

Discipline Yourself

By Donald S. Whitney

Tomorrow morning, I don't have to decide if I'm going to read God's Word and spend time in prayer to Him. Meeting with the Lord is a discipline long-rooted in my morning routines, and my commitment to it simplifies my spirituality. It's one less decision I have to make, one more spiritual priority well woven into the fabric of my daily life.

The apostle Paul instructs us, "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (1 Timothy 4:7, NASB). The practical ways of fleshing out obedience to this command are called the Christian spiritual disciplines, the God-given means by which we are to bring ourselves before the Lord. And as we enjoy a growing relationship with Him through them, He changes us "for the purpose of godliness," that is, He makes us more like Jesus. And so, as we practice these disciplines, our lives conform more to biblical—and simpler—rhythms and patterns.

In one way, when you enjoy a simpler spiritual life than you have now, it will still be—and *should be*—busy. If you obediently pursue both the Great Commandment and the Great Commission of Jesus (see Mark 12:28-31; 28:18-20), as well as "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness," you won't grow idle. But even though the personal and congregational spiritual disciplines lead to a full life, they can also simplify it.

For example, the Christian spiritual disciplines help us focus on the right things, including the most important of all: knowing and glorifying God. Conversely, practicing the disciplines also helps prevent some bad habits, such as spending time in non-productive, unwise, or even sinful ways. Personally, I have the clearest vision, both of what I should bring into and carve from my life, while engaged in spiritual disciplines like meditating on Scripture, praying through Scripture, or worshiping the Lord with His people.

The disciplines simplify our spiritual lives further by simplifying our communion with God. He hasn't left us to find our own ways to Him. We don't have to wonder how to meet with the Lord and experience Him. God Himself established paths—such as Bible intake, prayer, worship, service, evangelism, fasting, silence and solitude, journaling, and fellowship—which make our spiritual walk with Him simpler and more satisfying.

No one coasts into Christlikeness. Any progress in godliness requires Spirit-filled effort and purpose. But the Christian spiritual disciplines, rightly practiced, can bring some simplicity and order to the process of becoming more like Jesus. Where do you need to "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness"?

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