

Keeping in Step with the Spirit: Spiritual Disciplines as Kingdom Living

Beverly Heights Presbyterian Church | Kyle David Bennett, Ph.D.

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CLASS OUTLINE

- A. This is a course in practical theology. It will be biblically rooted, theologically informed, philosophically argued, but ultimately concerned with the intricacies of practicing our theology. In particular, *how* do we live out God's commandments and call to us as image-bearers and followers of Jesus?
- B. This is a class on spiritual disciplines. But I'm going to assume you know what spiritual disciplines are. If you don't, you will either catch on over time or we can comb through them after class. Our purpose will be to explore their meaning, significance, history and application. We will address questions such as:
- What do we mean by "spiritual?"
 - What is a discipline?
 - How have believers thought about them and practiced them in the past?
 - How can and should we practice them today?
- C. This is a class taught by me. Admittedly and confessedly, I see things from a particular angle and have particular interests. We will dig into some of the history of them and biblical principles that motivate them, as well as their theological significance and philosophical meaning, but I am mostly interested in how they remedy everyday practices and relate to kingdom living.
- D. This class has an objective. I want you to see spiritual disciplines in a different light. They have a vertical dimension to them—i.e., they connect us to God. But they also have a horizontal dimension—i.e, they are meant to shape our world in accordance with a renewed life in God's kingdom. I want you to see that and want to practice them.
- E. This class has a schedule.
- *Week One* will introduce the notion of "selfish spirituality" and how this tendency has crept into our contemporary understanding and practice of spiritual disciplines.
 - *Week Two* will look at past articulations and developments of spiritual disciplines with focus being placed on their "horizontal dimension" and they should be seen as a "package of practices."
 - *Week Three* will sketch the world of spiritual disciplines. I will note how each practice was crafted to "discipline daily deeds," such as thinking, eating, talking, and resting.
 - *Week Four* and *Five* will dig into particular practices and explore how they remedy bad habits and malformed ways of living and push us into Kingdom living.

- *Week Six* will make a foray into another project I am working on: disagreement. I will argue that disagreement is a good thing and that the church needs to practice it as a witness to renewed life in the Spirit.

F. This class has rules.

- No talk of mother-in-laws.
- I believe in the power of thinking and talking—that is to say, Christians discussing and discerning together. I believe this can be done with charity and in the (right) Spirit. If you have a question or a concern, please raise your hand and let's discuss and discern.

Week 1

“My thanksgiving is never in the form of self-sacrifice. It disgusts me in myself . . .
Perhaps the *feeling* I keep asking for, is something again selfish—something to help me
to feel that everything *with me* is alright”
~ Flannery O’Connor, *Prayer Journal*

Overview and Objectives of the Class (see above)

Assessing Our Cultural Situation: Practicing “Selfish Spirituality?”

- What prompts you?
- Isaiah 58:1-12

Damaged Disciplines: The Three I’s of Contemporary Christian Practice

- Individualism, intellectualism, and instrumentalism
- Galatians 5:16-26