot, threatening to push me toward collapse. I remember sinking into my favorite chair night after night, feeling so exhausted and anguished that I wondered whether I could survive another day, whether I wanted to survive another day. I felt punished by simply being alive and thought death would bring welcomed relief.

"I remember counting the consecutive days in which I cried. Tears came for forty days, and then they stopped, at least for a few days. I marveled at the genius of the ancient Hebrews, who set aside forty days for mourning, as if forty days were enough. I learned later how foolish I was. It was only after those forty days that my mourning became too deep for tears. So my tears turned to brine, to a bitter and burning sensation of loss that tears could no longer express. In the months that followed I actually longed for the time when the sorrow had been fresh and tears came easily. That emotional release would have lifted the burden, if only for a while.

"[The] two hours between the accident and our arrival at the hospital became the most vivid, sobering, memorable moments of reflection I have ever had or will ever have. I was lifted momentarily out of space and time as I knew it and was suspended somehow between two worlds.

"One was the world of my past, so wonderful to me, which was now lying in a tangle of metal on the side of the road; the other was the world of my future, which awaited me at the end of that long ride to the hospital as a vast and frightening unknown. I realized that something incomprehensible and extraordinary had just happened. By some strange twist of fate or mysterious manifestation of divine providence I had been suddenly thrust into circumstances I

had not chosen and could never have imagined. I had become the victim of a terrible tragedy....I realized that I would have to suffer and adjust; I could not avoid it or escape it. There was no way out but ahead, into the abyss. The loss brought about by the accident had changed my life, setting me on a course down which I had to journey whether I wanted to or not. I was assigned both a tremendous burden and a terrible challenge. I faced the test of my life. One phase of my life had ended; another, the most difficult, was about to begin. When the emergency vehicle arrived at the hospital, I stepped out into a whole new world." (pp. 16-21)

Diane

When she was a baby, she contracted polio, rendering her left arm weak. The muscle never really grew so that most tasks had to be accomplished with the right. But she grew up, finished a Bible major, married and had two boys and a girl. Then she felt called into ministry and completed a seminary degree in Christian education, gaining honors as one of the top students in a class of hundreds.

Going to work for a growing Southern Baptist Church, she worked in ministry for eight years, gradually sharpening her skills at organizational management. Gifted in details as well as people skills, she oversaw the building of a new facility and the move of the congregation. By the time new weaknesses began to appear, she was the minister of administration of a church with a Sunday attendance of 1200, and a staff of 8, including three other pastors. At age 47, her effective career and ministry blossomed.

Diane's eldest had finished undergraduate studies. The second was a freshman and her daughter was 15 and full of the vitality of youth. Her husband was Dean at a large community college, overseeing curriculum and programs involving thousands of students.

At first the doctors weren't sure what was happening. There was loss of the remaining abilities in the left arm and a serious weakening of the muscles of the legs. For nearly 9 months they thought it was post-polio syndrome. Then the tests came back near Christmas two years ago. She had ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease.

The diagnosis was grim. Most ALS patients are dead within two years of diagnosis. The losses are gradual, irreversible and slow. The nerves slowly die. The mind remains fully alert, active and capable. The mind is eventually left isolated in a body that no longer responds. Feeding is done by a tube directly inserted surgically into the stomach. Breathing has to be assisted by a machine. Speaking ceases and communication happens only via a computer using the tiny movements of the eye.

Some victims live for 10 or 20 years. Most gradually are confined to immobility, able only to communicate with subtle eye movements. At present, full-time aids provide the required twenty-four hour home care and will continue with Diane until her anticipated death. She is now into her fourth year living with this disease, fed by a stomach tube and breathing only because of a machine pumping air into her lungs. [Sequel: After this was written, Diane lived on, struggling valiantly against this horrendous disease until her digestion finally stopped working and she passed away almost 10 years to the date of her original diagnosis. (David: She was my wife's sister.)]

Living with Change and Loss

[David Fraser]: Living means change, and change means loss. Yet there are losses very different from the ordinary cycle of change that comes with aging, marriage, the birth of children or the change of work and place of living. There are irreversible catastrophes whose results are permanent, the impact almost incalculable and the consequences cumulative.

Sometimes those effects are immediate and obvious such as the automobile accident that Gerald Sittser experienced. Other times effects are more cumulative as in the case of Naomi. First came the famine; the forced migration; the death of husband and sons—all gradually plunging her into a condition where she was bereft and poverty-stricken again.

Other times adversities move much slower yet inevitably, like Diane's monthly losses from ALS, gradually adding up to the loss of all muscular response and then death. These struggles and losses may take years, even decades. Diane did not choose this dreaded destroyer of human capacity. For 10 years she fought for every additional day or week to watch her children grow and become independent. Her experience was not average. She saw her

youngest, a daughter, graduate from high school and marry, and she had grandchildren put on her torso though she could not hold or caress them.

Paul's Example

Other adversities come with the choices made in ministry to which we are called. This is the case if the Apostle Paul. In his emotionally powerful plea to the Corinthians he gave us a revelation of the adversities he had experienced. Some came from natural dangers. Others from the opposition of those willing to inflict punishments so serious that they brought Paul close to death. But there are also self-imposed deprivations that were appropriate to his sense of calling and ministry opportunities, ascetic practices that grew out of the imperatives of specific ministry pressures.

Then there is Paul's mysterious "thorn in the flesh," given to him by God to be the means and reminder that he not be over-exalted in his own sense of self-importance. Paul begged that God remove the "thorn," only to get a flat "No" and an assurance that God would bring a divine power into his ministry he would not otherwise experience.

Think About It

Reflections on Case Studies in Adversity

In the light of what you read about Paul, Naomi, Gerald and Diane and in the light of your own life experiences, make a list of adversities and losses that cause suffering and change. We are thinking especially of adversities and losses that have the power to become turning points. They reshape our priorities, forcing us to encounter God at a level deeper than we previously encountered. After you have made a list of these sorts of events and realities, go back and underline those that have been particularly important in your own life experience (or add and underline them if you neglected to write them down). Use your journal for this exercise.

Learning from Suffering

[Chris Hall]: One of the things we discover as we review our own lives or the lives of those close to us is that suffering, pain and adversity comes in all shapes and sizes. Some "sufferings" are chosen voluntarily, as is the case with the spiritual disciplines. When we voluntarily fast for a day or a week, the discomfort and pain is self-inflicted. Some adversity that comes to us is beyond our control or choice, completely involuntary, such as Paul's shipwreck due to the powerful Mediterranean storm that blew his ship off course in Acts 27-28.

One thing we learn about all such pain, whether physical or emotional, is that it is very difficult to compare one kind of suffering with another. While we might be able to say that there is a clear difference of pain and loss between a getting a thorn in our finger and having our leg amputated, we can't always make easy comparisons between other losses and adversities.

The reason it is difficult, if not impossible, to compare losses with each other is because each is unique in its own way. The pain of growing up with sexual or physical abuse is one sort of pain and loss. But, so too is the pain of caring for a spouse with Alzheimer's for a decade, watching as they slowly descend into mute incomprehension. How do we compare Diane's loss with that of her husband or her 15-year-old daughter? Is Paul's pain of being beaten nearly to death more profound than Naomi's losses of sons and husband? How do we balance the pain of an illiterate's constant, grinding poverty with the pain of an affluent, educated professor's losing three family members?

More importantly, when we try to compare our suffering with another's, some people come out on the losing end. They feel as though their suffering is not validated, isn't as bad as it seems, shouldn't cause as much scarring and trauma as it does. Those who win the comparison are given the not so subtle message that no one has suffered as they have. Thus, no one can really understand them or offer support. The proper question is not who suffers worst, but...

- What meaning can be gained from suffering?
- How can we grow through suffering?

The Example of Jesus

We have the example of Jesus in the very middle of adversity, loss and suffering. Listen to the words of Hebrews 5:7-9:

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him...

The astonishing thing is that the pedagogy of suffering was necessary even for one who was perfect in every way, a sinless human at every stage of life and in every arena of life.

We want you to take a few minutes to reflect on the meaning of this Hebrews passage. Given all you know about the life of Christ, can you fill in the details of the suffering he experienced? While this passage has its primary focus on the Garden of Gethsemane and the crucifixion on Calvary, it looks behind those events to realities even before this. For example, you might remember the time Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus, but there are numbers of other things that brought suffering to Jesus.

Think About It

The Pedagogy of Suffering in the Life of Christ

There are numbers of other things that brought suffering to Jesus. Write down as many as you can recall.

Learning from the Life of Christ

[David Fraser]: What thoughts came to mind as you thought about Jesus? Let us reinforce some of your discoveries with some of our own:

- Philippians 2 suggests that the act of incarnation itself involved suffering in surrendering divine prerogatives for the confinement of human living.
- Jesus was involved in suffering the confusions and discouragements that come as a by-product of growing up.
- Jesus suffered from the very fact that he resisted temptation to the very end. Much of the time, we don't suffer long; we give in, and don't face the fullness of temptation. This sort of suffering is seen in the wilderness as the Spirit prepared him for ministry.
- He suffered the obdurate opposition of Israel's religious leadership as well as the leadership of his own hometown. What must he have felt when he was told the story of the deaths of the children that came because of his own birth, as his birth incited Herod to kill children in a mad attempt to prevent anyone from seeking his throne?
- What do you think he felt when his inner circle of three disciples misunderstood him, could not stay awake to pray with him in Gethsemane, or when he looked at Peter in the courtyard just after Peter had denied him the third time?
- Some of you know how lonely it is when you are the only Christian in your family. What about Jesus' suffering when his own brothers and sisters could not acknowledge him while he was alive? When Mary came with her sons to take possession of what they thought was a mad Jesus, Jesus must have agonized in saying he had no mother or brothers except those who heard and obeyed the Word of God.

There is much more that we can list at this point. We have not even tried to probe the nature of the sufferings of Passion Week, both in the humiliations of his inner spirit or in his body, brutally and cruelly flogged and then crucified. Jesus demonstrates the pedagogy of suffering and loss in the small and large details of his life.

Spirituality is something that demands time and experience to develop. It is not found at a weekend retreat or after a year of seminary. It occurs as an accumulation of years of routine experiences and crisis moments. But most of the time we have focused on the years of routine experiences. There is suffering in them. And those small doses of suffering can add up to real disruption in our growth and abilities.

