

THE MEANS OF GRACE

Studies in Some Key Spiritual Disciplines

Using These Studies

- You can use these studies as an individual. Each week has a major theme section with some reflection questions, followed by short sections for daily reflection and prayer during the week.
- Groups can use the studies too. The major theme section can be the input and discussion material for the Small Group meeting. The daily reflections can be follow-up for members at home or used in the group for more discussion.

Small Group Leaders

- Each member should get a copy of the study booklet beforehand.
- Plan about 1 hour to 1.5 hours for the meeting.
- Open in prayer, then read the notes on the topic for the session.
- Use the Reflection/Discussion questions for that topic (usually three questions).
- If time allows and there is interest, you can use some of the daily reflections for further discussion.
- Have a time of prayer with particular focus on the Spiritual Discipline under discussion

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THE MEANS OF GRACE

SOME SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

1. Discipleship Means Disciplines

2 Timothy 3:14-17

One of the ways God uses to change us into his likeness is through the Spiritual Disciplines we pursue – Spiritual Habits that strengthen our grasp on God’s truth and its application to our lives. Here are some of the disciplines of discipleship.

Humans are creatures of habit. We prefer routines and develop many habitual ways of organizing our lives – some of them good, others not always helpful. These habits are like the disciplines by which we maintain our lives. We eat well and regularly, we wash ourselves, go for walks if we can, pursue hobbies and interests to fill our time, go to work if we must.

The Christian life too is largely made up of habits. Our Christian character is shaped and reinforced by the repetition of behaviours that express and strengthen our tendencies.

The Church has learned to value certain *Spiritual disciplines* or habits which develop the shape of a godly lifestyle. Anglicans have called them ‘the means of grace. These spiritual disciplines have proven beneficial to many people in the training for godliness. St. Paul reminded Timothy that he needed to *train himself to be godly* (1 Tim. 4:7).

The Spiritual disciplines are activities that train our spiritual muscles of faith and obedience. A life that is trained in these habits will grow strong in a godly outlook and reactions. Public worship services for praise and prayer is the most prominent spiritual discipline. Participating in the Lord’s Supper (Holy Communion) together is a central discipline by which our faith is strengthened.

Christian growth requires us to work at these disciplines. Robert Webber observed: “The disciplines continually impress upon us who we are . . . They are the means by which we become more aware of the union we already have with God and the means by which the Holy Spirit defends our experience of union with God.”ⁱ

We know that unless we develop good exercise and health habits, it is likely that we will not flourish. If we want a close experience of God, we must invest in spiritual growth of mind, body, soul and spirit. A lazy attitude that does not want to put effort into studying the Bible, praying or serving others, prevents spiritual growth.

Spiritual disciplines do not guarantee spiritual growth, but it is still true that a disciplined, trained Christian is better able to meet the challenges of false teaching or wrong values (1 Tim. 4:1-5). The disciplined believer will also be a good example to others. It is such disciples that keep the church and its mission going and moving ahead (1 Tim. 4:6-16).

Spiritual disciplines are many and varied. *Fasting* is an ancient and biblical discipline. *Solitude* – withdrawing from interaction with others – is a powerful way of

attending to God. *Engaging with the Bible* is a foundational discipline that has many sub-disciplines or varied ways of practicing it. Some of the spiritual disciplines are pursued by individuals and others are done with others as corporate activities.

Just as a healthy body needs good food and exercise, so the Christian needs healthy spiritual nourishment and opportunities to express faith in obedience. The purpose of the Spiritual disciplines is to equip us for action (Eph. 4:7-16).

We can categorize the Spiritual Disciplines into two kinds: *Disciplines of Intake* and *Disciplines of Output*.

Spiritual Disciplines of Intake

Three main intake spiritual disciplines will be familiar to you. These are channels for taking in what we need to nourish our healthy spiritual life.

- *Bible reading and study* is foundational to the Christian life.
- *Prayer* is the supernatural breathing of the Christian's life.
- *Worship and fellowship* (gathering for praise and encouragement with fellow believers) are vital to our Christian spiritual life.

Spiritual Disciplines of Output

The purpose of being fed is to supply energy for living, for action. Some output disciplines of the Christian life are:

- *Serving Others and God*. We use our gifts and God-given abilities to help others.
- *Witnessing to our Lord* is another output of the spiritual life. We cannot avoid being a witness. Let us seek to be part of God's mission and do it sensitively and well as we have opportunity.
- *Giving* financial and practical help can be a spiritual discipline. Generosity towards others and support of the church's mission disciplines the hold that money has on our hearts and expresses concern for others.

These studies will cover five main spiritual disciplines: Scripture, Prayer, Fellowship/Worship, Service, and Witness. The first three are mainly intake habits and the other two are output disciplines.

The basic Biblical principle of passing on what we receive from God applies directly to the practice of the Spiritual Disciplines (Acts 20:35; Mt. 25:29). To gain the most blessing from God, pass on others the blessing you have received from God.

For Reflection/Discussion

1. What are your current spiritual disciplines or habits? Are they working well for you, or have they become simply 'habitual'?
2. What is the balance in your spiritual life between 'intake' versus 'output'? What happens when you are imbalanced in intake versus output?

3. What spiritual discipline do you want to learn about, or get better at practicing?

Daily Reflections on Discipleship Disciplines

1. Spiritual Disciplines for the Transformation of Life

- Read Romans 12:1-3

The Christian disciple is called by God into a way of life in which there is a deeper, ongoing transformation – of body, mind, heart, and will. We know that anything we do as whole, embodied persons will require training. Our minds need to be filled with truth and challenged to think things through. Our heart must be filled with right desires and our bodies must follow good choices (will).

Just as we build up habits that involve our whole embodied selves (eating, sleeping, exercising, working), so our Christian life will require us to develop good spiritual habits. The Spiritual Disciplines are some time-tested ways of training ourselves as Christians.

What spiritual disciplines do you use to train your mind, your body, your will?

2. Spiritual Disciplines Counter the Ingrained Bad Habits of Sins

- Read Romans 7:13-25

When we set out to obey Christ's yoke, we find that the habits of mind, desire and actions may need to change, but it can be difficult due to the enslaving power of bad habits. It is hard enough to change our diets, let alone other behaviours.

Spiritual disciplines are the ways of cultivating new habits of living. We read the Scriptures daily to counter the false ideas of the world; we pray and open ourselves up to the power of God; we meditate on the kindness of God. Life is expressed in what we do daily, weekly, monthly, constantly.

How are you building good habits to replace or displace the old bad ones?

3. Spiritual Disciplines and the Fullness of the Spirit

- Read Galatians 5:15-21

It would be a mistake to think that the practice of good spiritual habits will change us. It is the power of God the Spirit filling us and directing our lives that is the energy for real, deep change. *Be filled with the Spirit*, says St Paul, *and you will not fulfill the desires of the fallen nature* (Eph. 5:18).

