

S e s s i o n 5 , E s s a y 3

THE GOSPEL OF NEW LIFE

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The call to abide in God's presence, which resounds throughout scripture, is an offer of new life with God and a new way of living in the world. This new life is transformative. We are different than we once were, changed and continually growing into the likeness of Christ.

A posture of faithful presence is predicated on the assumption that the incarnate Christ can and does shape the attitudes and behavior of His followers. As a result, Christ-likeness defines the Christian's public life. Only when we allow Jesus sway in our lives can we go into the world as He was in the world. We must be transformed personally before we can be socially revitalizing. Authentic personal faith is foundational for any effective expression of public faith.

These truths reframe the challenge of living faithfully as a minority in the pluralistic societies of the twenty-first century. Though our social context may seem daunting, there is an incredible blessing hidden within the challenges of our time. We live in a culture that can be wary of the Christian faith. It often rejects all truth claims and is suspicious of faith itself. This scrutiny can serve to push the church

to a new standard of integrity. Living faithfully will require the church and her members to embody the love, humility, and moral standard of Jesus Christ. Only then can we be the visible and tangible expression of Christ's kingdom.

New Life in Christ

In the gospel of John, Jesus Christ declared His purpose in coming into the world, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10b). New life permeates the biblical narrative:

- New life starts with *new birth* (John 3:3).
- It is *eternal* in scope (John 3:16, John 10: 27, 28).
- It is *found in Christ* (1John 5:11,12).
- It is *Christ's life in us* (Romans 8:9-19, I Corinthians 3:16, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 3:16-19).
- It is imparted through *identification with Christ in His death and resurrection* (Romans 6:1-6).
- We become *new creations* with *new ways of*

living (Ephesians 4:21-24, Colossians 3:4-21, Romans 6:1-6, 2 Corinthians 5:14-17, Galatians 5:19-26).

- New life is *a prerequisite of public faith* (John 17).

Life has four basic components: vitality, scope, orientation, and realm. New life has these same components.

The Vitality of New Life

According to the *American Heritage Dictionary* life is defined as “an animating force or source of vitality.”⁸ The vitality of new life is the eternal Jesus living in us through our physical bodies in the physical world. In Galatians 2:20, Paul writes, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Only the Holy Spirit can enable us to answer the call to abide in Christ. We live our new lives in a rhythm of *faith* and *surrender*, empowered by the Spirit of God (See Appendix 2: *Biblical References for the Holy Spirit* and Appendix 3: *The Holy Spirit Leaning Activity*).

Biblical *faith* is not a passive position in the Christian life. Faith *acts*. When we put our faith in Jesus, we act according to what we know to be true. We live according to the values and principles God reveals through His Word. Faith always leads to conviction and then surrender, which takes form in either obedience or repentance.

Surrender is the active, moment-by-moment, cognizant submission of one’s desires, thoughts, and actions to the person of Jesus Christ. In such moments we say, “Not my will but yours be done, right now, right here.” Through surrender, the Spirit is free to have His way; in dying to self, we live to Christ.

New life, however, is lived out in the context of a fallen world, and although the power of

sin has been broken, we are not fully liberated from our fallen self. As a result, sin frequently disrupts our lives and the reality we experience is much different from what God intends.

When sin interrupts our fellowship with God, the Spirit’s work in our lives convicts us of sin and leads us to confession and repentance. The Holy Spirit does the work of sanctification and causes us to grow into the likeness of Christ. (See Galatians 5:17-26.)

One of the most significant forms of surrender is the process of confession and repentance. Surrender involves both the confession of sin (not my will) and acquiescence to Christ (but Yours). In so doing, we allow God to have sway in our hearts, over our words, and in our actions. By faith, we surrender to Jesus and the Spirit begins to grow and produce fruit in our character. It is this constant ebb and flow of surrender and obedience that allows us to walk uninterrupted in the power of the Holy Spirit. (See 1 John 1: 5-10.)

