

Spiritual Disciplines For Developing a Heart For God

Study Texts: Ephesians 4:17-24; I Peter 1:14-16

Letting go: The Disciplines of Abstinence (I Peter 2:11- putting off)

Solitude – Spending time alone with God. This is hard in our incredibly busy times but it is indispensable to spiritual growth. We must let go of some of our busyness.

Fasting – Abstaining from food to express dependence on God – It is meant to be an act of humbling oneself before God to seek His help and deliverance. It is often associated with repentance (Matthew 4:2;6:16-18).

Denial – Intentionally denying yourself certain legitimate pleasures to find your sufficiency in God (or) a higher fulfillment in God (Matthew 16:24-26).

Sacrifice – Giving of our resources beyond what seem reasonable to remind us of our dependency on God. (Time/service/money) C.S. Lewis has written: "... if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot because our charitable expenditure excludes them." (Matthew 6:24; Luke 17:10)

Secrecy – Living before an audience of one. Doing things without others knowing about it (Matthew 6:5-6; 25:34-40; Philippians 2:3; Hebrews 6:10).

Simplicity – Learning to live with less. Meeting basic needs. (Proverbs 30:7-9; I Timothy 6:6-8). "We resolve to renounce waste and oppose extravagance in personal living, clothing and housing, travel and church buildings. We also accept the distinction between necessities and luxuries, creative hobbies and empty status symbols, modesty and vanity, occasional celebrations and normal routine, and between the service of God and slavery to fashion. Where to draw the line requires conscientious thought and decision by us, together with members of our family." (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, March 1980).

Silence – Talking less and listening more. Being quiet before the Lord and others (Psalm 23:2; Isaiah 30:15; James 1:19). This is a lost discipline.

Putting On: The Disciplines of Activity (Romans 13:12-14; Ephesians 6:10-12)

Study – Reading, meditating on and investigating the Scriptures. Nourishing your soul on God's Word (Deuteronomy 8:3; Psalm 19,119; I Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12).

Worship – Offering wholehearted praise to God (contra. Matthew 15:8); giving God glory, exalting God, declaring His excellencies/praises (I Peter 2:9; Psalm 95:6-7; Revelation 5:11-14). Use psalms, hymns, spiritual songs – "singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord" Ephesians 5:18-19

Prayer – Pouring out your heart to God in: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication (I Peter 5:7; Phil. 4:5-7; Hebrews 4:16 – invitations to come to God: – James 4:8 – “Draw near to God...” see: Psalm 73:25-28)

Fellowship – Mutual caring and ministry in the body of Christ. To try to live for Jesus disconnected from a body of believers is to neglect a key resource for spiritual growth (Ephesians 4:11-16; Hebrews 10:23-25).

Submission – Humbling yourself before God and others—being accountable (Psalm 51:17; James 4:7; I Peter 5:5-6; Hebrews 13:17)

Service – God intends for us to find our greatest joy in giving our time, talent and resources for the benefit of others (Mark 10:45; Luke 17:10; John 13:13-17; Galatians 5:13; Ephesians 4:16; Philippians 2:3-8).

Witnessing — Inviting others to believe on Christ. Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me – so send I you” (John 20:21; See also: Matthew 5:13-16; 28:19-20; Acts 1:8).

Check yourself regularly by these disciplines. Where do you need attention? Intentionally stretch yourself in these disciplines and you will develop a heart for God.

Remember: Although we do not accomplish spiritual maturity in our own strength (because it is the work of the Holy Spirit– II Corinthians 3:18), we are not passive recipients of it. Spiritual maturity is the by-product of a spiritually disciplined life that is lived in constant dependence on God (Ephesians 6:10-12).

There is no easy path to spiritual maturity but the rewards of giving yourself wholeheartedly to it are deeply satisfying.