

Why Practice Spiritual Disciplines

SCOTT HOEZEE

Ten days after Jesus ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost and lit the Church on fire. As the book of Acts shows, the Spirit continued to do amazing things, building the Church in places like Corinth, Galatia, Thessalonica, Crete, and all over. It was all very energetic; all very exciting; all redolent of God's great power; but by the time we come across the last letters Paul wrote some years down the line, we find Christian believers settling in to their new identity in Christ, and as that happens, we begin to see an emphasis on what we now call spiritual disciplines. Once we become Christian by the mighty power of God, there are disciplines – spiritual practices we need to engage in to stay spiritually healthy and fit. Today on Groundwork, we begin a series that looks at the role of spiritual disciplines in our lives as Christ's disciples. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

Scott, you know, there are certain seasons when many of us think about the disciplines in our lives; I mean, for example, over the holidays we have to think about dieting, or when summer is approaching and we remember that swimsuit in the drawer, or at the New Year, many of us have the practice of resolutions – we are going to try to change; but, at any season of the year it is appropriate for Christians to think about spiritual discipline.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is right; and these are abiding practices; they really are not meant to be seasonal or come and go. So, we are going to think about that in this new series. In this particular program, we are going to give an overview of the disciplines, and then subsequent programs in this series will be focusing in on one or sometimes putting a couple of different disciplines together. It is a good thing to do because some of us, I suppose, know a little bit about spiritual disciplines, but maybe not a lot. We wonder, is this the kind of thing, really, that is more monastic; that the monks in the monastery focus on; maybe nuns in a convent focus on disciplines; but us ordinary Christians not so much; or should we? What are they? How do we do them? Those are the kinds of things we want to get at.

DAVE BAST

Right; and I know that many of our listeners probably come from an Evangelical or a Protestant background, as you and I do, Scott. I remember growing up, for me the idea of fasting, that was Catholic; they could not eat meat on Fridays, but this was totally foreign to us as Evangelicals or as Protestants; but increasingly, and very interestingly in our time, there has been a growing awareness of and practice of the spiritual disciplines among Christians from all churches. There have been a couple of key writers, actually, from the Evangelical side who focused on this. I think of Dallas Willard, the late Dallas Willard, a great name; and in particular probably Richard Foster and his well-known book, *Celebration of Discipline*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and that book, I remember, came out in the 1980s, I believe. It was about the time I was in college, and I know among college students – Evangelical college students – that book made quite a big impression and really put, for a lot of us, some of the disciplines on our radar screens. Again, for some of us Evangelicals, it was the first time.

Maybe we could just mention and summarize – if we just look at the Table of Contents, actually, of Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* – and just mention the disciplines, some of which we are going to devote whole programs to in a future part of this series, but he divides them into: Inward disciplines, outward disciplines, and corporate disciplines. Inward disciplines include meditation and prayer, fasting and study. Outward disciplines include simplicity, solitude, submission, service (all S's on that one). Corporate disciplines are confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. So, that is Richard Foster's nomenclature, if you want to use a big word; that is how he breaks them down and lists them among those various categories.

DAVE BAST

But this is not just a Catholic idea, or increasingly now, a Protestant, or an Evangelical idea; this goes, actually, back to the New Testament. Very clearly this is something – an idea that becomes very important – especially as time goes on and progresses in terms of the New Testament writings, some of the epistles that we are familiar with are – very early on – they were written early when the Church was especially concerned with theology and doctrine; but then there come these later epistles, and especially from Paul's pen – we call them the Pastoral Epistles – where he is concerned more about the Church.

SCOTT HOEZEE

By the way, we call them the Pastoral Epistles because they were written to young pastors – pastor Timothy in Ephesus – pastor Titus working out of the Greek island of Crete; and so, these were letters from Paul, a senior pastor, to these young pastors; and some interesting themes emerge in those, including things that we are going to refer to in this program, and probably throughout this series, as what we could call kind of a spiritual hygiene. And I think, Dave, you have a few verses from Titus.

DAVE BAST

Yes, let me read from Titus Chapter 2, beginning at verse 11:

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹²It teaches us to say, "No," to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age. ¹³While we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and savior, Jesus Christ. That is a wonderful phrase: The blessed hope, which is Christ's return; but in the meantime, God's grace teaches us to do something, and it begins with a big *no* to worldly passions so that we can say yes to lives that are, as Paul describes them, godly and upright and self-controlled.