Four Types of "Disruptive Moments"

Gordon MacDonald offers us four sorts of "disruptive moments" that create the context within which we gain sensitivity to the issues of the Spirit and learn obedience. In fact, sometime the disruptive moment is not negative, but a powerful, joyful surprise that overwhelms our pain and reservation. Here's MacDonald's list:

The disruptive moment of wonderment. The thing we cannot explain (leaving us breathless, stupefied) and we are unable to assimilate the meaning of the event. We may choose not to think about that moment, or it may become a defining moment in our experience, suddenly opening up the whole hidden world of the Spirit and Kingdom of God, confirming and consecrating us in a way that stabilizes our ministry for years to come.

The disruptive moment of aging. In this case we face a process we cannot avoid. Some of you may not yet have had your sense of self and your hopes challenged by the aging process. We often speak of those who have mid-life crises, who simply by the process of aging suddenly break out in untypical acting out. Or those who find they are no longer able to go at the pace required by a pressure-filled position and feel God is sidelining them. Aging can be disruptive as we face the losses that come with the passing of time.

The disruptive moment of spiritual discipline. In this case we face something most of us would rather not do. If you have been working with the guidelines of this course, then you will know how disruptive practicing the spiritual disciplines can be. They are aimed at reshaping our habits and our schedules. Diligence and determination are essential for those of us who would get in touch with the Spirit through these practices. We must overcome feelings, fatigue, distractions, errant appetites, and popular opinion. We must say no to those gluttons of our time that leave no room for serious study, meditation, solitude, prayer and so on.

The disruptive moment of crisis. When a crisis falls upon us we face things we cannot control. We may be able to plan for the aging process and be able to reschedule our lives so that we are regularly and deeply engaged in the spiritual disciplines, but we cannot plan for crisis. By its very nature, crisis is a major, uninvited disruption. We cannot avoid it; we cannot postpone it; we cannot control it. When crisis hits us, we find ourselves suddenly plunged into the strongest tests of our integrity. [From MacDonald's *The Life that God Blesses*, page 70]

Think About It

Disruptive Moments That Have Shaped My Life with Christ

Identify disruptive moments in your life. Which of the following have been defining moments for you in terms of shaping the sort of person you are with the gifts and outlook you bring to life? Use your journal to write responses.

- The disruptive moment of wonderment: the thing we cannot explain (leaving us breathless, stupefied, even joyfully overwhelmed).
- The disruptive moment of aging: a process we cannot avoid.
- The disruptive moment of spiritual discipline: something most of us would rather not do.
- The disruptive moment of crisis: overwhelming events we cannot control.

[Chris Hall]: You may discover that at this point in your experience you have been spared some of the profoundly painful crises others have had to walk through. That can be a cause for rejoicing, but it is also reality that we all will have to walk through the shadow of the valley of death. One day, sooner or later, the crisis of catastrophic loss and adversity will invade our lives. Then the giants of pain and difficulty will swallow up the small scale sufferings that we have had to the present.

One of the interesting commonalities of many spiritual biographies is the realization that suffering has done more to bring individuals to the depths of the reality of God at work in their lives than have pleasantries and joys. Listen to the words of two contemporaries.

Malcolm Muggeridge, the well-known British journalist and writer who became a Christian later in life said in a TV interview near the end of his life:

Unit 12: “Adversity and Crisis: Getting Ready”

As an old man.... looking back on one’s life, it’s one of the things that strikes you most forcibly—that the only thing that’s taught one anything is suffering. Not success, not happiness, not anything like that. The only thing that really teaches one what life’s about—the joy of understanding, the joy of coming in contact with what life really signifies—is suffering, affliction. [Quoted in MacDonald’s *The Life that God Blesses*, page 26].

Or hear the great Russian novelist and writer, Alexander Solzhenitsyn:

It was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good. Gradually, it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes, not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either, but right through every human heart, and through all human hearts. So bless you, prison, for having been in my life.

Both men are saying it was the disruptive moments of suffering that enabled God to reach into their consciousness giving them the most blessed lasting gifts. To be sure, we do not always need such dramatic gestures of God to get our attention. Even the small sufferings of life can catch our attention and bring us to our senses.

A seemingly endless list of disruptions saps joy from much of life:

electricity that goes off at the wrong moment,
phones that are dead,
letters that get lost or stolen in the mail,
flat tires,

twisted ankles,
miscommunications,
unkind remarks,
promotions that go to other people.

Persons Bigger than Problems

God intends that the person becomes bigger than the problem. This is a character-building process. We can break out in angry frustration, break down in despair and discouragement, or break through to the resources we need to endure what comes our way. Frequently, God is preparing us for the major disruptions by teaching us through the small disruptions—and from time to time bestowing upon us the disruption of wonderment and joy.

Yet it is only when the storms hit and something catastrophic happens that we ask a whole new set of questions. It is then we, like Job, hear God speaking to us in a different voice. At the beginning of his story, Job was already a mature man of integrity. Yet at the end of the story he was completely transformed beyond his wildest imagination. He had discovered the living God in a way he never would have known apart from his suffering.

God intends that his children grow beyond the problems they face, as a mature and integral person as Job did. Some writers on the spiritual life speak of the desired outcome of adversity as “brokenness.” We must be careful when we use the term “brokenness” for it can refer to a variety of things from the broken-heartedness that causes deep grief over some loss to the brokenness of something out of order (for example, the car is broken). When used by spiritual writers, brokenness refers to bringing a person to contrite and humble submission before God.

Harnessing a Horse

Perhaps the image used of breaking a wild horse of its wildness is a good one. Breaking a horse for riding or work is to domesticate it; it is to put a saddle on its back and a guiding bit in its mouth. All the energy and power of the horse is harnessed for the purposes of its master. Breaking a horse is not breaking it down so that it is passive, beaten, listless or unresponsive. Rather it is bending the horse’s will so that it responds to the will of its master. Now the speed, power and spirit of the horse are tamed to the tasks and delights of its master.

In a similar manner, the small pains of the frustrations of ordinary life combine with the dramatic and drastic pains of adversities and loss to tame our unruly spirits for the directing ministry of the Spirit. Those disruptive events and moments are defining; they bring our restless and rebellious spirits into full submission to the ways of God.

David writes in Psalm 51:17 “The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” Broken over the confrontation with his sins of adultery, murder and the death of the child conceived through his adultery, David confessed his discovery of a God who is tender to the broken reed, who does not quench the smoking wick. God responds to those who humble themselves before him.

Places of Brokenness

In the Reader, you will find statements by three individuals who came to places of brokenness. Chuck Colson did so as he was in the midst of a political and personal crisis as an aide to the United States President Richard Nixon that eventually led to his imprisonment. He writes of the brokenness that came as he began to perceive God’s reality and power for his own life. His brokenness was a “severe mercy,” essential in bringing him to God for the first time.

You will also find the words of Calvin Miller, whose brokenness was not about his own misdeeds but over his intellectual pride and lack of faith. He discovered his inability to meet the demands of parish ministry.

Then there is the story of Rick Warren, pastor of what has now become a rapidly growing, enormous church in southern California. In his case the pressures and failures of early ministry led to a crisis and brokenness that transformed his relationship to the ministry God had given him. Many around the world have read his best selling book, *A Purpose Driven Life*. Few know how much of it came out of crisis and brokenness.

Read the excerpts from their stories at the end of this unit and answer the question that follows.

Think About it

Brokenness Before God

Read the section “Brokenness Before God” in your Reader for this unit. Then, answer the following question in your journal.

What crisis event(s) in your own life has led to brokenness before God? Describe the events. What effects did they have in your life and ministry?

Voluntary and Involuntary ‘Breaking’

[David Fraser]: The “breaking” process comes to us in two forms: voluntary and involuntary. In most of this course we have considered taking up the small burden of voluntarily submitting our unruly wills and lives to the grace of God. The involuntary come in ways we least expect it. It comes as financial crisis, job disruption, relationship turmoil or termination, health issue, aging milestone—and even as a zone of spiritual and emotional dryness.

One difficult question to answer is why involuntary adversity and crisis builds some people up, making them stronger where they are broken, while in other situations, people go through even lesser adversity and are virtually destroyed. Alan Nelson speaks of two sorts of breaking: being broken in the right places and being broken in the wrong places.

If the pressures of adversity and crisis are allowed into our lives as God’s grace, they will break our pride, sloth and falsehood. They will confront our sin and challenge the habits that harm our relationship with God and with our fellow humans. At other times, those pressures can shatter our emotions, embitter us, and cause us to become carping, complaining, resentful people. We may withdraw into our own self-pity, shutting God and our needy neighbor out of our lives. We may indulge ourselves in binges of eating, drinking or sex, attempting to escape the pain and reality of the losses we have suffered. Our integrity can be undermined. What makes the difference between being broken in the right places or in the wrong places?

God’s Recycling Process

There are no easy answers. There is wisdom and experience we can draw on to help us. Read the conclusions of Gerald Sittser as he reflects on what losing his mother, wife and

daughter in one fell swoop meant to him. He is an example of what Alan Nelson calls God's recycling process. Nelson writes:

God is a great recycler. He takes the garbage that happens to us and makes something good out of it. The breaking process has a spiritual ecology. Problems are never wasted. [Alan E. Nelson, *Broken in the Right Places*, p. 151]

We are only able to summarize a few of the major things Sittser offers us in his book, *A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows Through Loss*. On the following pages we have listed the major points we are extracting from Sittser. Take additional short notes to help clarify and fix his penetrating insights into your thinking.

From Gerald Sittser's *A Grace Disguised*, Zondervan Publishing House, 1996

First - Walk, Don't Run

We must walk into the darkness rather than try to outrun it. We must allow ourselves to be transformed by suffering rather than think, foolishly, that we can somehow avoid it.

The first thing Sittser says is that we must walk into the darkness rather than try to outrun it. We must allow ourselves to be transformed by suffering rather than think foolishly that we can somehow avoid it. He writes:

Sudden and tragic loss leads to terrible darkness . . . The darkness comes, no matter how hard we try to hold it off. However threatening, we must face it, and we must face it alone. (p. 32)

The darkness that descends is profound. It is like running after the sun as it gradually sets in the west only to realize no matter how fast you run, you will suddenly be in complete darkness. Yet the quickest way to reach the sun and the light of day is not to chase after the setting sun in the west, but to plunge eastward into the dark, until the sunrise comes.