We must not turn the spiritual disciplines into a law or a legalism. It is God the Spirit who changes us. By turning to God in spiritual disciplines, we are putting ourselves in the place and position for a surrender to the help of God. We are to sow to the Spirit, not to the flesh, says St Paul (Gal. 6:8). Richard Foster aptly comments: "A farmer is helpless to grow grain; all he can do is provide the right conditions for the growing of grain. He cultivates the ground, he plants the seed, he waters the plants, and then the natural forces of the earth take over and up

comes the grain . . . The Disciplines are God's way of getting us into the ground; they put us where he can work within us and transform us. By themselves, the Spiritual Disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where something can be done."ⁱⁱ

When have your spiritual disciplines failed you? What did you learn?

4. Spiritual Disciplines and the Balanced Christian Life

- Read Luke 10:25-42

Spiritual writers have noted for centuries that disciples can tend towards two opposite poles in their spirituality: they can major on contemplation of God (the inner life of prayer) or push outwards into action: the Contemplative way versus the Active way,

Martha and Mary sum up the two tendencies in the Gospel tradition (Luke 10:38-42) and provide a balance to the story of failure in the parable of the man by the wayside (Luke 10:30ff). The inner life of prayer must show itself in the outward life of obedience. It is no surprise therefore that the Spiritual Disciplines themselves fall along this spectrum of inward and outward.

Do you have a balance of Inward vs Outward Spiritual Disciplines?

5. Spiritual Disciplines and Grace

- Read Philippians 3:1-16

Some Christians are uncomfortable with all this talk of Spiritual Disciplines. They reason that salvation is of grace, and that we must beware of relying on our own efforts. Are we not simply, freely forgiven? Why should we work so hard to grow in holiness, if we are set free from Sin by grace?

Grace is free, but it is not cheap, and it calls us to holiness. God calls us to live the new life. Spiritual Disciplines are ways we pursue the new life in daily practice. As Richard Foster observes, we must walk along a ridge with the two dangerous chasms on either side: the useless striving for righteousness in our own strength on one side, and on the other, the peril of disregard for God's way of obedience.

How can we keep the balance of obedience and reliance on God's grace?

6. The Rainbow of Spiritual Disciplines

- Read 2 Peter 1:3-11

We can only consider a few of the Spiritual Disciplines in these studies. There are a large range of practices that have proven useful to many believers down the centuries. Solitude – deliberate drawing away from company to spend time in communion with God and listening prayer – is powerful. Fasting in its many forms is a Biblical practice. A regular, intentional focus on some spiritual or created reality, consecrated to God, can be a helpful spiritual discipline.

What is your favourite Spiritual practice? How does it help you?

2. Feeding on God's Word

2 Timothy 3:14-17

The healthy Christian life depends upon a diet of the milk and meat of the Bible, God's written Word.

Let us consider the use of the Bible, God's written revelation, in the development of our spiritual lives. To live in a Spiritual way, we must think Spiritually.ⁱⁱⁱ And there is no way to gain a Spiritual mind than to study the work of God the Spirit - the inspired Scriptures, the Bible. We must be people of the Word of God, who feed on it as milk and meat for our lives.

How can we grow in our understanding of the Bible?

1. We can *listen* to the Word of God read and expounded.

The public reading of Scripture and its systematic teaching is a vital part of Church life (1 Tim. 4:13-14). Find a church where the teaching ministry is strong and faithful to the whole counsel of God in Scripture. God has given Bible teachers to the church as one of his gifts. We should receive their ministry. Many gifted teachers have also put their expositions of the Bible into book form for our benefit. You will get more out of the reading of Scripture in public worship if you have studied it beforehand or reflect on it again later.

2. We can *read* the Bible for ourselves.

Make personal reading of the Bible a daily discipline. It is good to be systematic: try to read through the Bible as a whole. Reading the Bible keeps the story and the general teaching of the Word of God flowing through our minds. There are a number of Bible Reading Plans that give daily portions for study.

The Biblical books were written originally to be heard by an audience, to be audibly consumed. You can now listen to an audio recording of the Bible.

3. We can *study* the Bible.

Reading the Bible gives us breadth, but studying the Bible gives us depth. To study the Bible is to stop and take a closer look at the meaning and application of the text. Bible study requires concentration and effort. You should probably use a notebook and pen, as well as study aids like a concordance, a Bible dictionary, and a commentary. You can find high quality Bible study books and commentaries in Christian bookshops or libraries. A good Study Bible has explanatory notes alongside or underneath the text.

Don't undervalue the worth of your own unaided study of the Bible text. You can outline the flow of the ideas; do a study of a paragraph; outline a Bible book; follow a Bible theme; or do a study of a Bible character.

4. We can *meditate* on God's Word.

"The reason why some come away so cold from reading the Word", wrote Thomas Watson, "is because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation." Meditation means reflectively thinking with a view to application (see Ps.1:2-3). We spend time thinking deeply about the truths and spiritual realities revealed in the

Bible. We fill our minds with Scriptural truth and turn the truths around in our mind until we see them from different angles. As the Anglican prayer says, we should 'read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest' the Scriptures.

Biblical meditation is the art of asking questions of the Bible text.

- We ask *observation questions* (What does it say? What is the main idea? What are the key words?).
- We ask *interpretation questions* (Why does the writer say this? How does this relate to other passages?)
- We also ask *application questions* (Is there a command for me to obey here? What difference does this make to my life or to the Church?).

One way to think deeply on the Scripture is to memorize verses or sections. You then always have the Word of God ready for use (Prov. 22:17-19). God's Word can be your guide with instant access (Ps. 119:24).

5. We can *turn the Bible into prayer and praise*.

There is so much in Scripture to fuel our prayer and worship of God. The Anglican Collect Prayers are a good example of how the Bible can be turned into prayer. In your daily times with the Lord, take the truth of the Bible passage you have been reading, and use it in your praise of God or your prayer requests.

For Reflection/Discussion

1. What method of engaging with the Bible are you currently using?
2. What do you most need to know about the Bible, so that you can use it more fruitfully?
3. What use of the Bible do you need to explore next in your discipleship: systematic reading; Bible study – going deeper; meditation; application to your life; or memorization of texts?

Daily Reflections on The Spiritual Discipline of Engaging with the Bible

1. Grasping the Bible

- Read Psalm 1

Use your hand as an illustration of five different ways to use the Bible:

- (1) *Hear* the Bible read, preached, discussed: let the little finger represent the smallest effect.
- (2) *Read* the Bible: read it as a message to you through the people of God before you: let the ring finger represent God's promises to you (1 Tim. 4:13).
- (3) *Study* the Bible: let the middle finger, the tallest one, represent reaching up to higher knowledge of the meaning of Scripture. (2 Tim. 2:15).
- (4) *Memorize* the Bible: let the index finger, the pointing finger, represent your ability to commit verses to memory and have them at your finger-tip.