SCOTT HOEZEE

What you find here is, indeed, what I referred to earlier as spiritual hygiene. Physically we know we clean our teeth, we wash our hair, we wash our bodies, we get exercise, we try to eat healthy foods; you stay fit. Lots of little things you do for your physical hygiene. Well, in the Pastoral Epistles in particular – not just here – you will find them throughout the New Testament, of course, but Paul wants to focus on the things that Titus and Timothy as young pastors can encourage their people to do to stay spiritually healthy.

DAVE BAST

That is a great image, really, that I had not thought of before, but hygiene – what is hygiene, actually? Hygiene is the word – the Greek word in the New Testament that translates into English as sound practices, or even...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sound doctrine; sound teaching.

DAVE BAST

Hygiene means essentially good ideas. You know what? It is a good idea to take care of yourself. It is a good idea to floss, as well as brush your teeth. You do not have to do that, but then, do not be surprised when your health begins to deteriorate; and these are good ideas for the spiritual life – for spiritual hygiene. You have to do something; you cannot simply sit there and be a spiritual couch potato and expect to grow in your faith. That is the point that Paul is making; and especially, it is interesting to me that he is doing this now near the end of his life and ministry when his concern has become: How is this movement going to continue? How is the Church going to go on into the next generation?

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Paul has seen enough – and we will talk about how this is still true in our world today, too – Paul has lived long enough now to know that in places like Ephesus where Timothy was pastoring, and Crete, where Titus was pastoring, there was a world of competing ideas out there. There were a lot of different ways to get the Gospel wrong. There were a lot of things people could do that would harm their relationship with Jesus; and so Paul – again and again in Titus and in I and II Timothy you find that you must teach sound doctrine – and again, that Greek word *hugieinos*, from which our English word, hygiene comes. Keep them spiritually healthy – and he says that again and again and again.

DAVE BAST

Remember now, this is all in the context of thinking about transmitting the faith onto the next generation. When the Gospel first burst into the First Century world, there was a great deal of excitement. So, you read a book like I Thessalonians, and people are all amped up and they expect Jesus to return at any moment, and then it did not happen. No, it turns out that God's will for us is to settle down and to follow, in Eugene Peterson's wonderful phrase, "A long obedience in the same direction." As Paul says, we wait for our blessed hope. So, what we want to do is really dig into the idea of spiritual discipline and how it can be beneficial to us; and we will do that next.

BREAK:

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to Groundwork, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Dave, we are beginning, in this program, a new series on the spiritual disciplines, and we are tuning in particularly to, and digging into, the scripture of the Pastoral Epistles; the two letters to Timothy and the one letter to Titus. We read some of Titus 2 in the first segment of this program, but let me just re-read verses 11 and 12, and we can dig into them even more. Paul writes to Titus:

¹¹For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹²It teaches us to say, "No," to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age. I want to focus on that word, "self-control," because if you have read Titus, actually, it comes up all over the place in Titus; people must be self controlled. Earlier in Titus 2, Paul addressed different age groups: Young men, old men, young women, older women, slave people, free people, everybody; you have to be self controlled, and it is a very, very interesting concept in Greek; in fact, the Greek word, *sophronas*; if you translated it literally, it means to be in your right mind, which is an interesting concept.

DAVE BAST

What strikes me from those verses that you just re-read is that the first thing Paul says is that grace has appeared, and what he means is Jesus has appeared; because Jesus coming into the world, that is the new thing that has happened; it changes everything; and with Him comes this wonderful grace of God; an announcement of God's favor – unconditional favor – that is what grace is; undeserved favor, but for many

people, the idea of grace suggests, “Well, hey, great; anything goes then. It is all grace; there is nothing I really need to do; I just sit back – “let go and let God,” kind of a thing, and Paul says: No, you know what? The first thing grace teaches us to do? It teaches us to say “no.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; no to exactly that kind of existence that, according to Paul, was very common on Crete at the time where Titus was a young pastor, but it is common today, too. You just said the phrase, Dave, “Anything goes.” Young people today – there is this new phrase young people are putting out: YOLO! It is Y-O-L-O, and it stands for “You only live once.” So, the idea is: Live it up. Do whatever feels good. Do whatever is convenient. Grab the gusto. Grab the brass ring.