Second - Our Response Can Define the Moment

What happens *in* us matters more than what happens *to* us. The experience of loss itself does not have to be the defining moment of our lives. "The decision to face the darkness, even if it led to overwhelming pain, showed me that the experience of loss itself does not have to be the defining moment of our lives. Instead, the defining moment can be our response to the loss." (p. 36)

Choices of responses are never easy. Those who transcend their suffering, as the psychologist and holocaust survivor Victor Frankl discovered, are those who choose to expect a better tomorrow, even though at the present there is little prospect and no guarantee of one. Frankl's experience in the Nazi death camps showed him that those who displayed dignity, courage and inner vitality were those who refused to yield ultimate power to their circumstances. The world was as horrible to them as to others, but they refused to be defined by that world. They identified with another world, and the inner world within them was one vastness that could not be invaded and conquered by their guards or the horror that surrounded them.

Nicholas Wolterstorff echoes these sentiments in his account of what occurred within his own spirit after his adult son was killed in a mountain climbing accident:

And sometimes, when the cry is intense, there emerges a radiance which elsewhere seldom appears: a glow of courage, of love, of insight, of selflessness, of faith. In that radiance we see best what humanity is meant to be . . . In the valley of suffering, despair and bitterness are brewed. But there also character is made. The valley of suffering is the valley of soul-making. (p. 40)

Third - Pain, the "Flip Side" of Pleasure

Pain is the "flip side" of pleasure. The capacity for pleasure increases with the capacity for pain. "The pain of loss is severe because the pleasure of life is so great; it demonstrates the supreme value of what is lost." (p. 46)

We cannot have our world both ways: to have water that refreshes and cleanses us but cannot drown us; deeply loved companions who bring us great pleasure without also bringing us

great pain when we lose them; fire that warms and comforts but does not burn us nor destroy our homes and possessions.

Fourth - Recovery, a Misleading, Empty Expectation

Recovery is a misleading and empty expectation in the case of catastrophic loss. You recover from broken limbs, but not from amputation. Catastrophic loss by definition precludes recovery. It will transform or destroy us, but it will never leave us the same. We cannot recover what is irrevocably lost. Sittser could never have his wife, daughter or mother back. His future, whatever it is, will always include the pain of the past with it.

Sittser says catastrophic loss is like undergoing an amputation of our identity of self from self. The self we were as parent or employee, or the self as energetic and productive is now gone forever; we can no longer be or become what we were again. Catastrophic loss cannot be mitigated by replacements. It can only lead us to a new identity, one that incorporates the pain of loss while moving forward to the next phase of our lives. Sittser writes,

So with the background already sketched in by circumstances beyond my control, I picked up a paintbrush and began, with great hesitation and distress, to paint a new portrait of our lives.

At first I was tempted to paint on a small canvas because I assumed that from that point on I would be living a small life. I wondered how I could keep the same expectations of having the good life I had before, considering the death of three people who had made it so good. Many people who suffer loss are tempted to do the same, lowering their expectations of what they will get out of life.

. . . Expectations can remain high, as high as they were before, but only if we are willing to change their focus. I can no longer expect to grow old with my spouse, for that path is forever closed to me. If that remains my expectation, then I will surely be disappointed. But perhaps I can expect something else that is equally good, only different. (p. 75-76)

Fifth - The Role of Environment in our Happiness

Loss forces us to see the dominant role our environment plays in determining our happiness. Loss strips us of the props on which we normally depend. By coming to an end of ourselves we come to the beginning of a new relationship with God.

So much of our contentment and happiness is externally focused: on our position, our children, our salary, our good fortune or health. Loss pushes us to relocate the source of our authentic joy and happiness in God, come what may.

Sixth - Regret Accompanies Loss

Loss is often accompanied with regrets. Loss takes what we might have done or intended to do and turns it into what we can never do. Loss freezes life into a snapshot. It forces us to recognize the incompleteness of life and to admit our failures. Therefore regret is an unavoidable part of loss, for we lose the tomorrow we needed to make right our yesterday or today.

Yet there can be redemption. Can a life gone wrong because of loss be made right again, however irreversible the loss itself? Yes, but only on one significant condition: people with regrets can be redeemed but they cannot reverse the loss that gave rise to the regrets. They must let go of the loss and embrace the good effects the loss can have on their lives; they must seek personal transformation that comes only through grace. Sittser writes:

Many people are destroyed by loss because, learning what they could have been but failed to be, they choose to wallow in guilt and regret, to become bitter in spirit, or to fall into despair. While nothing they can do will reverse the loss, it is not true that there is nothing they can do to change. The difference between despair and hope, bitterness and forgiveness, hatred and love, and stagnation and vitality lies in the decisions we make about what to do in the face of regrets over an unchangeable and painful past. We cannot change the situation but we

can allow the situation to change us. We exacerbate our suffering needlessly when we allow one loss to lead to another. That causes gradual destruction of the soul. (p. 86-87)

This destruction of the soul is like a "second death," a death of our own spirit after the first one we have already been through. This death comes from a mixture of guilt, regret, bitterness, hatred, immorality and despair. Despair is not the result of the loss but our attitude about it. Death of a child may tempt us to become self-pitying, but death is not the cause of self-pity. Self-pity is our response to death. Chronic unemployment may tempt us to go on a binge, but the binge is not the result of the unemployment but our response to it.

Destructive emotions are a natural response to catastrophic loss, but they are not to be allowed to define reality. Our feelings do not determine what is real, though the feelings themselves are real. We cannot ignore our feelings, but neither are we to indulge them.

Seventh - Doing a Self-Inventory and Examination

Regret offers the opportunity to do examine ourselves. We take stock of patterns that have dominated our relationships and shaped our attitudes. Failure to take stock almost ensures that we will repeat the patterns that were already chiseled into our lives before the loss. Loss can be transformative when it causes us to seek the forgiveness of God. In that misery we learn that God loves us unconditionally, even when we may not be able to love God back. And out of that we can become different people, reshaping our habits and relationships more in the image of Christ's desires. We may not be able to repair what is now beyond repair, but we can rebuild today in a way that breaks bad patterns of the past.

Eighth - Loss Leads to Questioning God

Loss often makes it seem that God is distant or unfriendly, that God lacks power or desire to deliver from suffering. Loss calls the existence of God into question just as pain conceals God's face from us.

Still there is a problem that comes with catastrophic loss: can God be trusted? Loss often makes it seem that God is distant or unfriendly, that God lacks the power or desire to deliver from suffering. Sittser characterizes the ambivalence that came with his tragedy saying, "Though I believed transformation depended upon the grace of God, that very God was one of whom I wondered: Can I trust him?"

We shiver before the disorderliness of tragedy's terrifying randomness. There is arbitrariness about it: this one dies; another is spared. Only a few seconds different and life would have gone on normally. People were in the wrong place at the wrong time. It is senseless. There are no answers to why her? Why there? Why then? Loss makes the universe seem cold, an unfriendly place with no feeling for human values and lives. Life seems to be little more than trillions upon trillions of atoms, colliding with each other with no design or reason.

Suffering is even more profound when it appears the universe has no heart at its center and no reason or meaning. Sometimes death happens when we realize we are taking calculated risks or when we are not taking appropriate precautions. The loss due to folly or calculated risk itself gives some reason to the death.

We must realize common sense and normal precautions will help minimize accidents, but they cannot eliminate them. Life is an accident waiting to happen. Catastrophic losses will continue to occur, even the sorts that seem meaninglessly random.

Loss calls God's existence into question just as pain conceals God's face from us. Loss may make God seem terrifying and inscrutable. If God spared me, does that mean God killed the others? If I wind up on the good side of God's sovereignty, does that mean others wind up on the losing side of sovereignty? Suffering does not allow us the luxury of keeping the deep questions about God at a safe or speculative distance. Is God sovereign? Is God good? Can we trust God? Where is God when we suffer?

If there is no God, there is no objective reason why we should feel or think one way or another. Then what happens simply happens. There is no way of retrieving good or ill from it. There is no way to validate sorrow as a legitimate and healthy emotion. This is not to say that only those who know God experience the pain of loss. People feel pain regardless of their

worldview because the suffered loss is bad. Tragic death is bad; betrayal in marriage is bad; sexual abuse is bad; terminal illness is bad; severe disability is bad.

Yet we know these are bad because we have some knowledge of good. The system of meaning that leads us to feel bad about the loss and gives us the right to feel bad has God's existence at it center. Life was not meant to be this way. This is not God's original design.

Ninth - Living with Hope

We must live in hope, expecting the best while knowing that the worst can happen. That is part of the bargain of living in a fallen world. Our own tragedies can be a very bad chapter in a very good book. The terror of randomness is enveloped by the mysterious purposes of God.

We must live in hope, expecting the best while knowing the worst can happen.

Job's story is one of the clearest examples of catastrophic loss in the Bible. Yet the story works only when we view it from within Job's experience. Seeing the experience through Job's eyes can give any who have suffered tremendous loss a window into their own experience.

We discover that Job's choices mattered to both God and the heavenly host. His power of responding to his suffering affected the very conversation of heaven itself. Job stops questioning, not because God was a bully who intimidated him, but because he came to know the true and living God, not just know about God. Job learned that behind the apparent randomness of life is the transcendent God whose greatness does not nullify the importance of Job's choices. Job ultimately found meaning in the ineffable presence of God whom he cannot fully comprehend with his intellect but whom he can experience in the depths of his being.

Joseph is another take on this same set of issues. Joseph acknowledges the evil in his life, done to him by his brothers, but also the goodness God intends. He does not see the whole plot of the larger story of which his life is a chapter, but he believes in the goodness of that story. Our own tragedies can be a very bad chapter in a very good book. The terror of randomness is enveloped by the mysterious purposes of God. In the end, life turned out to be good, though the journey to get there was circuitous and painful.

Thornton Wilder suggests in *The Eighth Day* that we should understand our lives as a great landscape extending far beyond what the eye of experience can see. Who knows what chain of events our one, singularly horrendous loss sets in motion, events that may well change and bless future generations.

Tenth - Loss is not Fair; Neither is Blessing

Loss has little to do with fairness. For that matter the goodness and blessings of life also have little to do with fairness. We do not get what we deserve. The majority experience of our world is suffering of one sort or another. So the more appropriate question for gaining perspective is not "Why me?" It is "Why not me?"

Most of us want control. However, the very possibility of increased control means our vulnerability to disappointment is increased if we lose control. Suffering is simply a part of life. Most of us can only make the most of a bad situation. The problem of expecting to live in a perfectly fair world is that there is no grace in that world. Grace is only grace when it is undeserved.