- (5) *Meditate* on the Word of God (Ps. 1:2-3): thinking longer and harder about the meaning, let the thumb represent your ability to firmly grasp the truths of the Bible.

What passages or verses of the Bible do you know by heart?

2. Interpreting the Bible Correctly

- Read Luke 24:13-35

Anglicans are to read the Bible forwards as the story of the people of God, but to interpret it backwards in the light of the fulfillment in Jesus Christ. (See Article of Religion VII). The Old Testament is to be read in its fulfillment in Jesus. The New Testament interprets the meaning of the Old Testament. We don't read Leviticus and think we have to follow the dietary ritual regulations of the Israelites. We can learn the meaning of these laws, but they are not a prescription for us.

Other simple guiding rules of interpretation follow. The Epistles (Letters) of the apostles guide the meaning of the gospel narratives because the unfolding of the meaning of the cross and resurrection of Jesus came later under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Another sensible rule is to use the systematic and clear passages to make the teaching plain and leave the incidental and mysterious passages to one side. Stay on the well-lit main road of the Bible. Teaching passages, not symbolic ones, are best for gaining light.

What are some silly or wrong ways to interpret the Bible? Can you recognize them?

3. Try Spiritual Reading of the Bible Text

- Read Habakkuk 2:1-4

This method goes under various names, often called *Lectio Divina*. It is reading the Bible with a whole life and heart attention. It has five steps:

- (1) *Read or listen* to the passage. What words or thoughts grab your attention?
- (2) *Meditate* on the word or phrase that gets your attention. What does it say to you right now?
- (3) *Contemplate* this reflection from the Bible. Sit with it, gazing at it or letting it stay in your mind.
- (4) *Pray* over this thought from the Bible, let it form a prayer from you.
- (5) *Ask* God to show you what action this text evokes from you today. This is the missional application of the passage.

Which of these five steps do you tend to omit or neglect?

4. Which Bible Translation Should I Use?

- Read Nehemiah 8:1-12

The simple answer is one that makes the meaning clear to you in such a way as to accurately convey the meaning. It is wise to use a mainstream version, such as the NRSV, the NIV or the NKJV.

There are two basic types of Bible translations. The first type tends to translate word for word, phrase by phrase producing a more literal version (e.g. NRSV). These keep closer to the original but can be harder to understand. The other kind translates thought for thought, and are usually easier to follow, although it may involve more interpretation of the text (e.g. REB, NLT). Most English versions are a blend of the two kinds. There are also looser versions, essentially paraphrases.

It may be good to use a more traditional version and keep a freer version at hand to check for meaning.

Do you have a Bible version that you prefer? Do you use multiple versions?

5. Hook, Book, Look, Took

- Read Luke 19:1-10

This simple four step method starts with the issue or question that *hooks* your interest.

Hook: What does the passage address? The text will usually give you the hook itself, whether it is forgiveness of sins, or sacrifice or righteousness, or the problem of suffering.

Book: Then look at what the Bible says about the issue: this is the *Book* part, the content or truth that is put before us.

Look: We then *look* deeper into this truth and reflect on its meaning and mystery. If it is forgiveness, we ask questions about the nature of what forgiveness means.

Took: Finally, we take something away; this is the *Took* step. An action to do, a prayer to pray, a sin to confess.

Which of these four steps do you find the most helpful?

6. Head, Heart, Hands

- Read James 1:22-25

This is a method for the person who likes to draw. Get a pen or pencil, or three different colours, and be prepared to draw on your study Bible.

Read a passage of Scripture and ask yourself:

- What truth lights up my mind? Draw a light bulb around or near the idea in the passage.
- What speaks to my *heart*? Draw a heart around the verse or words that move you.
- What does the Scripture move me to *do*? Draw a hand next to the action you want to take.

Do you agree that action should be part of our Bible study?

3. A Life of Prayer

Ephesians 6:18-20

Prayer is a foundational spiritual discipline, by which we develop our relationship with God and become involved with the Lord in seeing his will done on earth.

The Christian life is a life of prayer: *Pray continually* (1 Thess. 5:17). This means that prayer should pervade our whole life as a constant atmosphere and a state of mind. We go through life looking to the Lord for help, waiting on the Lord for wisdom and guidance, thanking the Lord for his blessings, and praising the Lord for his majesty and love. Prayer, in all its many forms, colours our life.

We will need to cultivate the habit and skill of prayer, which is why it is regarded as a Spiritual Discipline. We must be disciplined in our praying. We should seek God's help in developing a life of prayer.

Prayer takes many forms: *Pray in the Spirit on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers and requests* (Eph. 6:18). Let's consider some of the ways of praying.

1. Prayer should be *part of our routines*.

Life is full of rhythms: daily, monthly, seasonal, and annual. We need to build prayer into the rhythms of our lives. Most have found morning and evening natural times for daily prayers (Ps. 92:1-2; 145:2). "Prayer must be the key of the morning and the lock of the night", taught William Gurnall. Plan to have a daily Quiet Time with the Lord, shutting out other concerns to focus on being with God, listening and talking.

Longer times for prayer can be scheduled at other times – vigils for prayer or prayer retreats. There is sometimes need for special or extraordinary prayer, perhaps with fasting, when there is a danger or difficulty at hand; when we are seeking guidance (Acts 10:5-6; Dan. 9:2); when we are under affliction or temptation (Eph. 6:12; Col. 4:12-13); or in a time of great expectation (Acts 1:4,14).

2. Prayer can be *spontaneous, the expression of our heart's desires and our needs* (Neh. 2:4).

There is the "lifting up of the soul to God upon a sudden, emergent occasion, with some short but lively expression of our desires to him".^{iv} Whether vocalized or not, these short spontaneous prayers show that we haven't really stopped praying - the conversation with the Lord can resume quickly. We can make the whole day an experience of communion with Christ.

3. Prayer can be *structured, ordered speaking to God*.

There is nothing unspiritual about set, prepared prayers – the Lord taught us to use such a form (Mt. 6:9) and used them himself (the Psalms). You can find the thoughtful prayers composed by others to be excellent vehicles for expressing yourself to the Lord. Anglicans and other churches use a rich tradition of deep prayers. Use the liturgical praying of public worship as a guide and help to your praying.

4. Prayer can be *contemplative adoration* (Ps. 27:4; Ps. 5:1).

Praise is part of prayer, perhaps the highest form of prayer. In praising God, we leave our own needs behind and celebrate God for his own sake. Jesus taught us to begin our prayers with praise (Mt. 6:9). The best teachers of praise are the Psalmists of the Old Testament. Psalm 147 shows how praising God puts our own problems into perspective (147:1). Praise of God is a tonic for anxiety and fear (Phil. 4:4-7). The Bible gives material for our adoration of God. You can sing to express your praise of God (Ps. 57:7-9).

