

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

Beverly Heights Presbyterian Church | Dr. Kyle David Bennett

Fall 2022

WEEK TWO

To enter into a practice is to enter into a relationship not only with its contemporary practitioners, but also with those who have preceded us in the practice, particularly those whose achievements extended the reach of the practice to its present point.

~ Alasdair MacIntyre

Whoever practices [ποιῶν] righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.

~ 1 John 3:7

Where We Have Been: The topic of this class is spiritual disciplines: particularly, simplicity, meditation, fasting and feasting, solitude, silence, service, and sabbath-keeping. I noted that our practice of them can become self-centered and vertically-loaded, and this wasn't always the case. Individualism, intellectualism, and instrumentalism are particular manifestations of this.

Where We're Going from Here: We will revisit the nature and purpose of spiritual disciplines. What are they for? What is their endgame? We will explore how they have been understood and practiced in generations past. Eventually, we will consider what it might look like to practice them here and now in our community and neighborhoods.

Their Nature—A Working Definition: Spiritual disciplines are habits and practices that are cultivated in the (Christian) community for the purpose of regulating behavior, directing focus, and inculcating God's commands, work, and vision for creaturely life together in our imagination and orientation.

Key Terms

- *Spiritual*: related to the sanctifying and renewing life in the Spirit and eschatological kingdom. The "spiritual" is not a separable dimension of reality or human nature that is opposed to materiality or physical life (i.e. behavior). The Spirit (πνεῦμα) is opposed to the flesh (σάρξ), not the body (σῶμα) (Galatians 5:1-12). We are not Gnostics or Manicheans when it comes to materiality and the body.
- *Discipline*: the process by which we are sanctified and renewed for the Kingdom through the teaching and training of the Son and Spirit. Discipline of our lives (i.e., thoughts, attitudes, habits, behavior, and lifestyle) doesn't happen accidentally. Practicing righteousness (ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην) is not practicing sinning (ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν) (1 John 3:7-8) We are not Marcionites or Antinomians when it comes to formation.

Their Purpose—Looking to the Past

- John Cassian (360-435), *Institutes*
- John Climacus (c. 579-649), *Ladder of Divine Ascent*
- Augustine (354-430), *Rule*

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

Beverly Heights Presbyterian Church | Dr. Kyle David Bennett

Fall 2022

- Gregory the Great (c. 540–604), *passim*, but especially his homilies
- John Calvin (1509–64), *passim*, but notably *The Institutes*
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) *Life Together*

A Taxonomy of the Tendencies or Outlooks:

CONTEMPORARY VIEW	TRADITIONAL VIEW
Spiritual disciplines are for one’s own benefit	Spiritual disciplines benefit the community
Spiritual disciplines are meant to fix our spiritual problems (e.g., doubt, despair, etc.)	Spiritual disciplines are meant to correct bad behavior (eating, resting, working, etc.)
Spiritual disciplines are meant to inspire or edify the believer in his or her faith	Spiritual disciplines are meant to remedy the believer’s mental and bodily habits
Spiritual disciplines are a collection of individual practices from which one can choose	Spiritual disciplines are a way of life that one must discern and determine as a whole
Spiritual disciplines are practices that must be integrated into one’s already existing schedule and lifestyle	Spiritual disciplines are corrections to one’s already existing practices, schedule, and lifestyle
Spiritual disciplines need to be practiced only temporarily or seasonally	Spiritual disciplines need to be practiced regularly, and for the rest of one’s life
Spiritual disciplines are “special” practices that are distinct and separable from mundane activities	Spiritual disciplines are alternative ways of doing mundane activities in which we honor the Father, learn from the Son, and follow the Spirit in our execution of these mundane activities.
Spiritual disciplines are meant to be done by individual believers for their own “spiritual growth”	Spiritual disciplines are meant to be done by a community of individuals for the renewal of culture and society