Tragedy and catastrophic loss result sometimes due to callous wrongdoing, sometimes because of blunders (stupidity and incompetence). Sometimes we suffer because of the malicious, foolish or incompetent decisions and behavior of others who should and could have acted differently. Most of us want justice to prevail in our lives. And when it does not happen (as in this case, the alleged driver got off since it could not be proven to a jury's satisfaction that he was driving), we then want revenge. Bad people get away with doing bad things.

The only way to handle wrongdoing in God's world is with forgiveness. Lack of forgiveness only repeatedly re-inflicts the wounds.

Eleventh - God's Sovereignty Includes Human Freedom

God's sovereignty includes, but does not nullify human freedom. People make decisions; they are not simply puppets. In addition, God came to earth and suffered a vulnerability no different from our own. No matter how deeply I descend into the pit of my own loss and suffering, God is there with me. I know enough to believe this. Jesus' story tells me so.

Unit 12: "Adversity and Crisis: Getting Ready"

Loss reminds us we do not have the final word. We all will die. Miracles are only temporary reprieves. Only resurrection can reverse death as the final word. Jesus' story tells us so.

So, we need to say that loss is a solitary experience because the uniqueness of the loss and the depth of the pain are individual. But loss need not be a lonely experience. Many others have joined the company of those who have entered the darkness, walked through it and with it. Some losses are private; others are very public. The people who take the time to enter into the pain with you will be only a few. But there is one who will always walk with you. Jesus' story tells us so.

Among those who walk with us in our pain will be those whom we come to love again. The problem with choosing to love again is that it is a choice to live under the constant threat of further loss. But to choose not to love is to imperil the life of the soul for it thrives only in an environment of love. Brokenness forces us to find a source of love outside ourselves. Earth is not outside heaven. It is heaven's workshop, heaven's womb.

Twelfth - Good Can Come, But the Loss is Not Good

Much good comes out of loss. But all the good in the world will never make the adversity itself good. The pain remains, yet the tragedy and loss become a part of a larger whole with the suffering God with us. Listen to two final quotations from Sittser's book,

I still have a sorrowful soul; yet I wake up every morning joyful, eager for what the new day will bring. Never have I felt as much pain as I have in the last three years; yet never have I experienced as much pleasure in simply being alive and living an ordinary life. Never have I felt so broken; yet never have I been so whole. Never have I been so aware of my weakness and vulnerability; yet never have I been so content and felt so strong. Never has my soul been more [lifeless]; yet never has my soul been more alive. What I once considered mutually exclusive—sorrow and joy, pain and pleasure, death and life—have become parts of a greater whole. My soul has been stretched. (pp. 179-180)

The supreme challenge to anyone facing catastrophic loss involves facing the darkness of the loss on the one hand, and learning to live with renewed vitality and gratitude on the other. This challenge is met when we learn to take the loss into ourselves and to be enlarged by it, so that our capacity to live life well and to know God intimately increases...Loss can diminish us, but it can also expand us. It depends, once again, on the choices we make and the grace we receive. (p. 180)

Take some time to write about what you have just read. We all have some experience, direct or indirect, with what such pain and adversity is like. Please take some time to respond to Sittser and to add the insights God has given you as you have faced painful realities in the past.

Think About It

Reflecting on Sittser

In reviewing the perspective Sittser develops for understanding his own adversity, what strikes you as particularly insightful? As you think through the crises of your own life or those close to you, what insights would you add to the few things we have picked out of Sittser? Use your journal.

[Chris Hall:] We are now at the end of this focus on adversity and loss. There is no section in this unit on a spiritual discipline for two reasons.

First, when catastrophic loss hits people, it disrupts all the ordinary routines of life. They have to improvise as they find their energy and emotions on a wildly oscillating cycle. Motivation dries up and the ability to focus shifts. What disciplines are practiced come, for a time, to be intimately related to the response people begin to learn to make as they walk through the darkness.

Unit 12: "Adversity and Crisis: Getting Ready"

Second, we are nearly at the very end of this course. Unit 13 focuses on setting a plan to engage the spiritual disciplines for the next 12 months. We have been making decisions for you during our time together. Now you must decide your own path. This unit allows you to begin to do that again.

In closing we want to use "A Prayer Vow of Submission to God's Will, Come What May." Methodist Pastors in South Africa affirm these prayer words as a vow each year at the District Conference.

Put me to what you will,
Put me to doing,
Put me to suffering,
Let me be laid aside for you,
Let me have all things,
Let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield
All things to your pleasure and disposal.

Email Assignment

When you have finished all the assigned readings, workbook and journal, answer the following two questions, one page each:

- Consider the adversity and loss you have suffered in your life to this point in time. How do you see it as formative of your character and your knowledge of God? Or do you feel most of your spiritual grounding to this point has been largely without much adversity or loss? Is there someone close to you who has suffered far more than you?
- Record three major points in your life where you sense there was major, enduring transformation within you. Characterize what those points were (e.g., a painful failure or betrayal; a course you took that was particularly life-changing; a catastrophic loss; a gift of overpowering joy and blessing etc.) Locate and describe three major points of God's grace entering in and changing your life.

Reading: Brokenness Before God

Charles Colson

Suddenly, I felt naked and unclean, my bravado defenses gone. I was exposed, unprotected, for [C.S.] Lewis' words were describing me. As he continued, one passage in particular seemed to sum up what had happened to all of us at the White House. "For Pride is spiritual cancer: it eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or even common sense."....

As I drove out of the driveway, the tears were flowing uncontrollably. There were no streetlights, no moonlight. My car headlights were flooding illumination before my eyes, but I was crying so hard it was like trying to swim underwater. I pulled to the side of the road not more than a hundred yards from the entrance of my friend's driveway, the tires sinking into the soft mounds of pine needles.

I remember hoping that my friends wouldn't hear my sobbing, the only sound other than the chirping of crickets that penetrated the still of the night. With my face cupped in my hands, head leaning forward against the wheel, I forgot about machismo, about pretenses, about fears of being weak. And as I did, I began to experience a wonderful feeling of being released. Then came the strange sensation that water was not only running down my cheeks, but surging through my whole body as well, cleansing and cooling as it went. They weren't tears of sadness and remorse, nor joy—but somehow, tears of relief.

And then I prayed my first real prayer: "God, I don't know how to find You, but I'm going to try! I'm not much the way I am now, but somehow I want to give myself to You." I didn't know how to say more, so I repeated over and over the words: Take me. I stayed there in the car, wet-eyed, praying, and thinking, for perhaps a half an hour, perhaps longer, alone in the quiet of the night. Yet for the first time in my life I was not alone at all.

That is my introduction to knowing God personally, but I believe that most believers must go through a period of breaking as they come truly to know God's grace. Isn't that what our faith is about—we must know the wretchedness of our sinful state before we turn to the Lord for rescue. For many of us, God's mercy must be of the severe sort that allows us to come to the end of our abilities—the end of our rope—in order to see our need of Him. Certainly my life has been an example of God's severe mercy in breaking those he loves. (Charles Colson, *Born Again* [Fleming Revell, 1976, 1977] pp. 113, 116-117)

Calvin Miller

So, all real saints are fashioned in the crucible of God. They are broken—even crushed—between mortar and pestle; then their soft nothingness is changed to granite, from which God fashions monuments to himself. Thus, a Jew of Tarsus was beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, imprisoned (2 Corinthians 11:23ff), and yet he speaks out in praise, of the brokenness that forged him! Paul does not brag of being strong! He boasts only of his weakness and praises the storms (2 Corinthians 12:10). For in his heart he knew that simple grace has little volume in its soft authority. But when such grace is battered by the storms, the gales do their transforming work. Thus grace and brokenness together can take a frightened Asian Jew and name him Thunder, the Lion of God.

From my little promontory of 30 years of parenting and pastoring, I now look back and bless the seasons of my brokenness. Some of these seasons punctuate my recent years with the pain-purchased counsel of God. But for my best lesson of life, I must move back, back, back—through the decades—to old despair.

In college I read incessantly from those atheist philosophers and existentialists who dominated Humanism. I glutted my hunger to understand life by reading mostly those who never knew life: Meade, Russell, Unamuno, Sartre, etc. Throughout seminary I continued my fascination with this pursuit of emptiness and in the process became as hollow as those I read.

Thus, I arrived at my first full-time pastorate, with all the academic credentials I needed, but faithless and confused. I despaired of ever preaching with any certainty, steeped in the dark scholarship of my ghoulish academics, I had no light to see God: Was he there? Was he real? Was he loving? My congregation was so spiritually hungry that they waited each week for bread I could not break. I met their hunger with my own, my Sinai held no manna. Our famine was severe.

I said what they expected, but every sermon left me with the brown taste of my hypocrisy filling my mouth. I did not need to tell them of my confusion. It was self-proclaiming! Like Nazareth we were (Mark 6:5,6); God did not do many mighty works there "because of our unbelief." Just when I felt my own confusion would destroy me, I broke!

I cried out to God to slay me or make me an honest man with an authentic word. My intellectual pride dissolved in utter need. I broke! My brokenness—like all brokenness—had for its sweet fruit, simple fluent tears. Those tears were sheer acetylene. A torch that cut away, at first, my pride, and then doubt.

With arrogance and doubt both gone, the scales fell from my eyes. I saw God! High and lifted up! His train filled the temple (Isaiah 6:1ff). He took a live coal from off the altar with tongs; he did it for great was the burning and white was the heat! And when my brokenness was complete, I said, "Who art thou Lord?" (Acts 9:5).

He didn't answer, but I knew.

It was the first time I had felt the fire of God on my tongue. It would not be the last. It was a welcome fire made warm by my own brokenness. Since that first flame came to me, I've found that brokenness and fire are always friends, and those who learn to say within their soul, "I'm sorry God," carry fire within their neediness. Thus only the broken bring the flame. (Quoted in Alan E. Nelson, *Broken in the Right Places*, p. 9-11)

Rick Warren

At the end of the first year of beginning Saddleback Valley Community Church, I was completely worn out emotionally and physically. I was trying to keep up with the rapid growth and was working 18-hour days. While speaking on the last Sunday morning of the year, I felt I was going to faint and was unable to complete the message. Fear and depression overwhelmed me. I took a month leave from the church, taking my family to Phoenix for recuperation and reevaluation. This was my "desert" experience. Out of spending intensive time with the Lord, three convictions were burned into my heart. 1. It's God's church, not mine. 2. Ultimately, it's His responsibility, and 3. By grace I am God's man for this church at this point in time. During the next 12 months, I battled depression as the Lord taught me many, many truths that have shaped my life and ministry. It was the most difficult year of my life as I was physically unable to do much of what was required of me. I was forced to learn total dependency on the Lord for every area of ministry. (Quoted in Alan E. Nelson, *Broken in the Right Places*, p. 172-3)

Spiritual Formation

Unit 13

Getting Set for the Rest of Life



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Unit 13

Getting Set for the Rest of Life

Unit 13 Contents

- Learning Outcomes and Steps to Complete Unit 13
- Lecture Notes and Workbook
- Email Assignment
- Readings: Mission Statement, Parable by Gordon MacDonald, Discipline in Focus: Worship

Learning Objectives

- Review the priorities you set for spiritual formation practice.
- Identify six important activities that, if done regularly, would make a significant, positive difference in your spiritual and vocational life.
- Begin planning your weekly and monthly goals for spiritual discipline exercises.

