

# Coffee and Conversation Series

## Spiritual Living

- ▶ **MY QUESTION - DISCUSS:** *Why disciplines/practices - doesn't living faith come naturally after receiving Christ as Lord?*
- ▶ “When I say ‘practice’ I don’t mean repeating an act until you get it right. In this use, it means to instill regular discipline to accomplish a specific task, ritual without which we feel incomplete, or that our experience of each day is less.”  
– **S. Kelley Harrell**
- ▶ “Gratitude goes beyond the 'mine' and 'thine' and claims the truth that all of life is a pure gift. In the past I always thought of gratitude as a spontaneous response to the awareness of gifts received, but now I realize that gratitude can also be lived as a discipline. The discipline of gratitude is the explicit effort to acknowledge that all I am and have is given to me as a gift of love, a gift to be celebrated with joy.”  
– **Henri J.M. Nouwen**

“While formally or structurally speaking, there are mechanisms of discipline operative in both the convent and the prison, in both the factory and the monastery, more specifically these disciplines and practices are aimed at very different ends. And here we must make an important distinction: we can distinguish good discipline from bad discipline by its telos, its goal or end. So the difference between the disciplines that form us into disciples of Christ and the disciplines of contemporary culture that produce consumers is precisely the goal they are aiming at. Discipline and formation are good insofar as they are directed toward the end, or telos, that is proper to human beings: to glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

– **James K.A. Smith,**

# Coffee and Conversation Series

## Spiritual Living - Practices

- ▶ What are some of the 'practices' you now follow in your life?
- ▶ How long have you followed these 'practices'?
- ▶ Did someone teach them to you, or did you master them yourself?
- ▶ Have you ever changed those 'practices' during your life time? Why?
- ▶ Are there 'practices' that you tried and abandon?
- ▶ Do these 'practices' enrich your life or hinder/burden you?
- ▶ Have you shared these 'practices' with another? Shared with them how they have benefitted/enriched your life?
- ▶ Have you adopted a 'practice' suggested by another person? What has been your experience?

# A Spiritual Discipline/Practice Is.....

- ▶ A spiritual discipline is any regular and intentional activity that establishes, develops, and nourishes a personal experience with God in which we allow ourselves to be transformed.
- ▶ A spiritual discipline has both vertical and horizontal dimensions. The discipline/practice opens a door to God and, as such, it leads to acts of love and compassion toward one's neighbor that brings life, health and vitality to the world.
- ▶ It includes the following components:
  - ▶ Regularity (not necessarily daily)
  - ▶ Opens one to an experience of and relationship to God
  - ▶ Personal transformation

# A Spiritual Practice Is.....

- ▶ **It is regular**: a practice is something that has become part of one's life, as regular as brushing your teeth, taking the dog for a walk. Developing such a regular habit sometimes takes perseverance, determination and good humor. Many of us get excited about a new practice, start it, then start slipping. Like changing one's eating habits! It gets easier when we see the practice as comfortable, helpful, beneficial. If you want to establish a spiritual practice, experiment with something you think you can become comfortable with. Return to it even if you slip for a while. Modify it until you think it is right for you.

# A Spiritual Practice.....

Establishes, develops and nourishes a personal experience of God: for Christians, spiritual practice is not about developing greater inner peace or about any of the other goals one might read about in “how to” books. Spiritual practice is what one intentionally and regularly engages in because one wishes to have a deepened experience with God, the Transcendent, Jesus, the Christ, the Spirit.

The key word here is “experience”: each of us will come to experience God in a unique way. Within the practice one is more open to how and where God enters one’s life, and to what God is seeking for you in your life.

*Simply ‘doing it’ doesn’t guarantee a deeper relationship. Intent, authenticity and honest are needed, among other personal commitments. However, feelings ARE NOT one of them. We may or may not ‘feel’ our relationship. We trust God is pleased with our attempts and can use them to build that relationship (Merton)*



# A Spiritual Practice Is.....

**A means of personal transformation.** Humans are creatures of habit. Look at where you sit every Sunday in the sanctuary. Habits and routine are part of our life for many reasons. Sometimes we become dissatisfied with our routines, wonder if there isn't something more, want to explore, experiment. 'Practices' are away that can occur. If you are happy just the way you are; if you are afraid of what might happen if you were transformed, then spiritual practices are not for you.

One enters regular, intentional spiritual practices so the God one experiences in relationship might gradually transform us into who we are called to be.