5. Prayer can be *work for the Kingdom of God*, as we intercede for the needs of the gospel and other people.

Through our prayers the kingdom of God advances on earth, and the powers of evil are frustrated (Eph. 6:12; Rev. 8:3-5). There can be a “wrestling” in prayer, as we seek to see God’s power released on earth to deal with difficult and evil problems (Dan. 10:2; 2 Cor. 10:1-4). Prayer is not a substitute for spiritual work – it is work itself! This kind of intercession may require much of us (in fasting and perseverance in prayer (Mk. 9:28; Heb. 5:7).

6. Prayer can be *listening to God*, when the Holy Spirit inspires and guides our praying.

We pray to God: *Show me your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths* ((Ps. 25:4-5). We all face times when we do not know what to pray for in a particular matter. We are stumped. We ask God to show us what to do and then wait on him for an answer. It is while God’s people are praying that they are most likely to receive guidance from him (Acts 9:10-16). Our communion with God provides the best context for communication from God. We are listening for God to speak. “The Christian prayed, ‘speak louder, Lord!’ The Lord replied, ‘come closer, my child!’”

Prayer helps us see what God is doing. P.T. Forsyth wrote: “Here deep answers deep. God becomes the living truth of our most memorable and shaping experiences . . . He who speaks to us also hears in us, because He opens our inward ear (Rom. 8:15). Prayer is the great organ of Christian knowledge and growth. We learn to read the strategy of Providence in the affairs of the world. To pray to the Doer must help us to understand what is done. Prayer, as our greatest work, breeds in us the flair for the greatest work of God, the instinct of His Kingdom and the sense of His track in Time.”^v

7. Prayer can be *grateful thanksgiving for specific and general blessings*.

Thanksgiving is expressed gratitude to God for blessings he has given us (1 Thess. 5:18; Ps. 92:1-2). Thanksgiving should accompany our praying (Eph. 6:18). We are to pray *with* thanksgiving.

We should look for God’s answers to our prayers. We should seek to exercise our faith in God as the one who hears and answers our prayers. We will track this and confirm it by taking note of answers to prayers, and then rendering thanks to God for these blessings.

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. What is your usual way to pray on your own?
2. What is your biggest challenge about prayer?
3. Have you kept a list of special answers to your prayers?

Daily Reflections on The Discipline of Prayer

1. Pray According to God's Will

- Read Matthew 6:5-15

The first principle of prayer is that it is about joining our priorities with God's will. It is not a way by which we get God to do what we want, but rather a way that God uses to bring us into the project of achieving God's will on earth. We can ask God freely for our needs, but they should be placed within the higher priority of God's will. The Lord's Prayer clearly outlines the pattern and priority of our praying: God's will first, then our needs after that.

How much does God's Kingdom purposes figure in your daily prayers?

2. Pray in the Name of Jesus

- Read John 15:5-16

We usually close our prayers with the phrase 'in the name of Jesus our Lord' or similar. What does this mean? It is the basis and authority for our requests. We ask the Lord to exercise his authority and rule on earth as the exalted and victorious King (Heb. 2:5-9). Our prayers come to the throne of grace through the intercession of Jesus the Priest, with his righteousness and surrender to God's will. As we pray in Jesus's name too, we are coming to God in union with our Lord in all that He does for us and is doing through us (Jn. 15:1-16).

When you think of Jesus's praying in heaven for you, does this help you to pray?

3. Pray in the Spirit

- Read Romans 8:26-27

The Bible teaches that prayer is a ministry of the Holy Spirit within us. The Spirit is the helper and intercessor, who inspires our prayers. When we do not know what to pray for, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us – in us! He gives us directions about our praying and we find that we are praying with a burden from God beyond our own comprehension. We feel the heart of God as we pray (Rom. 8:26-27; Ps. 77:1-20; 2 Cor. 12:7-10). "Every prayer that is prompted by the Spirit is a pledge of its own fulfilment" said James Buchanan.^{vi}

How do you seek the inspiration of the Spirit for your prayers?

4. Pray Expectantly

- Read Colossian 1:3-14

We pray but may miss how God answers our prayers. In complex problems, the Lord's answers may be multiple and form a developing set of answers over time. The answer may come in a different way, or after a longer time. Why not keep a journal or notebook of your prayer requests? Keeping note of what happens enables you to recognize the Lord's work. These answers to prayers can become 'Ebenezers' (memorial stones) of encouragement.^{vii}

Do you keep a list of prayer-answers from God?

5. Pray with All Kinds of Prayers

- Read Ephesians 6:18

Prayer has many forms, so there is no reason why our praying should be boring or tedious. There is a type of prayer for all occasions. Here are six kinds of prayer (there are others):

- (1) *Wow!* (Praise). We celebrate the greatness of God and call on God to magnify and glorify his Name.
- (2) *Thanks!* (Thanksgiving). We note what God has done in specific matters and give him thanks.
- (3) *Sorry!* (Confession). When we fail, we need to acknowledge it to God, and seek his ever-flowing forgiveness.
- (4) *Please!* (Requests). The most basic kind of prayer is supplication – asking God for something. We can bring our needs and requests to God, and we can intercede for the needs of others.
- (5) *Woe!* (Lament). This is the expression of our sadness or devastation when tragedy or disaster strikes. It is completely proper to weep and wail before God when really bad things happen. It may be due to sin and evil, or simply the mysterious problem of chaos and futility.
- (6) *What?* (Guidance). We turn to prayer when we are stumped by a problem and need light from God on our path.

Do you use a range of prayer-types? What kind of prayer is missing from your prayer-life?

6. Pray Conversationally

- Read 2 Thessalonians 1:11

The essence of prayer is conversation with God. It does not always involve us bringing a shopping list of requests. Sometimes we may simply want to be in God's presence consciously and to be open, listening to God's voice. We can have a chat with the Lord about what is on our minds. The Lord expects us to speak to him directly and privately (Matt. 6:5-6). We can verbalize our conversation with God together as we pray with others in a group.

Do you make time for a 'catch-up chat' with the Lord Jesus?

4. Fellowship in the Body of Christ

1 Corinthians 12

In our sharing and mutual love, Christians become channels of the Lord's gifts and graces to one another.

One of the chief means of grace (or channels for God to bless us) is the experience of Christian fellowship – belonging and interacting as a member of the Body of Christ, the Church. If we neglect this Spiritual Discipline of Christian Fellowship, we will cut ourselves off from blessing, and impede the blessing of others.

Why is the Christian Church an essential part of your Christian growth?

1. Because you need the encouragement and challenge of other Christians to keep you on track and growing for Jesus (Heb. 10:24, 25; 1 Cor. 14:1-39).