Steps to Complete Unit 13

Read and Reflect....

- Unit Thirteen Reader: Discipline in Focus: Worship.
- From *Devotional Classics* pp. 157-162 (Law); pp. 213-120 (Bunyan); pp. 237-343 (Smith); and pp. 323-330 (Nee)

Respond...

- Complete the various assignments in your journal or on a separate paper.
- Continue the discipline of journaling in response to your reading and practice of the Spiritual Disciplines.

Complete the final email assignment and send your work to the professor.

Lecture Notes and Workbook

[David Fraser]: If you have completed the first twelve units in this course, you have finished the specific materials that make up the contents of Spiritual Formation. The focus of this unit is on the future. This unit is about *putting first things first*.

Most likely, we will tell you little you don't already know. The issue is not what you know but what you *do* about what you know. You have spent a great deal of time doing self-assessment, exploring and exposing yourself to new perspectives on your habits and patterns of living. Now it is time to make some decisions and begin to act in line with those choices. Nothing you have learned so far will be useful if your learning does not genuinely make room for God in your life.

In Unit 11 we explored one of the major outcomes of authentic engagement with the spiritual disciplines: integrity. Integrity means, among other things, the ability to make and keep our commitments. In this final unit we want you to make some commitments and begin to put them into regular weekly practice. If you've found time to work through this course, then you already have made and kept a significant commitment. You are now at the point where you must decide how what you have learned is going to change the way you live in the next month, the next year and the next decade.

Think About It

What might you do to make a tremendous positive difference in your life?

List one thing that you are not doing now, but doing it would make a tremendous difference in your spiritual life.

List one thing that you are *not* doing now, but doing it would make a tremendous difference in your vocational life.

Managing Our Lives

[Chris Hall]: Thinking about doing things that will make a tremendous positive difference in our lives is exciting. We can have deeper, richer lives of intimacy with God. We can be more effective and faithful as we serve God, whatever our vocations. We can make decisions and take actions that will set us on paths to more vitality in our spiritual lives.

What we must ask ourselves is, "Why we are *not* doing the things that would make a tremendous, positive difference in our lives?"

Perhaps we have not organized and carried out our lives in terms of clear priorities. We do not manage our lives in ways that correspond to what we say are our priorities. Our lives do not embody our basic values.

In recent years those who teach time management have stressed the idea of setting priorities in the light of our values and sense of mission. We are asked to weigh the value of various activities and set specific short-term, mid-term and long-term goals. This method has been an important tool in learning to spend time where it is most valuable. Yet, simply scheduling and gaining some control over the demands on our time does not answer the question, "What is most important for me to be spending my time doing?" I can be very efficient in performing unimportant tasks that do not accomplish what God is calling me to be or do.

A final piece in this picture becomes clear when we ask whether we are managing both time and ourselves. We manage our lives in large measure by how we spend our time. Yet managing time tends to set the focus of our concern on efficiency, in getting things being done. When we say we manage time because we wish to manage the gift of life God has given us, it is clearer that our focus should be on enhancing relationships in order to accomplish what God is calling us to do.

The Time Management Matrix

Below you will find a time management matrix from Stephen Covey's helpful book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. He describes four activity categories.

Urgent, Important

In Quadrant One (the top left) are activities that are both urgent and important, matters with pressing urgency, with deadlines that demand near term if not immediate attention.

When matters are urgent, we tend simply to react to them because they insistently demand our attention and action. When they are also important, then we face crises that must be solved. Many of us in ministry find ourselves constantly living in Quadrant One. Some of us are consumed by urgent demands requiring significant results. We are crisis managers, problem solvers, deadline-driven people. Some of us even have an urgency addiction.

If we are also people of very high standards, perfectionists, we can be completely consumed by Quadrant One activities. The result of such an orientation is a high stress level, constant movement fighting "fires" that need to be extinguished, perpetual crisis management without time to plan or work smarter, not just work harder. Working for a boss who leads and manages only on the basis of Quadrant One activities can be very frustrating. The end result of a Quadrant One preoccupation is burnout, a dramatic loss of motivation and energy. We want to quit.

Urgent, Not Important

Since we are often so accustomed to being driven by outside urgent matters, we may spend a great deal of time in Quadrant Three [III] activities: the urgent but non-important. We may think we are in Quadrant One because we are reacting to things that come to us as urgent, but the reality may be that the urgency is based not on our values, mission, or priorities, but upon the expectations of others.

Sometimes we live in Quadrant Three because we have only a short-term focus, or we want to please other people, who we believe are important. We may see ourselves as victims, rather than being in control. We may not even believe we *can* plan, or we may believe plans are worthless. What is going on here? We probably do not yet discern clearly what is right for our lives. We may not yet have the commitment to stick to important things, because that commitment means disappointing others who may have different plans for our time.

Not Urgent, Not Important

Quadrant Four (IV), the non-urgent and unimportant, involves activities that express sinful sloth. In this case we dribble our lives away on things having little or nothing to do with matters of importance to God and His will for our lives. We talk about "wasting time" or "killing time." We drift, allowing life to happen with no thoughtfulness on our part, no discernment between the trivial and the important. We are neither building others or ourselves. We are not maintaining relationships or producing results that glorify God. We live lives of dissolution and escape because we cannot face the challenges of living a life of significance.

To be sure, we do not engage in Quadrant Four activities every time we shut activities down and engage in a pleasant diversion. Recreation is one of the non-urgent but important activities we need. The difference is how the activity is related to our core values, mission and priorities.

Living primarily in Quadrant Three and Four, is living irresponsibility. Folks who live here do not have a set of internal controls that enable them to respond to the range of activities and demands they face. They drift with the tides or they escape from responsibility. Either way they do not accept responsibility for their own lives.

Not Urgent, Important

As you may guess, Quadrant Two activities are the key to this whole picture. Quadrant One activities are important, but the non-urgent but important activities take more initiative and effort on our part if they are to happen.

For most of us, exercising the spiritual disciplines is a Quadrant Two (II) activity. Similarly, unless we are the pastor who is to preach, or the soloist who is to sing or play, Sunday worship service is not urgent. It may be important and we do it by choice. Unless we are members of a religious order that requires certain daily and weekly activities (such as prayers and retreats), the activities that nourish our spiritual growth and formation are Quadrant Two activities.

Quadrant Two activities give us vision, perspective, balance, and control. They build our performance capacities so that when urgent crises or problems arise, we have the personal resources necessary to engage those problems successfully. In Quadrant Two we cultivate our ability to *respond*, not simply *react*, to the situations confronting us in Quadrant One. Quadrant Two activities root us deeply in the Word, connect us to significant others in the body of Christ, and lead us into a more balanced, sensible living pattern.

Reflect on your own activities. The first step in moving out of Quadrant Three and Four activities is to clarify what is most important to you. You may already have written a personal mission statement. If so, retrieve that statement and review it as you answer the questions that follow.

Urgent means those things requiring immediate attention. **Important** refers to those things that produce results, contributing to our mission, values or high priority goals.

Stephen Covey's Four Quadrants

The Time Management Matrix		
	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	I. <i>Activities:</i> Crises Pressing problems Deadline driven projects	II. <i>Activities:</i> Relationship building Recognizing new opportunities Planning, recreation
Not Important	III. <i>Activities:</i> Interruptions, some calls Some mail, some reports Some meetings Proximate, pressing matters Popular activities	IV. <i>Activities:</i> Trivial, busy work Some mail Some phone calls Time wasters Pleasant activities

[Taken from Covey's *The Seven Habits of Effective People*, Simon and Schuster, 1989, p. 151]

Mission Statements

[David Fraser]: These questions need to be asked not only generally, but also in terms of your most important roles. A mission statement sets forth your understanding of your most significant commitments, organized around the present calling you believe God is giving you.

As an example, we've included a fully developed mission statement with core values included. By no means is this example a pattern you must follow. It is simply an example of a basic personal vision and mission statement that provides a basis for setting more specific goals as well as explicitly lists a number of the spiritual disciplines to be engaged regularly over time. These are the two front pages in my (David's) personal mission statement. You will notice the vocational mission statement is more detailed than the others. The length reflects the fact that the university at which I teach requires a detailed bi-annual growth plan with short and long term goals.

Think About It

Please read and study the Mission Statement included in your Reader for this unit.

Clarity for Vision and Mission

[David Fraser] We are not asking you to write a similar statement in this course, though it is immensely valuable for you to clarify your core values, vision and mission. Clarification will help you develop the ability to see what is at the heart of the key roles you play in your current

life situation. A mission statement sets forth as clearly as possible the direction you want to go and the accomplishments and activities you long to have as characteristic of your life. It does not always state what has become reality. For example, I still have a long way to go in living out what I believe God wants for my life.

Once you have clarified what is most important in your life, then you can begin to plan for the future. You may not be able to change the past, but you can begin today to change the future. *The key to doing things differently is not to prioritize your schedule, but to schedule your priorities.*

If you are convinced you need a different balance and rhythm in your life, one with more time for encountering God in the spiritual disciplines, then you must set new priorities and schedule what is important first. Let me tell a story that makes the point:

[An] instructor was lecturing on time. At one point, he said, "It's time for a quiz." He reached under the table and pulled out a wide-mouth gallon jar. He set it on the table next to a platter with some fist-sized rocks on it. "How many of these rocks do you think we can get in the jar?" he asked.

After we made our guess, he said, "Okay. Let's find out." He set one rock in the jar...then another...then another. He filled the jar and then asked, "Is the jar full?"

Everyone looked at the rocks and said, "Yes."

Then he said, "Ahhhh." He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel, dumped some gravel into the jar, and shook the jar and the gravel, filling in all the little spaces left by the big rocks. He grinned and said once more, "Is the jar full?"

