

Spiritual Disciplines

Excerpts from *The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard

"Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" --1 Tim 4:7

FASTING

"In fasting, we abstain in some significant way from food and possibly from drink as well. This discipline teaches us a lot about ourselves very quickly. It will certainly prove humiliating to us, as it reveals to us how much our peace depends upon the pleasures of eating. It may also bring to mind how we are using food pleasure to assuage the discomforts caused in our bodies by faithless and unwise living and attitudes-lack of self-worth, meaningless work, purposeless existence, or lack of exercise. If nothing else, though, it will certainly demonstrate how powerful and clever our body is in getting its own way against our strongest resolves.

"...fasting is one of the more important ways of practicing that self-denial required of everyone who would follow Christ (Matthew 16:24). In fasting, we learn how to suffer happily as we feast on God. And it is a good lesson, because in our lives we will suffer, no matter what else happens to us...Fasting teaches temperance or self-control and therefore teaches moderation and restraint with regard to all our fundamental drives. Since food has the pervasive place it does in our lives, the effects of fasting will be diffused throughout our personality." --Dallas Willard

Verses:

Mark 2:18-20-will fast
Psalm 35:13-humbled soul with fasting
1 Peter 5:5,6-grace to the humble
Isaiah 58:5,6-loosen the bonds of wickedness
Ezra 8:21-seek from God
Esther 4:16-fast for me
Matthew 17:20,21-prayer and fasting
Matthew 6:16-18-fast in secret, reward

SOLITUDE

"Solitude frees us, actually. This above all explains its primacy and priority among the disciplines. The normal course of day-to-day human interactions locks 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 ingrained behaviors that hinder our integration into God's order...In solitude we find the psychic distance, the perspective from which we can see, in the light of eternity, the created things that trap, worry, and oppress us."

Verses:

Mark 1:35-lonely place
Mark 6:31-lonely place

STUDY

"In the spiritual discipline of study we engage ourselves, above all, with the written and spoken Word of God. Here is the chief positive counterpart of solitude. As solitude is the primary discipline of abstinence for the early part of our spiritual life, so study is the primary discipline of engagement....Here is David Watson's comment: 'As I spent time chewing over the endless assurances and promises to be found in the Bible, so my faith in the living God grew stronger and held me safe in his hands....If we feed our souls regularly on God's word, several times each day, we should become robust spiritually just as we feed on ordinary food several times each day, and become robust physically. Nothing is more important than hearing and obeying the word of God.'"

Verses:

1 Peter 2:2-the pure milk of the word
2 Timothy 3:16, 17-inspired by God
Colossians 3:16-richly dwell within you
James 1:21-25-doers of the word

PRAYER

"Prayer is conversing, communicating with God. When we pray we talk to God, aloud or within our thoughts. In the nature of the case, prayer almost always involves other disciplines and spiritual activities if it is to go well, especially study, meditation, and worship, and often solitude and fasting as well....Praying with frequency gives us the readiness to pray again as needed from moment to moment. The more we pray, the more we think to pray, and as we see the results of prayer-the responses of our Father to our requests-our confidence in God's power spills over into other areas of our life."

Verses:

Psalms 116:1,2-call upon Him
Matthew 7:7-11-good gifts
James 1:5-wisdom
Jer. 33:3-great things
Phil. 4:6,7-in everything by prayer
Eph. 3:20-beyond all we ask or think
1 John 5:14,15-according to His will
John 16:24-ask in His name
1 John 3:22-obedience
John 15:7-ask for whatever you wish

SERVICE

"In service we engage our goods and strength in the active promotion of the good of others and the causes of God in our world....I will often be able to serve another simply as an act of love and righteousness, without regard to how it may enhance my abilities to follow Christ....But I may also serve another to train myself away from arrogance, possessiveness, envy, resentment, or covetousness. In that case, my service is undertaken as a discipline for the spiritual life....

"Paradoxically perhaps, service is the high road to freedom from bondage to other people....To live as a servant while fulfilling socially important roles is one of the greatest challenges any disciple ever faces....Service to others in the spirit of Jesus allows us the freedom of a humility that carries no burdens of 'appearance.' It lets us be what we are-simply a particularly lively piece of clay who, as servant of God, happens to be here now with the

ability to do this good and needful thing for that other bit of clay there.... We must, then, strive to meet all persons who cross our path with openness to service for them-not, of course, in any anxious, obsequious, overly solicitous manner, but with ease and confidence born of a vision of our lives together in the hands of God."

Verses:

Mark 10:45-came to serve

Galatians 5:13-serve one another

2 Corinthians 4:5-bondservants

WORSHIP

"In worship we engage ourselves with, dwell upon, and express the greatness, beauty, and goodness of God through thought and the use of words, rituals, and symbols. We do this alone as well as in union with God's people. To worship is to see God as worthy, to ascribe great worth to him...If in worship we are met by God himself, our thoughts and words turn to perception and experience of God, who is then really present to us in some degree of his greatness, beauty, and goodness....Practically speaking, the Christian's worship is most profitable when it is centered upon Jesus Christ and goes through him to God."

Verses:

Hebrews 13:15, 16-offer sacrifice of praise

Revelation 4:11-worthy to receive glory

Revelation 5:11-13-worthy is the Lamb