

Pursuing God by Developing Spiritual Habits
Becoming Like Christ
February 3, 2008
1 Timothy 4:4-10

- I. There exists this gross misconception about the Christian life.
 - a. Being a Christian is about avoiding hell and gaining entrance into heaven.
 - i. Salvation is the way you make sure your ticket gets punched and you're in!
 - ii. Certainly that's part of the deal, but not all (not nearly all).
 - b. Even if we won't come right out and say it that way, we act as though it were true.
 - i. We work so hard to bring people to Christ (isn't that what we were commanded to do?).
 - ii. But we spend so little time teaching people what they should do once they've come.
 - iii. Most of our Christian lives (post-salvation) are spent right here.
 1. Taking it easy – content and apathetic.
 2. We're saved – we've got our ticket – it's all good.
 3. We've been saved for years, but we've stayed away from the meat of the word and settled for milk. – Fat Babies.
 - c. You can spend a lot of years in that chair (well ... not that chair).
 - i. Content with the shallows of faith that you have waded into.
 1. Content with the security of your salvation and content to wait for glory.
 2. And in doing so you forsake your purpose (something we'll talk more about in a minute).
 - ii. After a lot of years in that chair, God can birth a desire for something more.
 1. Something deeper.
 2. That's exactly what God did for me.
 - iii. After some time in that chair I couldn't ignore a voice inside of me that longed for more of God in my life – I wanted to go deeper.
 1. That desire led me to unlikely places.
 2. To the church fathers – Irenaeus, Tertullian, Polycarp, John Chrysostom, Justin Martyr.
 3. It led me to re-read a book I read in college – Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster.
 4. I found something other than spiritual lethargy and religious stagnation.
 - iv. God commonly uses three things to get our attention and move us into periods of growth.
 1. God uses people (Church fathers, Foster, Dallas Willard).
 2. God uses circumstances (my own feelings of discontent and a desire for something more).
 3. God uses spiritual habits – what are classically called spiritual disciplines.
- II. Before we talk about what they are and how to develop these spiritual habits – there are several things to understand at the outset. First, why do them?
 - a. Spiritual habits promote spiritual growth.
 - i. Richard Foster (Celebration of Discipline) said, “Superficiality is the curse of our age.”
 1. I think he's right.
 2. I think you'll agree that much of our lives are spent on the surface.
 - ii. God's call is into deeper waters and spiritual habits guide us far from shore.

1. Their purpose is Godliness – conforming to the image of Christ.
 2. Becoming like Christ – a phrase we use a lot.
 3. 1 Timothy 4:8 – “For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.
 4. Romans 8:29 – “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be *conformed to the image of his Son*, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.
- b. Spiritual habits pull the pieces of our lives together.
- i. We don’t live in a pluralistic world – we live in a fragmented world.
 - ii. We do not live in a world of competing outlooks; we live in a world that has fallen apart.
 - iii. One of the symptoms of that fragmented world is fragmented lives.
 1. The pieces don’t fit.
 2. We have all the shards and pieces but can’t make a picture that makes sense.
 3. Try as we might – the picture is always incomplete – pieces don’t fit, pieces are missing.
- c. But, that is not the way it ought to be.
- i. Somewhere along the line we lost our “ought to be” – any sense that we should aspire to something higher than our most basic selves.
 - ii. We lost any idea that God has a purpose and desire for our lives that we should strive for.
 - iii. In Colossians, Paul argues that if our destiny is hidden in Christ then our lives here and now should be ordered to that future.
 - iv. The best way for the church to justify the claims of the gospel is by living the way of life to which the gospel calls us.
 1. To become more like Christ.
 2. To present ourselves “fully mature in Christ.” – Colossians 1:28.
- III. If we order our lives this way (if we develop spiritual habits) what should we expect?
- a. We should expect a union of right belief and right practice.
- i. James said that “faith without deeds is dead.” – James 2:26.
 - ii. Right belief without right practice is dead.
 - iii. We need to find activities that pattern our lives after the way of discipleship.
 1. These activities we call spiritual disciplines or spiritual habits.
 2. They are ways that we give action (practice) to our faith.
 - a. Not just works
 - b. But practices.
 - iv. Like physical exercise, these spiritual exercises build us up.
 1. What we say without mouths and what we do with our lives.
 2. The more they match up – the more God shines through us.
 3. The more we become like Christ.
- b. So living faithfully in a fragmented world is the mission of the church.
- i. Love God, Love Others, Make Disciples.
 - ii. Godly action, Godly community – are the product of a decision to develop spiritual habits (spiritual disciplines).
 - iii. And the first disciple you should make is yourself.
- c. We should expect that we need instruction to go deeper.
- i. Proverbs 23:12 says, “Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge.”