By this time we were on to him. "Probably not," we said.

"Good!" he replied. And he reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand. As he dumped the sand it went in all the little spaces left by the rocks and the gravel. Once more he looked at us and said, "Is the jar full?"

"No!" we all roared.

"Good!" he said, and he grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour it in. He got something like a quart of water in that jar. Then he asked, "What is the point?"

Someone answered, "Well, there are gaps, and if you really work at it, you can always fit more into your life."

"No" the instructor replied, "that is not the point! The point is this: if you hadn't put these *big* rocks in first, would you ever have gotten any of them in?"

[Quoted from Covey, Merrill and Merrill, *First Things First*, Simon and Schuster, 1994, pp. 88-89]

Quadrant Two activities and goals are like the fist-sized rocks. If we put the other activities and goals into the time we have first, then there will be no room left for the big rocks.

Spend some time setting spiritual priorities. Spiritual priorities are not our only priorities, but often spiritual activities do not "fit" into the time you *have left* to spend.

Below, we want you to extend the exercise you began earlier by considering what would make a significant positive difference in your spiritual life. What three things are you either already doing or not doing now, that would make a tremendous positive difference in your spiritual life? For your vocational life?

Estimating Time Spent

[Chris Hall]: Having listed those three activities under your spiritual life and under your vocational life, we want you to go back and list how much time you are currently spending weekly on each activity you listed. Make the estimate as realistic as possible. If it is a new activity you have not been doing, then the amount of time will be zero. If it is something you already do occasionally or even regularly, then you will be able to put a time estimate by that

activity. You don't want to stop doing something that is already life giving and important. But you may find you need to practice the activity more often or for more significant amounts of time.

Think About It

Time Spent in Six Quadrant II Activities
 Below, summarize each of the six activities in short form and write an estimate of time spent now on each activity weekly. Then, considering what is healthy and in balance with your other commitments, write a time estimate for each activity that would be ideal for each of the six.

Activity Described	Time Spent Now/Week	Ideal time Spent/Week
#1 _____		
#2 _____		
#3 _____		
#4 _____		
#5 _____		
#6 _____		

If you are like most people, you don't spend enough time on activities that will make a significant, positive difference in your spiritual and vocational life. At times Quadrant I activities overwhelm us, even against our best planning and intentions. We may find ourselves refugees, fleeing a difficult circumstance or involved in the relief efforts that require eighteen hour working days, seven days a week for months. Those circumstances occur. Yet even in the midst of them we can take small steps to respond to the reality of God's presence and God's desire for our company.

Our control over our time is often minimal. Unique circumstances occur. For example, we may have small children to care for; we may have a difficult medical challenge we are struggling to overcome. Whatever our current circumstance, we need must be honest, realistic and responsible for what we can do to close the gaps between what we are now doing and what would be ideal in nurturing our spirituality and improving our performance capacities to do the will and work of God.

Saying "Yes" and "No"

Where do we find time for the important but not urgent matters such as engaging the spiritual disciplines, completing a study course, or spending significant, uninterrupted family time?

The first simple answer is by saying no to Quadrant Three and Four activities. Review those quadrants now. They are the unimportant activities that steal our energy and our focus from what is better and more important for us to be doing. How do we say 'no' to these sorts of things, especially when we have habit patterns that pull us back into Quadrant Three and Quadrant Four activities?

To say "NO" you must have a strong "YES" inside to other priorities. Effective "no's" come from having said "yes" to what is truly important. But the "yes" must be stronger than the lure of the urgent or the pull of slothfulness. To what we have said "YES" ought to be at the center of what we say is our life mission. Our "yes" is more than words on a paper. It is an expression of the deepest and most powerful orientation of our lives. Often we are not integral enough people that our "yes" to God's calling succeeds in disciplining our other desires or reactions to temptations that come our way. Let me say it again. To say an effective "no" requires a powerful "yes" to other predetermined priorities.

Secondly, you may have to adjust your crisis management style for Quadrant One activities. Sometimes our lack of time reflects our crisis orientation or our lack of ability to

genuinely delegate and empower others in our organization to handle day-to-day emergencies. Given our responsibilities and calling, we need an appropriate balance between Quadrant One and Quadrant Two activities. You may have shrunk the time you spend in Quadrants Three and Four, yet still have little time to spend in Quadrant Two activities. We cannot provide you with tools in this course to shift your leadership or management style. There are other courses available to help with strategic thinking and leadership issues. Lack of time may not simply be a reflection of choosing what is unimportant. It may also be a product of overloading ourselves with important and urgent matters.

Again we have to reiterate what we feel is the underlying issue: having a "YES" inside us that is large enough to say "NO" to other things so that we find the time to do the Quadrant Two activities, matters necessary to nourish and strengthen us in God and in our performance capacities. Only then can we effectively and joyfully perform the Quadrant One tasks that fall to us all by the calling and gifting of God.

Think About it

The "YES" Inside Me

You spent some time in the workbook connecting with your mission and vision. Review what you said. Then state and affirm the "YES" that is strong inside you. What is the controlling longing for your life, in the light of God's call and gifting? Perhaps you have written a personal mission statement. If so, review the statement and write out what is preeminently important to you.

[David Fraser] You may discover writing out what is most important to you is difficult to state simply. Nevertheless, writing a personal statement of mission can make an enormous difference in what God can accomplish in us as we allow Him.

In the light of that to which you are saying "Yes," and in the light of the six activities you listed on the previous pages, to what are you going to have to begin saying "No?" Below, we want you to follow up your expressed commitments and desires with a first reflection on that to which you must say "No" if you are to redesign the way you spend your time.

Think About It

Things to Which I Need To Say "No"

To what activities or commitments do I need to begin saying "no" in order to find the room in my life for what is more important? List some of the regular or even occasional "time killers" that do not foster the important goals and mission to which you sense God has called you and for which God has gifted you.

Conclusion

[David Fraser]: You have spent an enormous amount of energy and time on this course. Already you have said "no" to things you were already doing in order to find space and energy to do this course. What is more difficult is doing the same on a more permanent basis, out of your own desire for more of God in your life.

Much of what we have been doing together has involved learning and relearning the spiritual disciplines. You have done a good deal of self-assessment, coming to greater self-awareness about your current condition and tendencies. Now is the time for you to take the next steps in designing a different way of being with God in the midst of your responsibilities and pressures.

While this is not a course teaching you how to plan or the mechanics that can make planning effective and useful, there is one piece of advice we have found helpful. Our conviction is that making room for Quadrant II activities is best done by developing not only daily routines, but by planning weekly in the light of what we have thoughtfully concluded are the most important things for us to be doing. It may be that we set as a goal that we have three to four hour-and-a-half long periods of time weekly in Bible study, prayer and journaling. Then we schedule those in the way we would appointments with the doctor or office hours at work. God gets onto our weekly calendar for special times of concentrated engagement. There may be a

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week where we can spend a full day in prayer and fasting, or we might want to have a designated day where we skip lunch and fast and pray. We may have a regular weekly meeting with a small group of fellow Christians to share and pray for each other. The possibilities are as varied as people and their callings. By thinking weekly and not simply daily, we find we more regularly are able to schedule our priorities rather than simply prioritize our schedule.

On a coming page of your workbook you will find a written statement of these last, finishing tasks of this course. When you have completed writing the two single pages and the pages developing your plan, then we ask that you send them into your course instructor.

[Chris Hall]: We also have a final treat for you. Gordon MacDonald wrote a parable for his recent publication, *The Life God Blesses*. You will find the parable on pages 194 and 195 of this unit. It summarizes much of what we have been doing these weeks and months together as well as what you need to think about building into your life in a more intentional way in the months and years ahead. His language is not the important and the unimportant or the urgent and non-urgent. It is above the waterline and below the waterline. This is a parable of ship building and sailing. We hope it is as instructive and insightful for you as we found it to be.

We are now ready for the final assignment for this unit and this course.

Worship

The discipline for Unit 13 is worship. The sum and substance of what we are about and what we are doing ends in the celebration and adoration of God.

William Temple defines worship thus, "To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God."

Worship is the goal of all our spiritual exercises because the disciplines bring us ever closer to God and conform us to Christ's perfect image. Worship is the ultimate means of the spiritual disciplines because our transformation happens as we live in the presence of and for the glory of God.

You will also find some suggestions dealing with daily worship during the week from the practice of Gordon MacDonald. He has divided his week into specific ways of encountering God and bringing to remembrance who God is.

Our brothers and sisters, we are at an end together. We are grateful to God for the privilege of walking part of the way on your journey toward the coming Kingdom of God. We want to close our time together in prayer:

Today, Lord, we say YES!

YES to you

YES to the life you have given us

YES to our brothers and sisters in Christ

YES to all that is good, true and beautiful

YES to the light yoke of the disciplines you lay upon us.

Thank you, Lord, for saying YES to us in the midst of all our struggles.

Convict us, convert us, and consecrate us, that we might be completely yours,

Through Christ, our Lord and Savior, AMEN.

Email Assignment

We want you to do three things in bringing the results of this course to fruition. First, go back and review your two page reflection papers you wrote for the preceding 12 units as final assignments. Be sure to note the patterns and conclusions you reached as you wrote those reflections. Are there recurrent themes? Take careful note of them.

Secondly, go back and reread your journal writing. This is an ongoing record of what you have been experiencing as you engaged the materials of this course. Take time to note patterns and recurrent themes that are present. Can you say what have been the most important things you have learned as you have self-consciously reflected on what is going on in your life and in your work in this course?

Finally, we have some writing for you to do in a final paper involving three parts. This is different from what we have been doing so pay close attention.

- a. Write on one page a short summary of the five most important things you learned from the course, "Making Room for God." These should summarize what you consider your most significant learnings. There are no wrong answers to this question because each person will have unique things they have discovered or relearned.
- b. We want you to write on another single page a response to the statement, "In the light of what I have learned in this course as well as what I find in my final assignment papers and my journal, I have concluded that I need to..."
- c. Finally, we want you to write out a short, to the point, plan for what we have called Quadrant Two activities that involve finding and spending time on the six activities you listed on the exercise in this unit titled "Time Spent in Six Quadrant II Activities." You may want to review those six activities in the light of your review of your twelve final assignment papers and your rereading of your journal. Confirm that they are the six most important things you might do to make significant, positive change in your life. Use them as your anchors for planning what you will do in the next month and regularly over the next year. This need not be limited to one page. Include as much as will help you implement what you need to do for the next month and during the next twelve months in "Making Room for God" in your life in new ways.