# ▶ Let's think of some spiritual 'practices'?

▶ Where did they come from and who defined them?

- ▶ Honoring the Body
- ▶ Hospitality
- ▶ Household Economics
- ▶ Keeping Sabbath
- ▶ Discernment
- ▶ Shaping Communities
- ▶ Forgiveness
- ▶ Healing
- ▶ Dying Well
- ▶ Singing
- ▶ Humility
- ▶ Service
- ▶ Stewardship
- ▶ Worship
- ▶ 'Sacrament of Loss'



# Spiritual Gifts and Practice of Stewardship



# DISCIPLE ≡ STEWARD

▶ Jesus' call to faith and discipleship (faithful living) effects all of a person's being and life.

▶ Some Biblical illustrations:

The 'almost' two: Matthew 8:18ff "holes and the dead"

Rich young man: Matthew 19:16ff "Oop\$"

Feeding the crowds

Taxes to Caesar

The Widow's Offering

Love for enemies

The Samaritan

Others\_\_\_\_\_

# Spiritual Practice of Stewardship

- ▶ Calls for:
  - ▶ Appreciativeness
  - ▶ Connection
  - ▶ Compassion
  - ▶ Distributing God's resources

# Spiritual Gift of Stewardship

- ▶ **APPRECIATIVENESS:** One has to see, appreciate and acknowledge all that one has, without comparison, as a gift for which we are always thankful. The problem often comes with comparison with others and with the definition of 'enough'. The nagging societal question posed each day to us is, Do you have 'enough'? Appreciativeness for all that we have, expressed each moment, the old 'attitude of gratitude', is crucial. If you don't see it as gift, it isn't!
- ▶ **CONNECTION:** We also need to see, appreciate and acknowledge the 'other' (a theological term for all other people). This is Jesus' message - love others as we love ourselves. This has been especially present command since The Tree of Life. Seeing and feeling 'others', their joy and pain, trust and fear, gifts and needs - walking in their shoes, living under their tent. If we have no connection with the other, is that other person really there?? And if they aren't there then there is no need to walk with them. What gifts did the Tress of Life bring to our awareness?

- ▶ **COMPASSION:** Connection with others allows to care for them specifically rather than generally, and in a way that helps and heals, not that harms. In a compassion connection we cry with them, feel their pain, understand their hunger, .....
- ▶ **DISTRIBUTING GOD'S RESOURCES:** Which brings us to distribution of all of God's resources - which go beyond time, talent and treasure and includes love, compassion, desire for peace, urgency to establish justice, quest for unity, care for creation,.....
- ▶ You will notice that I've said little about your wallet, even though Jesus has more to say on money than any other topic!! We are talking about being stewards - of all.



# Living Stewardship- A Spiritual Practice

Things you might  
consider trying  
(or continue)

- ▶ **Focus** on how gracious and generous God has been with you. Acknowledge that generosity.
- ▶ **Take time** to give thanks for all you have both pain and pleasure - for God is in both and from both you can grow and become a blessing to other
- ▶ **Begin** a new 'habit/practice', IE: prayer, change a routine, learn about specific areas in community, share a resource you have guarded, join an environmental group, work with immigrants, join PRISM,....
- ▶ **Keep** a journal, reflect on that practice with another, find an accountability partner.
- ▶ **Release** negative images and thoughts that you have about 'enough'.
- ▶ **Be mindful** of times and ways you seek to control things and relax into the grace of God
- ▶ \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ \_\_\_\_\_

# WHAT ABOUT MONEY - THIS IS ABOUT STEWARDSHIP AND I THOUGHT THAT WAS MONEY

One way to measure growth:

Establish a 'growth' habit - a measurable increase in time volunteering, learning, prayer or giving... (time study)

Another way to measure growth:

Increase knowledge, understanding and familiarity. Studies on poverty, conversation with immigrant, attendance at meetings, go to a SMF Pub Talk, lead a small group on peace and unity, or parenting, mentor a youth or new member, ....

Yet another way:

Establish an 'accountability partner'. Some trusted person who can question, prod, reflect, share on your faith and life. Confidential.

# OK here are the clichés

- ▶ Increase your percentage
- ▶ Give till it hurts
- ▶ There's joy in giving
- ▶ The electrical bill is going up
- ▶ Can't have two masters
- ▶ \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ \_\_\_\_\_
  
- ▶ Those are so much easier to say and measure, but aren't even 10% of what Jesus calls us to as stewards.