The mutual interaction of Christian brothers and sisters is an opportunity to help each other, to sharpen each other (Prov. 27:17). Other believers have Spiritual gifts that you don't have, and they can exercise these for your benefit. A word of prophecy from God to you as an individual may come through a fellow church member (1 Cor. 14:3). God does not only speak to us on our own in our Quiet Times; he speaks to us through teachers, prophets and the wisdom of Christian brothers and sisters.

Christian fellowship also provides "love with skin on", the love of Christ expressed in real people who can get alongside us, listen to us, lift us up, challenge us and help us in practical ways.

2. Because there is a special promise of the Lord Jesus to be present and active in his Body, the Church (Mt. 18:20; 1 Cor. 12:27-31).

We know that there is great power released from God in answer to the prayers of the people of God praying together. I do not know how this works, but it is too well attested to be discounted. If you belong to a congregation, this is a wonderful blessing to receive - the concerted prayer help of a Christian fellowship. "True fellowship takes place when Christians come together to minister to one another in the power of the Holy Spirit."^{viii}

You are part of the Body of Christ. If you cut yourself off from the Body, you lose the benefit of membership with other parts of the Body (1 Cor. 12:21). Ted Schroder notes: "Paul allows no vague representation of the church as the sum of all Christians. The body analogy expresses Paul's belief that Christ is available on earth in tangible form. These various gifts come in human packages. To be 'in Christ' we cannot stand off distant from this body . . . A body part detached from the other parts is clearly useless, and soon dead. It cannot experience Christ, the head of the body."^{ix}

3. Because the Church needs you and your ministry, just as much as you need the Church members and their ministry (1 Cor. 12:21-26).

It is worth noting that you cannot obey God properly on your own; most of God's commands require you to interact with other people, inside the church and outside. For example, how can you love the brothers and sisters, if you do not have anything to do with them (1 Jn. 4:12)? How can you build up other believers, if you don't involve

yourself with them (1 Thess. 5:11)? It is interesting to do a Bible study of the many “one another” commands of the New Testament.

Your gifts are needed in the Body of Christ. In fact, we need the harmonious and loving interaction of all the members of a church for the Body to operate effectively. Like all the Spiritual disciplines, involvement in Christian fellowship will require disciplined effort from us. We will have to make the effort to welcome the visitor, to listen to the needs of others, to offer friendship and care to the hurting, to encourage and instruct the confused. We will have to give each other the gift of our time and the affection of our hearts.

Christian fellowship will reach its potential when we prayerfully engage ourselves in the strengthening and building up of each other. We need to train ourselves in the godly relational approach that builds healthy Christian fellowship.

In Romans 12:3-13 St. Paul gives some guidelines about what this ‘fellowship love’ is like. Good relationships in the Body of Christ will be marked by sincere love; discernment of the good from what is evil; mutual affection in Christ; honouring of each other; spiritual fervour from God; a capacity to persevere in commitment to God and others and a spirit of generosity that seeks to meet needs with practical help.

The discipline of Christian fellowship will drive us to prayer and make us realize that only with God’s help can we be effective members of a healthy Christian church. We need the renewing work of God in our lives constantly. Do those Christians who drop out of “church” end up getting closer to Jesus Christ? Probably not. In the fellowship of the Body of Christ we speak the truth with love to one another. That is the winning combination – the truth of God, with love (Eph. 4:15).

For Reflection/Discussion

1. How are you currently engaged with fellow Christians? What is the spiritual depth of your friendships?
2. Think of occasions when fellow Christians have been a channel of God’s blessing to you. What difference did that make?
3. Do you expect that God will use you regularly to bless and help a fellow Christian or a person in need?

Pray daily the famous prayer of St Francis of Assisi: ‘Lord, make me an instrument of your peace (blessing)’.

Daily Reflections on the Spiritual Discipline of Christian Fellowship

1. Brotherly and Sisterly Love

- Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10

The New Testament word for our way of relating to fellow Christians is *philadelphia* - brotherly/sisterly love. Looking through the apostolic letters we can find the characteristics of this love in action:

- (1) *Encouraging One Another* (1 Thess. 5:11) – by our example, our words, and our actions.
- (2) *Praying for One Another* (Eph. 6:18) – a key way to deliver help from God to each other (Phil. 1:19).
- (3) *Serving One Another* (2 Tim. 1:16-18) – practical help in many forms will put love into action.
- (4) *Forgiving One Another* (Eph. 4:31-5:2) – inevitably, close interactions will mean we encounter the dark side of each other. As siblings in Christ, we must learn the art of forbearance and the skill of forgiveness. It will be the passing on of grace to others.
- (5) *Shepherding One Another* (Gal. 6:2) – we are called to mutually admonish each other to the best we can be for God and others. On occasions, true love for the brother or sister may call for a gentle challenge for them to change their behaviour. This ministry calls for spiritual maturity and love, says St Paul (Gal. 6:2). We must not be quick to give admonition, but we should all try to be open to it! When delivered in love, it may rescue lives from a downward path.

The church is a messy family but it is still God's family. When we come together, what do we do to encourage and help each other?

2. The Secret of Heavenly Harmony on Earth

- Read Phil. 4:2-3.

Church members don't always get on easily together. We disagree on things, we have different goals, we misunderstand one another, and sometimes we fall out on good relationship. What will bear the weight of our differences and disagreements? What will unite us when some things try to pull us apart?

St. Paul provides us with a powerful way of practicing heavenly harmony in church life. Our Christian fellowship is grounded on our *experience of God in Christ* (2:1) and our *efforts for unity in Christ* (2:2-13).

Four aspects of our experience in Christ:

1. Encouragement in Christ

What really sustains our church life is not our rituals, our buildings, our organisations, our activities, even our creeds. These won't stand the strain of trouble. This is our personal experience of being filled with God's grace in Christ, so our cup overflows. The first duty of a Christian is to be happy in Jesus.

2. Consolation from God's love

The word consolation means to speak to someone in a friendly way, to be gentle and caring.

3. Fellowship with the Spirit

Our Christian life is a fellowship with God's Spirit. We have this bond with God in the Spirit. This is the basis for our church fellowship – we share the

fellowship of the Spirit, the inner union with God by the Spirit. If we have a church that is based on a natural or fleshly fellowship, we may get on well enough, or sometimes not, but our way of relating to one another will be direct, person to person, without going through the Spirit, or being a union of our spirit's in God's Spirit.

4. *Affection and Sympathy*

The fourth pillar of heavenly harmony is the heart that flows from our experience of God in Christ: there will be a heart of affection and expression of sympathy and mercy.

We will have to put effort into this unity. St Paul gives three exhortations to follow, since heavenly harmony will not come without dedicated effort by all of us, together and individually.