DAVE BAST

Carpe diem!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

Carpe diem!
Scott Hoezee/

DAVE BAST

Seize the day!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Party hardy while you can; and Paul is saying: Look, the Cretan people live like this; and if he were alive today, he would say: Look, the American people, the Canadian people, all kinds of people live like this; but this is a nutty, crazy way to live.

When I was a kid, if my brother and I would do something, not just naughty, but something that was really foolish; something that was dangerously stupid, I can remember my mother saying, “Are you out of your ever-loving mind?” Well, being out of your ever-loving mind is the opposite of self control, because we just said that Greek word means to be in your right mind, and for Paul that means to be in the mind that God created you with in the first place, which is a mind of wisdom and of soberness and of control; and indeed, as we translate the word commonly now, of self control. How do you keep yourself in control? Well, here is where we come back to the spiritual disciplines. There are all kinds of things you need to do every day to stay in your right mind and stay focused on God.

DAVE BAST

A friend of mine who is really into scripture memorization – and that is actually one of the disciplines – it is a form of meditating on the word and memorizing the word...

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we will talk about that in this series.

DAVE BAST

And we will. We are going to have a program devoted to that – but he says scripture memorization is very simple, but it is not easy; and that is true of all the spiritual disciplines. They are exceedingly simple – there is nothing complicated to them – but none of them is easy; and to do it, we have to be willing first to say, “No,” no to our appetites, no to our tendencies, no to our habits.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is simple, but none of them are easy, and they really do require that daily effort and discipline. In fact, here is another line from the Pastoral Epistles; this one from the first letter to Timothy, Chapter 4:7, 8; Paul writes

to Timothy:

⁷Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths; rather train yourself for godliness, ⁸for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. So, there is that athletic image that Paul often uses, and that is not uncommon in conjunction with spiritual disciplines like praying and meditating and fasting and all of the other ones. It is like just the little things athletes have to do every single day to stay in shape.

DAVE BAST

0:15:08.6] And I think that is a great analogy and a great way of thinking about this whole question of spiritual discipline. Just as physically we need to get up off the couch and get active and get going, so spiritually there are things that we need to do. No, we are not somehow earning our salvation by doing these things. We are not piling up merit with God somehow – there are a lot of ways to go wrong in thinking about this as well.

There is a classic verse in Philippians Chapter 2, where Paul says:

¹²Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. ¹³For God is at work in you both to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Just take those two first words: Work out – workout, Paul says; you have to engage in workouts – in spiritual workouts.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Paul, of all people, knew that the purpose, indeed as you just said, Dave, was not to get yourself saved. In theology, there is this distinction between justification and sanctification – those are big words, but they are fairly simple concepts. Justification is when God gives you all the righteousness of Jesus as a gift. We sometimes say of justification it is just as if I had never sinned. That happens once. We are saved by grace. God credits to us the full righteousness of Jesus – Boom, you are saved by grace; but then there is the other – what follows next is called sanctification, which means becoming more like Jesus – literally becoming more holy – and that is a process that stretches out over your whole life, and you do all these little things: You work out your salvation, as you just said, from the Philippians verse; you train yourself from the I Timothy 4 verse we just read – not in order to get saved, but because you already are, and now you want to stay in step with Jesus and stay in tune with him. So, we do all these things – praying and fasting and meditating and serving and submitting and living a life of simplicity – because all of those little things that you do every day add up to a larger health in your soul, in this case.

DAVE BAST

0:17:10.1] So, it is good for you - that is number one; but here is number two, and maybe this is a great question just to bring this all into focus: Would you like to know God better? Would you like to have a closer relationship with God, with the Lord, with Jesus? Well, there are things that you can do, and it is the wisdom of the ages; of Christian saints from all times and places who have given us tips on this that will bring you closer to God and deepen your relationship and benefit you as well. It will be good for you. They will lead to spiritual health.

So, just to bring this all to a close in our last segment, we will review once again what those spiritual disciplines are and say a little bit about them.

BREAK:

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to Groundwork, and this first program in a new series on the spiritual disciplines; and we have talked now, Dave, about spiritual hygiene, which is literally the Greek word Paul uses in some of the later letters in the New Testament – Titus and Timothy – of staying fit, of staying healthy...