The Scope of New Life

Life has scope. It is “the interval between birth and death.”⁸ Eternal life starts at spiritual birth and never ends. This means we are living the same life now that we will be living in the new creation. Though the exact degree of continuity is unknown, new life received in Christ today is extended eternally. Eternal life is not a place, it is a way of living.

This is significant because God calls His followers to live differently now in light of forever. But there is a problem: because of the Fall, we are no longer equipped to live the kind of life we were created for. We were made for a life that seems difficult if not impossible to live. Paul laments this tension in Romans 7:15: “For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.”

This affects not only our relationship with God but also the social outworking of our faith.

In *Five Smooth Stones*, Tom Nelson connects our public life to our personal faith: “Our seeming ineffectiveness in battling for our culture is directly related to our inability to conquer the battles raging in our own individual souls.”⁹

To grow in our ability to “conquer the raging battles,” we must enter into our relationship with Jesus in ways that expand our capacity to love Him and walk more faithfully with Him. Dallas Willard explains how we might do this: “The disciplines for the spiritual life, rightly understood, are time-tested activities consciously undertaken by us as new men or women to allow our spirit ever-increasing sway over our embodied selves. They help by assisting the ways of God’s Kingdom to take the place of the habits of sin embedded in our bodies.”¹⁰

Spiritual disciplines may be enacted in private or in public. Private disciplines are forms of personal piety that are undertaken apart from the rush of daily life such as prayer, fasting, solitude, and bible study. There are also disciplines that are more public, or are at least pursued in the midst of life’s pressing moments. These include the disciplines of thanksgiving, surrender, and imitation. See Appendix 3: [“PRACTICING SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES” on page 12.](#)

In 1 Timothy 6:11, Paul exhorts Timothy to actively pursue a reoriented life: “But flee from [immorality], you man of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.” Paul says we to do this by “fight[ing] the good fight of faith; tak[ing] hold of the eternal life to which you were called...” (1Tim. 6:12).

When we “take hold of eternal life,” life begins to be reorganized and reoriented. Our approach to things like ethics, morality, beauty, and justice become fixed in the patterns that God established in Creation. Our good conscience is restored within the broken world and we live today in light of eternity.

The Orientation of New Life

To live means “to conduct one’s existence [or life] according to a particular manner.”⁸ The code we live by is what gives our life its orientation. New life in Christ reorganizes and reorients the individual toward God, in love.

This is what St. Augustine referred to as ordering our loves, or loving what God loves, as He loves it. In *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, Robert Louis Wilken addresses St. Augustine’s view of living a virtuous life: “Jesus had said, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.’ For early Christians the moral life was the religious life, a life oriented to God in love. Virtue was about the ordering of one’s love, and the first and greatest love, the love that animates all other loves, is the love of God. Only in seeking God, in following God, in holding on to God is virtue possible.”¹¹

The apostle John frames God’s love in terms of creation and restoration: “For God so the world [or cosmos] that He gave his only Son” (John 3:16). Throughout the New Testament, we are told that, in Christ, God is making all things new (Acts 3: 19-21; Romans 8: 19-23; 2 Corinthians 5: 16-21; Ephesians 1:9,10; Colossians 1:19, 20; Revelation 21:5). This “all things” includes humanity’s relationship with God which then radiates out to the individual. From the individual, “all things” extends to external relationships until it ultimately includes all of creation. If a virtuous life is defined by love rather than by a moral code, then virtue requires a reorientation toward God, self (this may take the form of being less self-obsessed), others, and creation.

Reorientation is at first very personal; it involves an individual’s relationship with God and deep inner healing. But if we are to take Jesus seriously about “all things,” our reorientation must extend to external relationship (family, friends, race relationships, neighbors, etc.) and the created order (visible and invisible). Public faith is living out a reorientation to all things

that God is making new.

The Realm of New Life

Life is lived within the realm of time and place. And with new life comes a new realm—the kingdom of Christ, God’s beloved son: “For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13-14).