- *Be Like-minded. 2:2.* We don't have to think the same way about everything, but we do need to share a common allegiance to the truth of the Gospel and the practice of the Christian life.
- *Be Lowly-minded. 2:3,4.* Humility is caring as much about others as about yourself - your own ambitions and desires.
- *Be Christ-minded. 2:5-11.* The way we can build a heavenly fellowship is by following the outlook and behaviour of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2:5-11

How can you build encouragement in Christ, consolation of God's love, fellowship in the Spirit into your experience of church life? What happens if you neglect these pillars of fellowship?

3. Let Us Catch the Little Foxes!

Read Song of Songs 2:15

In this Old Testament love poem, the beloved calls on her lover to deal to help her overcome the problems that work against their relationship, the 'little foxes' that get in to eat the fruit of the vineyard. Serious sins damage a church, but so do small sins, if they are left unchecked.

Think about those attitudes and actions that damage Christian fellowship. These include fault-finding, selfish ambition, busy-bodying and even plain old laziness.

What am I doing - or not doing - that is a hindrance to the unity and love of our church?

4. The Discipline of Disappointment in Fellow Christians

Read Psalm 133:1

The wisdom of the Christian ages has discerned that difficult experiences can become fruitful spiritual disciplines. Disappointments with the church and with fellow believers are often cited as justifications for departing and for nurturing grievances for a long time. Behind our disappointments with fellow believers may lurk an unrealistic view of Christian fellowship. There are no perfect believers and no churches that are without deficiencies.

The irony is this: that the very reason why so many walk away from involvement in a church – the difficulty of people and the problems of church life – is one of the important Spiritual disciplines that God wants us to use to grow in our knowledge of God. Just as in a human family, you don't get to choose your relatives, so in the church family of Jesus Christ, we do not get to choose our brothers and sisters. We have to learn to get along in a godly way with all kinds of fallible Christians – including you and me!

The apostle Paul recognized this challenging discipline of Christian fellowship and gave good advice on how to live together in loving fellowship, especially when differences arise (Rom. 14). Even the problems of Christian fellowship are a blessing, because they force us to leave our comfort zone and cope with the real demands of loving other people. The great exhortation about Christian love in 1 Corinthians 13, remember, was written to a divided and troubled congregation. If you and I don't hang in there together when fellowship is strained, how will we learn to love each other? We will grab our parachute and bail out before the real work of love begins. This is not the way to maturity.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer identified these foolish wish-dreams about fellowship in his classic *Life Together*. Christian fellowship is a spiritual reality, not a psychological, fleshly union. If we build our harmony on never clashing or disappointing one another, we will fall in a heap of misery. But when we face our disappointment, we can break through to spiritual realism. "Thus, the very hour of disillusionment with my brother becomes incomparably salutary, because it so thoroughly teaches me that neither of us ever live by our own words and deeds, but only by that one Word and Deed which really binds us together – the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. When the morning mists of dreams vanish, then dawns the bright day of Christian fellowship." ×

Are you still wandering in the mist of idealistic dreams about Christian fellowship? Go back and offer your disappointments to the Lord Jesus and find his answer.

5. Spiritual Friendship

- Read Proverbs 27:17

Friendship is built around shared interests and experiences. Much of our fellowship is based on general sharing of activities and church concerns, which is fine. But there is more to Christian fellowship than merely belonging to a local church. Spiritual friendship has been described as a relationship that encourages and challenges us to love God more deeply.

Spiritual friends share a common faith and love for the Lord. They are committed to one another's growth in faith and obedience. They will talk with each other about their spiritual lives and interests.

Are you this sort of friend to another? Do you have this kind of friend? It may not be possible to be close spiritual friends with every sister or brother, but it is good to have one or two with whom you can journey in God.

With whom do you talk about your spiritual life?

5. Service in Christ's Name

Galatians 6:1-10

Every Christian is gifted and called to serve others in Jesus' name.

Church fellowship is a discipline of both intake and output, but with Christian service we have a habit of output. Here is a Spiritual discipline that brings blessings to those who give help to others. Jesus himself said: *It is more blessed to give than to receive* (Acts 20:35).

The Biblical word for service is *diakonia*, from which we get our word 'deacon'. We are called to serve, and we follow the Servant King, Jesus.

The Spiritual discipline of service expresses our identity as God's children in Christ by grace; they are not an attempt to achieve a status or worth in God's eyes or in the sight of others, by our own efforts. To practice the disciplines of giving and service as a route to personal significance or merit before God is to ruin the whole process and harm our souls.

Let us reflect on the Christian's calling to serve others in Jesus' name.

1. Every Christian is expected to serve others and the Lord.

The Scripture is clear on this imperative of service: *as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers* (Gal. 6:10). Service is part of the self-identity of the follower of Christ. We live to serve God and in him to serve other people. We have the highest model of service to follow - the Son of Man who came, not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk. 10:45). We have a God who is the Servant King. "In service we engage our goods and strength in the active promotion of the good of others and the cause of God in our world."^{xi}

The Great Commandment of Jesus (Mt. 22:34-40) links love for the Lord our God with love for our neighbour - love for the other people around us, particularly those in need of help. This great commandment (to love God and our neighbour) is binding on all Christians. We know from the Gospel that Jesus defined the neighbour as including anyone in the world, even our enemies (Lk. 10:25-37). Some of our serving will be done outside the fellowship of the church, and some will be in the Body of Christ.

2. Service in God's name means love in action, not just internal feelings of benevolence (Mt. 22:34-40).

It is quite easy to have warm, positive feelings towards other people; it is another matter altogether to get up and help them. Jesus thinks of loving neighbours as a task expressed in practical care (Luke 10:25-27). To love God is to serve him and to love our neighbours as ourselves will involve serving them too. Service is active helpfulness. Sometimes it will mean bearing the burdens of others (Gal. 6:1,2,6), which means sharing their burdens through compassionate understanding and sensitive help.

3. We need to develop the mind-set of a servant – the servant’s heart, as seen in our Lord Jesus, the Servant King (Phil. 2:1-11).

Our serving must not become the stage for our self-assertion or self-promotion. Be prepared for the healthy spiritual discipline of humble, unobserved service. Be glad-hearted in your serving, as to the Lord and not grudging or resentful.

Serving challenges two of the deadliest of our sins: sloth (laziness) and pride. It inhibits the tendency to turn in upon ourselves in self-service to the neglect of others. If you can be happy serving without accolades, or if you can keep serving whether you feel like it or not, then you have developed the healthy spiritual habit of service.

4. We will serve best when we use our gifts and work cooperatively with others who are serving.

Some kinds of service are open to most able-bodied people; there is no spiritual gift of pushing a broom or doing the washing-up! All of us should be prepared to serve in simple and everyday ways, as need arises and we are able to help. But the best service we will give will be the ministry of our giftedness. The Bible teaches that all of us have gifts from God for serving his purposes, the world and his people (1 Cor. 12:4-6, 17-31).

We can define a Spiritual gift as a special ability that God gives, according to his grace, to each member of the Body of Christ to be used for the development of the church and the extension of the Kingdom of God.