DAVE BAST

Good practices, in other words.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; good practices that keep you healthy. What we want to do as we close out this program is just look briefly at some disciplines that we will spend much more time on in future programs, and show how, as you said a minute ago, Dave, the question behind the disciplines is: Do you want to know God better? So, how do some of the disciplines help us know God better? Maybe we could just start talking a little bit about prayer.

DAVE BAST

We have these internal disciplines, as Foster describes them, so that would be: Prayer and fasting, and those two things often belong together; and scripture – meditating on scripture...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Studying scripture...

DAVE BAST

Ruminating on it – chewing it – digesting it – memorizing it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And how does that bring us closer to God? Well, we stay tied to scripture, we say, because scripture tells us the true story of the universe. It gives us the true narrative; and we stay closer to God when we realize who we are as God defines us in the story of scripture. So, why do we meditate on the Bible? We believe that alone narrates for us our true identity, and when we know who we are... John Calvin always put together two things: Knowledge of self and knowledge of God, and you need both; and scripture tells us who we really are; so that is why we meditate on scripture. It keeps us close to God by connecting us every day to God's story.

DAVE BAST

You are reminding me, Scott, of an anecdote you read about James Cone, a well-known African American preacher...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Somebody once asked James Cone, "Why are sermons in African American churches so long?" And James Cone's answer was, "Well, you know, six days a week society tells black folks that they are second class; that they are of no account; so on Sundays it takes a while to talk people back into remembering who they really are as God's children." And that is what scripture does.

DAVE BAST

They need more of the word, yes. And that reminds of those public disciplines, which include worship. So, Bible study is not just a private thing that you do on your own in your quiet time. It is very important to read the Bible collectively with the people of God; to hear the Bible proclaimed; to worship; to celebrate; and that, too – you might not think of it that way, but that is a discipline as well. That is one of the spiritual disciplines is just going to church. We had a delightful visit just the other day, my wife and I, with my mother-in-law; my wife's mother is now 96, and she is no longer able to go to church – to her own church – which she did until very recently; but she goes every week now to the vesper service in the retirement community where she lives; and she told us that, and then she looked us and she said, "You know, if you get away from it, it gets away from you." And I thought, "You are right." That is the wisdom of age and of the centuries. If you get away from worship, it is going to get away from you. You are going to grow further and further away from God. You just cannot do it on your own.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and what an important connection this is, because I think often when we think about the disciplines, we think about mostly the ones that Richard Foster designated as the inward ones: Meditation, prayer – so, you can do this by yourself at your kitchen table, right? But, there is an intimate connection between prayer and meditation on scripture at your kitchen table and Sundays – or whatever day of the week when you

gather with God's people, where we also together pray; we together study scripture; we have a pastor explain scripture for us. Those disciplines – the inward and the corporate – are intimately involved with each other; and you are right, it is a discipline to go to church; and all you have to do is look at people who stop going and see what happens to their spiritual souls. They get pretty saggy. They get spiritually unfit; unhealthy, to carry through the metaphor we had from earlier in the program.

DAVE BAST

Okay, there are these others in between of the outward ones, as Foster calls them: Service and giving...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Simplicity.

DAVE BAST

Yes; stripping away your life down to its essentials, which actually is not just a Christian thing; that is a movement among many people in our culture today; but what we want to do in this series – we have talked a lot about worship in past programs; in fact, we have a whole series of those that can be found online on our website, groundworkonline.com. We have talked a good deal about scripture, but what we want to focus on are some of the less common, perhaps the less usual disciplines for our audience as we anticipate that. So, we are going to do a program devoted mostly to fasting and how that relates to prayer as well; and a program on memorization of scripture; meditating on it to the point where you remember the words and have them in your heart. We will do a program on giving and service... Am I missing one?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, we will see how simplicity frees you up to have the time to serve other people. If you are always trying to build up a big enough bank account to buy the next biggest thing on the market, you do not have time or money to give and to serve. So, as you said, Dave, these spiritual disciplines, as we have seen today by digging into scripture in Titus and Timothy, are designed to keep us healthy and they are designed to give us good spiritual hygiene, and these are the things that then keep us close to God.

DAVE BAST

And just one last point: We are not doing this to earn our way or to make ourselves righteous, but we are doing it because we love God and we want to go more deeply into Him.

Well, thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation. We are your hosts, Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. Visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what topics or passages you would like to dig into next on Groundwork.

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