Dallas Willard explains kingdom living like this: “The kingdom is present in action and available with and through the person of Jesus. That is Jesus’ gospel...this kingdom is not something to be ‘accepted’ now and enjoyed later, but something to be entered now (Matthew. 5:20; 18:3; John 3:3,5). It is something that already has flesh-and-blood citizens (John 18:36; Philippians 3:20) who have been transformed into it (Colossians 1:13) and are fellow workers in it (Colossians 4:11).”¹²

Jesus speaks of the interface between the kingdom of God and the world as being “in” but “not of.” On one hand, Jesus tells the Pharisees that, “the kingdom of God is *in* your midst” (Luke 17:20-21). But He also states that, “My kingdom is *not of* this world [italics added]” (John 18:36-37). The kingdom of God is located *in* the physical universe and among its people, even among those who do not know the king. However, it is *not of the world*. It has a different authority base and different organizing principles. According to the Barnes’ Notes, when Jesus said that His kingdom was not of this world, He was saying “it is not of the same nature as earthly kingdoms. It was not originated for the same purpose, or conducted on the same plan.”¹³

The realm of our new life is the *present* and *available* kingdom of God, which is *in the world* today *but not of the world*. This interface allows the kingdom to be both eternal and yet very much present. Jesus was intentionally setting up a tension between *in* and *not of*. His followers, like His kingdom, are to live in the midst of

the world but with very different organizing principles. The church is to be present and engaged in the world rather than aloof from the people and institutions of societies. And yet we are to remain distinct from the organizing principles of the fallen world, living differently and influencing those systems when possible. John 17 says, “...they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.”

Failing to keep the tension of *in* but *not of*, either because of an *improper separation* from the world or an *over-identification* with the world system, makes it impossible for the Christian to live missionally.

Improper separation leads to disengagement and ultimately being neither in the world nor of it. This can stem from a variety of reasons including fear, pride, or apathy. A posture of faithful presence counters this kind of disengagement by embracing three truths:

1. God loves the world and is in the process of renewing “all things,” including both the immaterial structures and systems of creation and its people (Revelation 21:5).
2. In addition, Jesus’ incarnation demonstrates His willingness to engage the world as an insider (John 1).
3. Jesus sends His followers to do the same (John 17).

Over-identification with the world results in an improper integration that leads to living both in the world and of or by the world systems. Over-identification with the world often comes from either a drive to be relevant or a fear of rejection. A posture of faithful presence counters over-identification in four important ways:

1. Faithful presence is grounded in the kingdom story. The biblical narrative, rather than random verses, provides a framework

that allows the individual to look with the light of the gospel at every aspect of life.

2. A posture of faithful presence is modeled on God's faithfulness to His people and His call to abide in His presence. As we develop our love for God, it becomes more difficult to compromise what we know to be true for the sake of the approval of people.
3. A posture of faithful presence acknowledges both the local and universal church and compels followers of Jesus to live in community as His body. Community provides a safeguard against over-identification because it provides substantial relationships that normalize the moral and ethical code of the faith. This gives the body of Christ incredible freedom to explore the boundaries of what it means to be in the world without being of the world.
4. Faithful presence calls the Christian to serve others and the society in which she lives. Jesus' example of servant leadership refocuses His followers' attention on the needs of others rather than merely on their own personal interests (Philippians 2:3-8). Service relieves the pressure to imitate the world system by taking away the appeal of greed, competitiveness, and other aggressive behavior. This enables the disciple to live in the world without succumbing to the world because he is not on the world's agenda.

Our new life in Christ is to be lived out in the world. Through the body of Christ, the unredeemed creation can know Jesus and believe in Him (John 17:21). However, in order to be effective in our kingdom responsibilities, we must be willing and able to live in the world—immersed in its culture and engaging its people—without becoming entangled with the organizing principles of the world.

Conclusion

In Christ, we have new life and a new way of

living. God infuses our lives with His life. We are reoriented toward God in love and live within the kingdom of God that is *in* but not *of* the world.