There are different gifts for service. One helpful way of categorizing these gifts of God is a threefold division into “Creation” gifts, “Redemption” gifts and “Spiritual Manifestation” gifts.

- *Creation* gifts are those abilities that God has put into us by our natural heritage and development (Rom. 12:3-13). We think of them as natural, but God is the source of them. We can use these talents in our service of other people. Administrative ability or musical gifts are examples.
- *Redemption* gifts are those ministries that relate to the proclamation of the Christian good news. They are ways of helping people to grow in their knowledge of the Lord (Eph. 4:11-12). Evangelism and teaching the Bible are examples of these ministries.
- *Spiritual Manifestation* gifts are some special ways that God the Holy Spirit manifests his special help in our midst. Examples include prophecy and gifts of healings, and others found in 1 Corinthians 12-14.

All these gifts are from God and are valuable for the building up of the church of God and meeting the needs of people. Your service of God and people will be effective if you do it according to your particular gift. How do you discover your spiritual gifts? Other people can tell you – ask them! Be prepared for their feedback, because sometimes we have an incorrect self-assessment of our own gifts (Rom. 12:3). A good test is the fruit of our serving. What happens when we serve? If others are blessed and happy, then we probably have it right. There is a harvest of good fruit

(Gal. 6:7-10). If we seem to be irritating other people, we may be missing the mark in our serving.

Another benefit of serving in accordance with our spiritual gifts is that we do not usually get discouraged or burnt-out. When we are in the place that God wants us to be, we ourselves are blessed too. A final point needs to be made.

5. Serving others in Jesus' name requires us to live in the power of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:13-26).

The energy source for our serving must not come only from within ourselves. Our service should be inspired and energized by God. We are *his* servants first, and then servants of others *in him* (Rom. 12:1-2). Do you have a particular area of service in the church or in world in Jesus' name?

For Reflection/Discussion

1. What is the relative balance between spiritual input and spiritual output in your Christian life? Are you a Mary or a Martha? (Luke 10: 38-42).
2. Have you experienced 'burnout' (exhaustion) in your Christian service? Why did this happen? What did you learn for future serving?

Daily Reflections on The Discipline of Serving

1. The Secret of Christian Service

- Read Philippians 2:1-11

The Discipline of Serving God and others does not start with ourselves as servants but with ourselves as recipients of the service of God. God our Lord serves us in Christ, who took the form of a Servant and humbled himself for us, all the way to the cross.

Whenever we get involve in giving service to others and to God's kingdom, we must remember that we are first the ones who are served, who are blessed by God. St Paul urges us to remember who we are and to have the right attitude. We are to humble ourselves and serve as we have been served.

Think about the way that God serves you.

2. Following the Servant

- Read Mark 10:35-45

We all know how power-trips and egos can damage organizations, ministries and people. The desire to get our own way and to dominate others comes very easily to us. We think, as some of the apostles did, of position and authority. Jesus challenged this mind-set.

A servant outlook will look for ways to help, and ask: 'what can I do to help you in this work?'

The willingness to do what needs to be done as directed by others is a sure sign of a servant heart.

3. Faithful in Little, Entrusted with Much

- Read Luke 16:10

Service can be tested. Will we do our allotted task faithfully, even if it is a small and simple thing. When we prove reliable, faithful, we may be given larger responsibilities.

Do you want the Lord to give you bigger responsibilities? Here is a clue: fulfil the simpler task that lies at hand, perhaps unfinished.

Is there a task that God has given you that you have not yet completed?

4. Service Burnout

- Read 1 Kings 19:1-18

Serving takes energy and discouragement can set in. Kingdom service also involves spiritual warfare, which brings higher level attack on us. It is easy to lose focus and to flag in zeal.

Have you been overcommitted and lost your zeal for serving? What is the best way to handle spiritual burnout?

If you are involved in supervising or recruiting others for a service role in Christian work, how can you lessen the possibility of burnout for them?

5. Serving in Your Strengths

- Read Romans 12:3-8

The Body of Christ grows as the members minister (serve) with the gifts that Christ gives them. Each of us has gifts or abilities from God – by nature (creation), by the manifestation of the Spirit and by the gift of Christ the Lord. We will serve God better when we know our gifts and develop them for God's service, as the church needs them. Many areas of service are open to most believers, but some ministries need to be done by people who have the right blend of gifts.

Do you know what your God-given abilities are? Are you using them in a cooperative way with other members?

How did you discover your spiritual gifts? If you need help, why not ask others who know you well?

6. Mentoring Others to Serve

- Read 2 Timothy 2:1-13

The spiritual discipline of service brings with it the attitude of a servant, who wants to see others blessed and the kingdom of God extended. The servant does not hold jealously onto the prerogatives of the role but is keen to see others joining in, and ready to hand it on in due course.

Who are you mentoring in your area of service?

6. Handing on the Good News of Jesus

Matthew 28:18-20

All church members are called by the Lord to share the good news of his love and salvation with the lost world.

Our Lord Jesus Christ left his church this “great commission”: *go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you* (Mt. 28:19-20). This commission is for every follower of Jesus Christ. How can each church member be a faithful witness of Jesus Christ and his salvation?

Witnessing to Jesus as Saviour and Lord has been regarded as a vital Spiritual discipline for members of his Church. Yet this task often fills us with concern and worry. We don't see ourselves as gifted in this area, and we may want to leave it to others. But there is a simple and appealing way to be a witness for Jesus Christ – a way that is open to everyone who believes in Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Here is a five-fold way of sharing the good news of Jesus with other people. It recognises that the people we meet will differ in their interest in Christianity and in their responsiveness towards God's truth. It provides a way that all Christians, including those who do not have the gift of “evangelism”, can be effective in the process of communicating the gospel of Jesus.

Let the human hand provide an illustration of these *five ways of sharing* the Good News of Christ with other people.

1. Pray

Let the thumb represent this first, foundational step in the process of communicating the gospel – to pray. The thumb can touch all the fingers and is needed for the hand to grip things. Prayer is involved in all the aspects of witnessing and is needed for effectiveness.

We can all pray for people who don't yet know the heavenly Father through the Son. We can ask the Lord to remove the veil or impediments that may be preventing them from understanding the gospel. We can ask the Lord to open their hearts and to bring someone to them with the good news of salvation in Christ with clarity and power (Col. 4:3-4). Remember that the early Church waited and prayed for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit before their mission was launched with great effectiveness (Acts 1:4-8). Prayer is particularly important for people who are distant from the message of the Gospel or resistant to it. We may not be able to speak about Christ to them because they do not want to listen, but we can pray for the Lord to dissolve their negativity and open up new spiritual possibilities for them. We pray for the hard-to-reach people, who do not come to us. We reach out to them in our prayers, and God can act to touch them.