Email your work to the professor by the date indicated in your Module Calendar.

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Readings

MISSION STATEMENT

I believe God invites me as a conscious subject of the Kingdom of God to glorify God by imaging God in the key relationships of life

- with fellow human beings, fostering an ensemble of social relationships that empower others
- with the earth, expanding simple lifestyle measures that foster stewardship
- with myself, affirming the gifts and fruits of the Spirit that amplify Christ-likeness
- with God, enhancing spiritual disciplines that nurture a close walk with God

And to enjoy Him forever

- through worship and celebration
- through regular thanksgiving and prayer growing out of a fundamental attitude of gratitude
- through study, contemplation and growing awareness of the character and works of God
- through a persistent and passionate pursuit of holiness
- through energetic work and service offered up as praise to God's name

My mission in life is to run the race of faith well, to run long and to finish strong. One hundred yards of talent will not do for a four hundred yard race. Six miles of preparation will not suffice to run a marathon distance.

To run well, run long, and finish strong, I must

- experience a continuing improvement in my performance capabilities
- embody strengthening traits of character that display the fruits of the Spirit
- engage a network of fellow runners who can partner with me in our common calling

To run well, run long and finish strong, I must do so

- in my family life
- in my vocational activities at the University
- in my commitments and activities in the Church, both local and global
- in my civic responsibilities

1. In my family life I will seek to establish and sustain a nurturing set of relationships

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- that allow each to become responsibly independent and freely interdependent,
 - marked by caring, fairness, patience, truth, honesty and physical-emotional warmth.
2. In my church involvements I will seek
 - to participate with a company of other believers in a community of faith, hope and love in which the world mission
 - of proclaiming Christ,
 - planting churches,
 - enhancing Christian leadership,
 - caring for the Creation,
 - and seeking justice and peace are integral elements
 - in ongoing congregational and denominational priorities and structures.
 3. In my vocational activities as a University instructor I will seek
 - to empower and equip students for living
 - in accordance with the reality and mandates of the Kingdom of God
 - especially the commission to make disciples of all peoples
 - through encounters with significant and stimulating knowledge and insight
 - in alliance with a balanced team of fellow Christian scholars
 - and to empower and enhance key Christian leaders and organizations to increase measurably their performance capabilities
 - in order to achieve the important goals involved in holistic mission
 - including evangelization, church planting, and community development
 - in partnership with Development Associates International and the Center for Organizational Leadership.
 4. In my civic responsibilities I will seek
 - to inform myself of the issues and candidates for public office of my own nation so that
 - I may vote responsibly and advocate reasoned and Christian positions
 - as well as give resources and time to a few organizations and causes
 - and to discover ways I might serve the poor and marginal of my world.

The values and principles to which I commit myself in carrying out my tasks include:

1. *Integrity*
 - aligning my inner self and my outer appearance so they match
 - in touch with my authentic feelings and tactfully honest with others
 - habitually keeping the agreements and contracts I make with others
 - manifesting discernment, steadfastness in commitment and forthrightness in speech
 - seeking to do all my tasks at the highest level of my ability
2. *Hope*
 - always believing God's input and oversight is present and active in every part of my life
 - remaining content, calm, expectant of good things from even tragic and painful events
 - banishing bitterness, discouragement, despair, and a critical spirit in favor of joy
 - able to enter into the pain of others without losing confidence in God's caring
3. *Love*
 - being concerned, interested and involved in healthy, affirming ways with others
 - communicating empathy and seeking empowerment for others to grow and flourish
 - accepting others as they are and affirming God's desire to give them the best
 - guarding the name and reputation of others as I would want mine to be
 - forgiving others when they wrong me in the same spirit God has forgiven me
4. *Courage*
 - able to stand alone when necessary for what is true and just
 - willing to take risks and to persist in doing what I hear God calling me to do and be
 - willing to admit wrong and make amends in forums as public as the wrong done
5. *Wisdom*
 - able to make competent, well-thought, judicious decisions for life

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- broadly prudent and perceptive in life involvements
- growing in the ability to see beyond the surface to the deeper issues and alternatives

6. *Self-control*

- not self-indulgent or lazy, not codependent or pushy
- seeking first the rights of others, then my own rights
- expecting as much from myself as I expect from others
- following regular habits that foster balanced growth, renewal and good health
- growing in my ability to respond proactively to the challenges that come my way

A Parable by Gordon MacDonald

Taken from *The Life God Blesses* (Thomas Nelson, 1994) pp. xix-xxiii

"The Persona"

Once a foolish man built a boat. His intention was that it would be the grandest, the most talked-about boat that ever sailed from the harbor of the boat club of which he was a member. Thus, he determined to spare no expense or effort.

That the boat builder would come to be known as a foolish man had nothing to do with his ability to build, nor did it have to do with his capacity to work hard. It also was not a reference to his personality, for he was a most pleasant person; people often said this. None of this! That he came to be called a foolish man had everything to do with qualities of person, invisible qualities, one might say, that no one was initially able to appreciate. But to say anything more about this is to get ahead of the story.

As he built, the foolish man outfitted his craft with colorful sails, complex rigging, and comfortable appointments and conveniences in its cabin. The decks were made from beautiful teakwood; all the fittings were custom-made of polished brass. And on the stern, painted in gold letters, readable from a considerable distance, was the name of the boat, the Persona.

As he built the Persona, the foolish man could not resist fantasizing upon the anticipated admiration and applause from club members at the launching of his new boat. In fact, the more he thought about the praise that was soon to come, the more time and attention he gave to those aspects of the boat's appearance that would attract the crowd and intensify excitement.

Now, and this seems reasonable, because no one would ever see the underside of the Persona, the man saw little need to be concerned about the boat's keel, or, for that matter, anything that had to do with the issue of properly distributed weight or ballast. Experienced sailors might wince at this, but one must remember that the boat builder was acting with the perceptions of the crowd in his mind not the seaworthiness of the vessel. Seaworthiness seems not an important issue while in a dry dock.

On one of those occasions when he was sorting out his priorities of time and resources, he said to himself, "Why should I spend money or time on what is out of anyone's sight? When I listen to the conversations of people at the club, I hear them praising only what they can see. I can never remember anyone admiring the underside of a boat. Instead, I sense that my yachting colleagues really find exciting the color and shape of a boat's sails, its brass fittings, its cabin and creature comforts, decks and wood texture, speed and the skill that wins the Sunday afternoon regattas."

So, driven by such reasoning, the foolish man built his boat. And everything that would be visible to the people soon began to gleam with excellence. But things that would be invisible when the boat entered the water were generally ignored. People did not seem to take notice of this, or if they did, they made no comment.

The builder's suspicions were correct: the people of the boat club understood and appreciated sails, rigging, decks, brass, and staterooms. And what they saw, they praised. Sometimes he overheard people say that his efforts to build the grandest boat in the history of the club would someday result in his selection as commodore. That had no effect upon his conviction that he had made good decisions and was on a correct course to boat-club acceptance and success.

When the day came for the boat's maiden voyage, the people of the club joined him at dockside. A bottle of champagne was broken over the bow, and the moment came for the man to set sail. As the breeze filled the sails and pushed the Persona from the club's harbor, he

stood at the helm and heard what he'd anticipated for years: the cheers and well-wishes of envious admirers who said to one another, "Our club has never seen a grander boat than this. This man will make us the talk of the yachting world." There were some boat owners who joined him, sailing on either side and forming a spectacular flotilla as they moved out beyond the breakwater and into the ocean.

Soon the beautiful *Persona* was merely a blip on the horizon. And as it cut through the swells, its builder and owner, who at this moment seemed anything but a foolish man, gripped the rudder with a feeling of fierce pride. What he had accomplished! He was seized with an increasing rush of confidence that everything, the boat, his future as a boat-club member (and probably as commodore), and even the ocean (why not when one is feeling confident?), was his to control.

But a few miles out to sea a storm arose. Not a hurricane. But not a squall either. There were sudden wind gusts in excess of forty knots, waves above fifteen feet. The *Persona* began to shudder, and water swept over the sides. Bad things began to happen, and the poise of the "captain" began to waver. Perhaps the ocean wasn't his after all.

How about connections with other club members, the ones who sailed from the harbor on either side, cheering and waving? He looked about for them. But none were to be seen. The boats that had been there in the early part of the voyage had turned back long ago. He had been too self-absorbed to notice. Besides, other captains knew storm clouds when they saw them.

Within minutes the *Persona's* colorful sails were in shreds, the splendid mast was splintered in pieces, and the rigging was unceremoniously draped all over the bow. The teakwood decks and the lavishly appointed cabin were awash with water. And then before the foolish man could prepare himself, a wave bigger than anything he'd ever seen hurled down upon the *Persona*, and the boat capsized.

Now, this is important! When most boats would have righted themselves after such a battering, the *Persona* did not. Why? Because its builder, this very foolish man, had ignored the importance of what was below the waterline. There was no weight there. In a moment when a well-designed keel and adequate ballast might have saved the ship, they were nowhere to be found. The foolish man had concerned himself with the appearance of things and not enough with resilience and stability in the secret, unseen places where storms are withstood.

Furthermore, because the foolish man had such confidence in his sailing abilities, he had never contemplated the possibility of a situation he could not manage. And that's why later investigations revealed that there were no rescue devices aboard: rafts, life jackets, emergency radios. And the result of this mixture of poor planning and blind pride: the foolish man was lost at sea.

Only when the wreckage of the *Persona* was washed ashore did the drowned man's boat-club friends discover all this. "Look," they said, "this boat lacks an adequate keel, and there is far more weight above the waterline than below."

They said more! "Only a fool would design and build a boat like this, much less sail in it. A man who builds only above the waterline does not realize that he has built less than half a boat. Didn't he know that the ocean is dangerous? Didn't he understand that a boat not built with storms in mind is a floating disaster waiting to happen? How absurd that we should have applauded him so enthusiastically."

There were a few old men and women off to one side who heard these things and quietly commented to one another, "We do not remember that anyone mentioned these things when the foolish man was building his *Persona*. What's the use of such questions when his boat is a wreck, and he is nowhere to be found?"

The foolish man was never found. Today, when people speak of him, which is rare, they comment not upon the initial success of the man or upon the beauty of his boat, but only upon the silliness of putting out on an ocean where storms are sudden and violent. And doing it with a boat that was really never built for anything else but the vanity of its builder and the praise of spectators. It was in such conversations that the owner of the *Persona*, whose name has long been forgotten, became known as simply the foolish man. ...