- ii. We need instruction to go deeper.
 - 1. I've already mentioned some of the sources of my instruction.
 - a. Church fathers.
 - b. Richard Foster, Dallas Willard.
 - 2. Like so much of our spiritual walk – it is a process more than a achievement.
 - iii. Spiritual habits are not achieved in a moment or through mastering technique.
 - 1. This is about faithful living – not mere imitation.
 - 2. This is a lifelong process of “practicing church.” In the best sense.
 - 3. Another look at Colossians 1 shows the importance of this instruction.
 - a. We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me. – Colossians 1:28-29.
 - b. Teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. – Verse 28.
 - c. Strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me. – Verse 29.
- IV. As we start this journey (14 weeks or so) what do we need to be aware of?
 - a. We cannot turn discipline into law – that is the way of death. {Foster}
 - i. It is not about mastery of technique.
 - 1. Follow the plan – follow the rules – learn the right methods.
 - 2. And it will automatically happen.
 - ii. It is about the acquisition of character.
 - 1. Spiritual habits are not about the external things that we do.
 - 2. They are about the internal changes that the Holy Spirit begins in us.
 - b. Spiritual disciplines are not the end (they are not the goal).
 - i. They are the means – they open the door Foster says.
 - ii. They are a channel through which God's grace flows.
 - 1. John Wesley called them a means of grace.
 - 2. They are a means to an end – that end is knowing God through his grace.
 - iii. It's possible to practice spiritual habits without experiencing God in that moment.
 - 1. It's possible, but it's a failure.
 - 2. It's form without substance. It's external without the internal.
 - iv. Charles Spurgeon said, “I must take care above all that I cultivate communion with Christ, for though that can never be the basis of my peace, yet it will be the channel of it.”
 - c. Finally, Holiness is not optional for those who apprentice themselves to Jesus Christ.
 - i. 1 Peter 1:15-16 says, “But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”
 - ii. Holy is about becoming more like Christ.
 - iii. Becoming more like Christ is about developing spiritual habits.
- V. In closing, let me share these final thoughts.
 - a. Here is a quote from Dallas Willard – “My central claim is that we can become like Christ by doing one thing – by following him in the overall style of life he chose for himself. If we have faith in Christ, we must believe that he knew how to live. We can, through faith and grace, become like Christ by practicing the types of activities he engaged in, by arranging our whole lives around the activities he himself practiced in order to remain constantly at home in the fellowship of his father.” The Spirit of the Disciplines.
 - i. “By following him in the overall style of life he chose for himself.”

- ii. “Become like Christ by practicing the types of activities he engaged in, by arranging our whole lives around the activities he himself practiced.”
- b. There is a danger in neglecting the spiritual disciplines.
 - i. We will bear little fruit.
 - ii. While we have all been given gifts; gifts do not guarantee fruitfulness.
- c. There is freedom in practicing the disciplines.
 - i. In the disciplines we find liberation.
 - ii. Liberation from habits, sin, temptation and doubt.
- d. There is an invitation in the disciplines.
 - i. An invitation to joy. The joy that comes from becoming like Christ.
 - ii. Jesus was the most disciplined man who ever lived.
 - iii. He was also the most joyous, most “alive” and most passionate man who ever lived.
 - iv. There is joy in becoming like Christ.
 - v. And you become like Christ by developing spiritual habits.