2. Serve

Let the little finger represent our lost friends, or ‘neighbours’ who need help, especially spiritual help.

Jesus commanded us to love our neighbours (Mk. 12:31). We are to do good to all people as we have opportunity and in response to the needs of people we meet or hear about (Gal. 6:9-10). This “Great Commandment” can be the doorway to the “Great Commission”.

Loving people and witnessing to them are not in competition or mutually exclusive. Just as the Lord Jesus healed and helped people in need, so we need to be aware of how we can serve people who are outside of Christ. Everyone needs help at some point in their lives. You may be on the spot to be a good neighbour to this friend, acquaintance or even stranger. We can serve them in simple way, like just listening, a powerful way to help. Practical help and service is an act of love that can melt resistance to the Christian faith. People may be more ready to listen to our message about Jesus when they have seen the love and care of the messengers of Jesus.

3. Relate

Let the ring finger represent the relationship we can have with those outside the faith.

The best way for the Christian good news to travel is over the bridge of friendship. People often join the church and come to faith by the invitation of Christians and through contacts or relationships with them. When we have a friendship with people, there is a basis for trust and mutual influence. The difference that Christ makes in a person’s life can be best seen in a real example. We can be living examples of the fruit of the Good News.

We can share social occasions with our acquaintances and friends outside the church. We can invite them to church-sponsored social events or activities which may be of interest to them. Through genuine relating, our non-Christian friend may gain an interest in the Christian faith. Those who would be resistant or indifferent to *the message* may come to value *the messenger*.

4. Respond

Let the middle finger represent the need to respond to the unbeliever who is reaching out for answers. The middle finger is the longest and reaches highest.

Some people show an interest in knowing more about God. They may come to us with a question. People may at one time be quite apathetic about God, but some development in their life, often a problem, causes them to look at the matter again. Here is an opportunity to remove difficulties to proper understanding of the Good News. If you are able to give an answer to their questions, that is great.

You can also connect the inquirer with people or materials that may answer the questions. Some of the church’s teaching programs can help here. You can lend the person some Christian literature.

5. Introduce

Since we use the index finger for pointing, let the index finger represent the opportunity to point someone to Jesus the Saviour and Lord.

Every Christian will have opportunities, from time to time, to explain the Good News of Jesus Christ to a listener. The opening to explain the gospel may come up

suddenly and catch you off guard. Be ready to put into simple words in a brief statement, what God has done in Christ for lost people, and what God calls us to do about it (1 Pet. 3:15).

One helpful way of introducing the Christian message to an interested non-believer is to share your own personal story of your faith in Christ. Your inquirer will be interested in your own personal journey. It is a great way to explain the Christian gospel.

For Reflection/Discussion

1. Are you praying for lost people?
2. If you were asked to briefly explain the Christian faith, what would you say?
3. How are you conveying the love of Christ to people you meet?

Daily Reflections on The Discipline of Sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ

1. Open Doors

- 1 Corinthians 16:9

God can create opportunities for the good news to move ahead. The Biblical term for this is an 'open door' (2 Cor. 2:3). A friend, a family member, or a work mate will become open and receptive to the truth of God. We need to be aware that this does happen and be ready to respond positively. We can also pray for God to open doors that are shut to the good news currently (Col. 4:3).

What relational and spiritual 'doors' are you praying that God will open?

2. Prayer for the Kingdom

- Read Matthew 6:9-13

The Lord's Prayer shows us the priorities of our praying. The kingdom of God and its advance should be first. As the church prays, the Holy Spirit is supplied to empower our witness (Phil. 1:18). Too often our personal and church prayers are preoccupied with ourselves and not focused on God's mission.

Do you have evangelistic enterprise and challenges on your personal prayer list?

3. The Good News Crosses the Bridge of Friendship

- Read Luke 7:31-50

Genuine friendship builds mutual trust, and this is good basis for a discussion of deeper matters of life. Our friend may disagree with us, but they will respect us and give us a hearing.

How many people outside the sphere of faith and the Church are in your circle of friendship?

4. Your Story

- Read 1 Timothy 1:12-17

People are interested in the experiences and stories of other people. One powerful way of communicating your faith is to describe your own personal story of what it means

to you. This can involve an account of how you came to believe in Jesus Christ, or another anecdote of what God has done for you. The New Testament tells the story of St Paul's conversion at least three times, and he himself describes the change in his life (2 Tim. 1:13,16).

Are you able to share your own personal story of faith in God?

5. God's Story

- Read Ephesians 2:1-10

There will be occasions when we may be asked what we believe, and we should be ready to answer (1 Peter 3:15). The Christian good news is a message that has a simple outline but many different angles and ways of explaining it. The Bible itself give us many examples of gospel-explanations. Find a simple way of explaining the good news of salvation in a way that makes sense to you.

Think of the needs that people have, which are addressed by the Christian faith, and develop your explanation as an answer to that issue.

6. Questions

- Read Acts 17:16-21, 32-33

You may not know the best answer to a friend's questions about God, but you should always listen and see if you can find an answer for them. Behind the many specific questions that come up, you will find that there are a small number of key issues that keep getting raised, in different ways. Be prepared to listen and to give an answer. Don't forget the value of asking a few questions of your own, to get your friend thinking.

Discipleship Disciplines: Concluding Comments

These studies have only covered a small number of the transformative practices called Spiritual Disciplines. We have not addressed the well-established discipline of public worship with fellow believers.

The Christian spiritual tradition has a rich tool kit of Spiritual Disciplines. One book covers sixty-two spiritual practices under the categories of Worship, Opening Myself to God, Relinquish the False Self, Share My Life with Others, Hear God's Word, Incarnate the Love of Christ, and Pray.^{xii}

I encourage you to explore some of these powerful practices, such as fasting, meditation, silence, solitude, stewardship and many others. There are guides and material available to help you.

May the Lord bless you in the journey of disciplined discipleship!

Ralph G. Bowles,

February 2021

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- ⁱ Robert Webber, "How the Disciplines Nourish Spirituality", AncientFuture Worship.com, 2/14/05.
- ⁱⁱ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, p 7.
- ⁱⁱⁱ I use the capitalized S to indicate reference to the work of the Holy Spirit.
- ^{iv} William Gurnall, *The Christian In Complete Armour*, 363.
- ^v P.T. Forsyth, *The Soul of Prayer*, (Paternoster, 1916, 1998), 47.
- ^{vi} James Buchanan, *The Office and Work of the Holy Spirit*, 275-276.
- ^{vii} See 1 Samuel 7:12
- ^{viii} John MacArthur, *Keys to Spiritual Growth*, (Revell, 1991), 171.
- ^{ix} Rev. Ted Schroder, *The Church – Why Bother?* Virtueonline.com
- ^x D. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, (SCM 1954), p. 17.
- ^{xi} Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, (Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), 188.
- ^{xii} Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, (IVP, 2005).