THE DISCIPLINE OF WORSHIP

The Object of Our Worship

All of the spiritual disciplines prepare us for the fundamental Christian action, worship of the true God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Spiritual health finds its rhyme and reason here. Biblical writers are of one accord in insisting on the centrality of worship: "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve" (Matthew 4:10). To fail to worship God in reverence and truth is to end in the abyss of idolatry and blasphemy. And what is blasphemy and idolatry? Lying about God. Tozer writes, "The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of him." (quoted in *Celebration of Discipline*, 159). Foster reinforces Tozer's thought, "To think rightly about God is, in an important sense, to have everything right. To think wrongly about God is, in an important sense, to have everything wrong." (*Celebration of Discipline*, 159-160).

How, then, do we picture God? How would we describe God if asked to do so? How have our life experiences, family background, culture and the scripture itself shaped our understanding of God? Yes, we are all theologians. We all have thoughts, ideas and perceptions—some true, some false—about God and God's actions in the world and in the church. This conceptual and life experience background forms the cocoon in which our worship—or the lack of it—receives its incubation.

Hence, the central role of the spiritual disciplines is helping us perceive, comprehend, serve and worship the one true God. Think, for example, of how the disciplines of study, meditation and prayer influence our conception and experience of God. Through study and meditation upon scripture we come to know who it is we worship, how God has acted on our behalf and how God calls us to respond to God in ascribing the worth, glory and love God desires and deserves. How well does your experience and conceptual understanding of God fit together? Do your innermost thoughts and feelings about God draw you to worship? Can you pray your theology? If not, why?

Perhaps the link between worship and confession is already apparent to you. Think of Isaiah's response to God as he is caught up to God's presence in Isaiah 6. "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (Isaiah 6:5) It is only when an angel plucks a coal from God's altar and places it in Isaiah's mouth that he is able to hear and respond to God's call. God's provision for Isaiah's sinfulness leads to Isaiah's response of worship and commitment.

Foster also reminds us that we worship God not only because of who God is, but because of what God has done. "His gracious actions are not only etched into ancient history, but are engraved into our personal histories." (*Celebration of Discipline*, 160) A short memory of God's acts on our behalf, both corporately and personally, will soon dry up our ability to worship well. Israel is continually reminded of the importance of monuments. As Israel crosses over the Jordan River, finally entering the land promised to Abraham, stones are taken from the center of the riverbed and built into a pillar at Gilgal. Why? So that when the years have passed and the Jordan flows as it has flowed for years, Israel will remember. The pillar of stones will remind Israel that God acted to redeem and has promised to continue to do so as they respond in faith.

What are the monuments in your life? Are there aspects of who God is or what God has done that you have forgotten, largely because you have overlooked or failed to remember your own spiritual history? What is God calling you to remember that you have forgotten? Use your journaling as an opportunity to record God's actions on your behalf. Remembering fuels worship and celebration.

The Priority of Worship

We are prone to get things out of order in the spiritual life. Many people who are attracted to ministry and become Christian leaders are action oriented. What we do is important to us. Service to others is at the heart of what we are about. The great irony, though, would be to spend a lifetime serving others without ever realizing that our primary service is to God in our worship. Might we focus on service to others because of the primary role we play in this kind of ministry? Our service will become self-centered and imbalanced if it is not rooted in the primary service of worship to God. As Foster insists rightly, service and action "flow out of worship.

Service as a substitute for worship is idolatry. Activity is the enemy of adoration. . . .One grave temptation we all face is to run around answering calls to service without ministering to the Lord himself." (*Celebration of Discipline*, 161)

Why might I be attracted to service to others while avoiding worship itself? Is my activity, perhaps my frantic driven nature, related to a need to prove myself, a need to succeed, a need to gain the approval of God and others, a need to be indispensable? Foster reminds us that healthy worship deflects attention off my actions and myself and on to one who is fully deserving and worthy of my praise. Worship deflects and rebukes the need of fallen people to be at the center of attention.

Preparation for Worship

Foster discusses a number of important steps we can take in preparing us for worship. First, Foster encourages us to cultivate "holy expectancy." That is, our attitude and responses to God throughout the week will determine to a great extent what occurs between God and us on a Sunday morning. Can we expect to meet God in worship on Sunday if we have avoided or ignored God for the previous six days? What steps can you take to wrap each day in the atmosphere of worship in the midst of the busyness and obligations we all face? These steps "will heighten your expectancy in public worship because the gathered experience of worship just becomes a continuation and an intensification of what you have been trying to do all week long." (*Celebration of Discipline*, 171) Saturday night is an especially important time. Use it for self-examination, confession and remembering God's goodness over the past week. Brother Lawrence relates that his practice of consciously remembering and acknowledging God as he washed dishes in his monastery enhanced his experience of God during the Eucharist. What behaviors and attitudes can you cultivate to enhance your own worship experience? What behaviors and attitudes are obstructing your ability to fully worship God? When Sunday finally arrives, do you take time to prepare yourself for worship before the service actually begins? Foster suggests, "Enter the service ten minutes early. Lift your heart in adoration to the King of glory. Contemplate his majesty, glory, and tenderness as revealed in Jesus Christ. Invite the real Presence to be manifest." (*Celebration of Discipline*, 163)

Foster also reminds us that worship is not a passive activity. Our prayers, responses and attentiveness to God and others in worship are essential. Foster advises us to lift the pastor and other worship leaders "into the light of Christ." "Picture," he says, "the Shekinah of God's radiance surrounding them. Inwardly release them to speak the truth boldly in the power of the Lord." (*Celebration of Discipline*, 163) Keep your eyes and heart open both before and during the service. Are there particular people God is calling you to pray for at that very moment? If you arrive early, select one or two people to pray specifically for as the service progresses.

Avenues into Worship

Worship does not usually occur spontaneously. Most of us need time to slow down and quiet down before we effectively and reverently move into worship. Are you learning to silence your heart before God? Silence, as we have noted in this course, is difficult to find and nourish in the modern world. Many of us bring the distractions of the workweek or family life into worship with us. How can we not? Hence, taking time to quiet our hearts before worship actually starts is important. Give your distractions, anxieties, hopes, dreams, frustrations, disappointments and concerns to God as worship begins. Make worship a time of listening to God if at all possible. As Foster puts it, "Certainly it is more fitting to come in reverential silence and awe before the Holy One of eternity than to rush into his Presence with hearts and minds askew and tongues full of words." (*Celebration of Discipline*, 167)

Foster reminds us that worship is more than a cerebral exercise focusing on the human intellect. It includes our minds but also encompasses our bodies and emotions. In fact, Foster insists, what we do with our bodies will influence our ability to enter fully into worship. For some of us this will mean learning to humble ourselves before God in new ways. Is God calling you to experiment with new forms of worship that you have avoided because of self-consciousness and the fear of embarrassment? Note Michael's response of contempt to David's dancing before the ark as it entered Jerusalem and God's response to Michael! What small steps can you take

toward greater receptivity and openness in worship that might rebuke hidden areas of resistance and pride?

The Fruits of Worship

Foster writes, "to worship is to change. . . Just as worship begins in holy expectancy, it ends in high obedience. If worship does not propel us into greater obedience, it has not been worship." We suggest you take a personal inventory of your past worship history. For example, how have you learned to worship? What are the particular emphases of your own faith tradition? How might the resources of other Christian faith traditions supplement and enrich your worship experience? Most importantly, what has been the concrete fruit of your worship? How has worship changed you? Has worship changed you? What have you learned about yourself in worship, good and bad? What have you learned about God? How is God calling you to change as a result of worship?

Gordon MacDonald's weekly liturgy for his personal time with God:

Sunday: a Day of Creation and Resurrection

God is my maker, the essence of what I am is good. But the evil in me is foreign tissue. The heavens and the earth are His, and it all "except what humanity has exploited and destroyed" gives evidence to his glory. THIS IS A DAY OF CREATION AND RESURRECTION.

Thus says God the Lord,
Who created the heavens and stretched them out,
Who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it,
Who gives breath to the people on it
And spirit to those who walk on it:
"I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness,
And will hold your hand." (Isaiah 42:5-6)

Monday: A Day of Glory

God is my King: I am a servant in His kingdom, and I stand before Him today in reverence and holy fear. His kingdom begins in me and in all who bow before Him in submission. THIS IS A DAY OF GLORY.

Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples!
Shout to God with the voice of triumph!
For the Lord Most High is awesome;
He is a great King over all the earth (Psalm 47:1-2)

Tuesday: A Day of Accountability and Mourning

God is my judge. Before Him and before Him only do I stand guilty of my sins, justifiably condemned. THIS IS A DAY OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND MOURNING.

O Lord, I know the way of human beings is not in their control,
That mortals as they walk cannot direct their steps.
Correct me, O Lord, but in just measure;
Not in your anger, or you will bring me to nothing. (Jeremiah 10:23-24)

Wednesday: A Day of Redemption

God is my Redeemer. In Jesus He has provided a way (the atonement of His Son) to satisfy divine justice, and, at the same time, offer me spiritual liberation and adoption into His kingdom-family. THIS IS A DAY OF REDEMPTION.

And also: "And the [redeemed] of the Lord shall return,
And come to Zion with singing,
With everlasting joy on their heads.

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They shall obtain joy and gladness,
And sorrow and sighing shall flee away." (Isaiah 35:10)

Thursday: A Day of Provision

God is my shepherd. By His Spirit, I have need of nothing else. He provides, protects, feeds, leads. THIS IS A DAY OF PROVISION.

I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever;
With my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations.
For I have said, 'mercy shall be built up forever;
Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens.'" (Psalm 89:1-2)

Friday: A Day of Compassion and Intimacy

God is my Father: He has compassion and tender affection for me, and He offers me a personal relationship as Father and friend. THIS IS A DAY OF COMPASSION AND INTIMACY.

As a father has compassion on his children,
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;
for He knows how we are formed,
He remembers that we are dust. (Psalm 103:13-14 NIV)

Saturday: A Day of Hope

God is my life. Through His gift, I have the promise of everlasting life. Death is a threshold to something incomprehensibly bright and wonderful. The work of eternity will be that of discovering the infinite depths of His glory. Sadness, conflict, brokenness, weakness will be things of the past, not remembered. Worship will be the order of the day. And we shall see Him as He is. THIS IS A DAY OF HOPE.

"See, the tabernacle of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them as their God;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
He will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.
And the one who was seated on the throne said,
See, I am making all things new." (Revelation 21:3-5)