The bright hope of the gospel is for now and forever. It is the promise of God to indwell His people and to give each one of us new life and a new kind of living, even now within this fallen and broken world. The public expression of this new life is one of faithful presence – faithfully abiding with God in the world.

The world system and the kingdom of God have starkly different agendas and these conflicting agendas are not all external; our own nature is at cross-purposes as we continually strive to walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:20-25; Romans 8:13). We are being sanctified in the midst of the conflict, yet our sanctification has a *now* and *not yet* aspect to it that can be baffling at times. In all this, we are becoming God's agents of restoration, able to do His work with joy and hope, offering new life and a new way of living to others who need to know Jesus. This is the posture of new life in Christ. And one happy day our hopes will be fully realized:

For behold, I create new heavens
and a new earth;
And the former things shall not
be remembered or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I create;

For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing,
And her people for gladness.
I will also rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in
My people;

And there will no longer be heard in her
The voice of weeping and the sound of crying.
Isaiah 65:17-19

NOTE: The following appendices are provided at the end of the Unit:

Appendix 1: *Biblical References for the Holy Spirit*

Appendix 2: *The Holy Spirit Learning Activity*

Appendix 3: *Practicing Spiritual Disciplines*

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8. *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 1st ed., s.v. "Life."
 9. Tom Nelson, *Five Smooth Stones* (Grand Island, NE: Cross Training Publishing, 2001), 53.
 10. Dallas Willard, *The Spirit Of The Disciplines* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 86.
 11. Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 289.
 12. Dallas Willard, *The Spirit Of The Disciplines*, 28.
 13. *Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database*, (Biblesoft, 1997).
 14. Dallas Willard, *The Spirit Of The Disciplines* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 86.

APPENDIX 1: BIBLICAL REFERENCES FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Gospel of New Life

The Spirit in the Trinity

- Jesus as distinct from the Spirit—Matthew 3:16
- The Spirit of the Father—Matthew 10:19, 20
- Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit—Matthew 3:11
- Jesus is led by the Spirit—Matthew 4:1
- Disciples are baptized in all persons of the Trinity, including the Spirit—Matthew 28:19
- The Spirit anointed Jesus' Ministry—Luke 4:18
- Trinitarian Worship—Luke 10:21
- Jesus and the Holy Spirit—John 7:39

The Role and Responsibilities of the Spirit

- The Spirit speaks through believers—Matthew 10:19, 20; Mark 13:11
- The Spirit seals believers in salvation—2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13
- The Spirit gives gifts—Hebrews 2:4; 1 Corinthians 12:1
- The Spirit reveals, guides, and teaches—Luke 2: 25 – 27; 1 Corinthians 2:10 -14; Acts 15:28; Luke 12:12; John 16:13
- The Spirit guides and sends out—Acts 13:4; Romans 7:6; Acts 16:7; Acts 20:22; Acts 8:29; Acts 13:2
- The Spirit bears witness to Jesus—John 15:26; 1 John 5:6; Acts 20:23; 1 Corinthians 2:4
- The Spirit empowers the believer in his/her sent-ness and Ministry—John 20:19-23; Acts 1:8; Acts 20:28
- The Spirit gives life and sanctifies—1 Corinthians 6:11; Galatians 5:5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Galatians 6:8; John 14:15; John 6:63
- The Spirit convicts of sin—Hebrews 9:14; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 John 3:24

The Spirit's Names

- The Spirit of the Lord—Luke 4:18
- The Spirit of your Father—Matthew 10:19, 20
- The Spirit of God—Matthew 3:16
- The helper—John 14:15; John 15:26
- The Spirit of truth—John 15:26
- The Spirit of holiness—Romans 1:4
- The Spirit of God's son—Galatians 4:6

The Spirit in Relationship to the Believer

- The Spirit is in/upon the believer—Luke 2: 25; Luke 4:18
- The Spirit dwells in/with the believer—John 14:15; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Timothy 1:14; 1 Corinthians 6:19, 17
- The believer is filled with the Spirit—Acts 4:8; Acts 4:31; Acts 13:9; Acts 13:52

