

Spiritual Disciplines - 2

By Pastor Alan Utting



'Discipline is the price we pay for freedom.'

Dallas Willard

Some people find *spiritual disciplines* easier than others often depending on personality. Organised people may prefer them; relaxed types may struggle more. Which type are you?

I first met Peter after a Sunday evening church service when he accepted an invitation to come to our place for supper. During our conversation, Peter shared that he had recently been hospitalised following a motorbike accident. It was clear from his difficulty in speaking that he had suffered some brain injury. It also became evident that he wasn't yet a believer, so I shared the gospel with him, and that night he responded to Christ. Over the years, I have led some very bright and gifted people to the Lord, though sadly a few have drifted in their faith. I wondered how Peter would fare given such a challenging start.

However, Peter made steady progress in his Christian walk as he embraced the spiritual disciplines. In time, he grew into a church leader and a close friend.

Following on from Spiritual Disciples - Part 1 here are three more disciplines to consider.

1. Confession

Although sin may bring pleasure for a season (Hebrews 11:25), it is like a cancer that destroys from within. Confession is an essential part of repentance, and repentance means turning around and walking in a different direction. If sin is not dealt with, it leads to ruin.

Many Christian workers struggle with holy living, often excusing their actions or blaming others. However, God offers forgiveness and renewal to those who repent and seek His help. Things to remember:

- a. We need to name the core of our sin. The Holy Spirit will show us that if we are willing to see its ugliness. Real repentance empowers us to change. The Spirit brings clear conviction, but Satan brings general condemnation.
- b. Claim 1 John 1:9. See yourself washed clean by Jesus and remember the Lord is 'full of compassion and mercy' (James 5:11).
- c. Where appropriate we need to confess our sin to others. (James 5:16). John Wesley established groups which met twice weekly for prayer, study and confession of sin.
- d. When confronting others with their wrongdoing, do so with gentleness and extend grace generously as we also are sinners (James 6:1).

2. Wilderness wanderings

These wanderings are intended for our spiritual refinement. We cannot live without the wilderness. Jesus Himself was led there after His baptism and often returned to it for times of solitude with the Father.

God uses the wilderness to shape our lives, allowing suffering and discomfort to refine

us so that we learn to depend entirely on Him—for His success and His glory, not our own.

Passing through the refiner's fire is another way to describe these seasons. God turns up the heat, and as the gold melts, the impurities rise and are removed. When the refining is complete, the refiner can see his own reflection in the molten gold as he gazes down from above. In the same way, God begins to see His image reflected in us as we grow more like Him.

Though we may not enjoy the heat God provides grace to sustain us, even when the refining process lasts for years.

These refining experiences can include things like lack of fruitfulness after years of ministry, lack of finances, some physical infirmities, personality challenges, disunity, lack of team members, spiritual attacks, loneliness, fear, powerlessness, lack of direction, criticism, false accusations, betrayal, lack of recognition for your endeavours and all of this calls us to die to self. When I was going through the refiner's fire, Psalm 66:10-12 was a great encouragement to me.

Nik Ripken, in *The Insanity of God*, notes that in China, individuals would not typically be considered for appointment as pastors unless they had experienced imprisonment due to their faith. Undergoing such suffering was regarded as an essential part of their theological training.

David found new ways to experience God and wrote many of his Psalms of praise even in difficult times.

Jude 1:24 'To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.'

3. Enjoying God

A friend told us how his young daughter pulled up a chair and wanted to chat, simply enjoying his company without any specific topic. He was touched by the moment. Similarly, our heavenly Father delights when we spend time with Him just to be together.

Before the creation of the world He created us for 'His will and pleasure' (Ephesians 1:4,5). This was even before we could do anything of use. Likewise, when Jesus was baptised before His ministry began, a voice resounded from heaven, 'this is my Son, whom I love' (Matthew 3:17).

Are you enjoying God or are you trying to earn acceptance by working hard and trying to live a holy life? By faith, accept what Jesus has done through the finished work of the cross. He personally loves you. Amazing! Spiritual disciplines are easier to maintain when we love Jesus.

Resources:

Nik Ripken, *The Insanity of God*

Bob Sorge, *The Fire of Delayed answers*