How and Why The Spirit is Imparted

- Must be born of Spirit—John 3:5
- Received as a gift—Acts 2:38; Acts 8:15; Acts 10:47; John 3:34; Luke 11:13
- Can be resisted—Acts 7:51
- The Spirit as proof that we belong to God—1 John 4:13; Galatians 4:6
- The Spirit is received through faith—Galatians 3:14; Galatians 3:1-6
- The Spirit and Emotion/Inner-Well-Being
- Righteousness and peace and joy—Romans 14:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:6
- Hope—Romans 15:13
- Freedom—2 Corinthians 3:17
- Comfort—Acts 9:31

Commands Regarding the Spirit

- Take up the sword of the Spirit—Ephesians 6:17
- Pray at all times in the Spirit—Ephesians 6:18
- Be filled with the Spirit—Ephesians 5:18
- Hear what the Spirit says to the churches—Revelation 2:7

APPENDIX 2: THE HOLY SPIRIT LEARNING ACTIVITY

The Gospel of New Life

The following passages are printed in full below: Romans 8; Ephesians 2:18-22; Galatians 5:16; and Titus 3:1.

- Read the passages, highlighting the principles related to the Holy Spirit and the life of the believer. Organize your insights into teaching points and write a summary statement that might be used to teach a new believer about the Holy Spirit. Remember you are only looking at a few verses and your summary will not be a complete presentation of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave him up for us all, how will He not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died--more than that, who was raised--who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ephesians 2:18-22

For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Galatians 5:16-26

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Titus 3:1-8

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.

APPENDIX 3: PRACTICING SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

The Gospel of New Life

A posture of faithful presence is predicated on the assumption that the incarnate Christ can and does shape the attitudes and behavior of His followers. However, there is an internal battle raging inside our souls that can leave us mystified at our own behavior. We need to discover what we must do to win this battle and enter fully into the life that has been offered to us.

To grow in our ability to conquer those raging battles, we must enter into our relationship with Jesus in ways that expand our capacity to love Him and walk more faithfully with him. Dallas Willard explains how we might do this: “The disciplines for the spiritual life, rightly understood, are time-tested activities consciously undertaken by us as new men or women to allow our spirit ever-increasing sway over our embodied selves. They help by assisting the ways of God’s Kingdom to take the place of the habits of sin embedded in our bodies.”¹⁵

Though the traditional disciplines are “time-tested activities,” any activity undertaken with the purpose of expanding one’s capacity to walk with the Lord would be considered a discipline. Turning your phone off during dinner or refusing to get email on Sunday might be spiritual disciplines for some. These activities would certainly contribute to the practice of solitude and hospitality.

Spiritual disciplines tend to fall into one of two categories: private disciplines of withdrawal or public disciplines of engagement. Disciplines of withdrawal are forms of personal piety that are undertaken apart from the rush of daily life such as *solitude*, *prayer*, *fasting*, and *Bible study*. Disciplines of engagement are undertaken in the midst of life’s pressing moments. These include the disciplines of *thanksgiving*, *surrender*, and *imitation*.

Private Disciplines of Withdrawal

The Discipline of Solitude. Solitude is the building block for all other spiritual disciplines. It is time alone, away from all distractions for uninterrupted time with the Lord. Solitude provides an opportunity to pull away from the society of others and to focus our whole self on Jesus. In these times, we are forced to quiet our souls and listen.

Jesus knew the importance of times of solitude. Throughout His public life He withdrew from the crowds for prayer, meditation and rest (Matthew 4:1-3; Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35 and 6:31; Luke 4:42 and 5:16; Matthew 26:36).

The Discipline of Prayer. Prayer is an ongoing, intimate conversation between God and a believer. It is more than just asking and receiving; it is both speaking and listening to God. Prayer is the foundation of our friendship with God.

Prayer is a distinctive mark of those who seek to follow Jesus, countering the tendency to be self-sufficient by consistently acknowledging dependence on God. The discipline of prayer was a priority for Jesus. His times of solitude were marked by prayer and often fasting (Matthew 6:5-10; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:2; and Philippians 4:6,7). ***The***

Discipline of Fasting. The purpose of fasting is to allow God to accomplish His agenda in, for, and through us. Fasting is a way to develop a greater intimacy and dependence on God. The discipline of fasting is designed to unleash transformational power by reducing self and increasing Christ.

In Isaiah, fasting was focused on the inner person, the physical body, the family, and the broader society. The purpose was to loose the chains of injustice and break all kinds of yokes (enslavements), especially of oppression. Fasting is designed to help us meet the needs of the poor and the marginal people of society. Fasting also has several pitfalls. Read Isaiah 58:3-11 and note of both the benefits and pitfalls.

Fasting is generally not appropriate for those with eating disorders, including disorders of overeating. A more appropriate discipline might be the discipline of eating a healthy and balanced diet.

The Discipline of Bible Study. Through the reading, meditation, and study of God's word, we devote ourselves to knowing God rightly and loving Him purely. Through His word, God reveals Himself so that we are not left to determine His character according to our own whims.

When Jesus calls us to love the Lord with our whole mind, He calls us to a faith that requires rigorous intellectual activity (Matthew 22:34-38; 1 Peter 1:13; 2 Timothy 2:15; Romans 12:2).

Public Disciplines of Engagement

The Discipline of Thanksgiving. The discipline of thanksgiving involves a determined will to give thanks and accept all that happens to us as coming from the goodness of God. Even those things that touch our lives because of the fallen world are allowed to touch us because of God's ultimate goodness. Giving thanks in painful situations is an expression of faith in God's involvement in the created order. It says that He is bigger and stronger than the world we live in and that He has not removed His hand from that world (1 Thessalonians 5:16-19; Philippians 4:6-7; Colossians 3:17).

The Disciplines of Surrender and Imitation. When Jesus told the woman caught in adultery, "Your sins are forgiven, go your way and sin no more" (John 8:11), He raised a serious issue: How can we obey this simple command?

Surrender. Since God is the one who changes and transforms the life of a believer, personal willpower, though important, is impotent when it comes to making lasting changes. Surrender, not willpower, is the key to a transformed life. Surrender, like thanksgiving, is something practiced in the press of life. It is a matter of giving God sway in our life at the moment we realize there is a conflict between His will and ours (Samuel 15:22).

Imitation. Imitation involves adopting the actions and attitude of Christ. This often goes against our earthly culture and fallen nature. Imitation often requires surrender. And both come down to choosing kingdom principles when earthly principles are more convenient (Philippians 2:5-9; Romans 12:1-2).

Thoughts for Application

Choose one specific new discipline. To further employ the use of spiritual disciplines, consider the list provided above. Additional disciplines might include journaling, singing and worship, the

regular confession of sin with a close friend, tithing, or community service.

Read up on the practice. There are several general books on the spiritual disciplines as well as many books on each specific discipline. Consider getting one general and one specific book.

For Disciplines of Withdrawal:

- Determine where, when, how long, and how often. This will differ according to the discipline you are trying to incorporate into your life. You may want to pray for 15 minutes twice a day. The discipline of solitude might be practiced for a whole day every other month.
- Determine how you will spend your time. Will you spend time in the word or use the *Book of Common Prayer*? Will you journal or read from other devotional material? Do you want to use music in any form?
- Put it on the calendar.

For Disciplines of Engagement. With disciplines of engagement, the issue of where, when, and how often are decided in the press of life, in each situation. Reflection is perhaps the best way to ensure that these disciplines remained a focus of your public life.

Determine a time and method of reflection and evaluation. This could involve looking back at the day each evening or using a journal in a dedicated manner in your daily devotions. Reflect on these questions:

- When are surrender and imitation most difficult?
- What leads me to giving thanks and worship God in difficult moments?
- Are there specific passages of scripture that apply to my areas of struggle?

15. Dallas Willard, *The Spirit Of The Disciplines*, 86