

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY 204: FOUR OUTWARD SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Jesus said: *“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock.”*
(Matthew 7:24-25)

INTRODUCTION

This Aide-Mémoire is the second in a three-part series on spiritual practices. The first was *203: Four Inward Practices*. Please note this does not contain the same introduction. That introduction described:

- a) how spiritual practices fit into the Way of Life;
- b) how discipline works in spiritual practices; and
- c) how our spiritual practices benefit us.

Please consult Aide-Mémoire 203 for this information.

What we need is a good guide to the spiritual practices. *Richard Foster* is a Quaker scholar who has focused on the spiritual practices over a life time.¹ His foundational work is *Celebration of Discipline*, from 1978,² in which he describes the twelve major practices.

A note on terminology: Foster calls them “disciplines,” but language changes over time. Since the 1970s when he wrote his classic, the word “discipline” has gained some negative connotations. We can see more clearly nowadays how powerful people in the

¹ For an idea of the extent of Forster’s resources on the disciplines, please see his author’s page on Amazon: <https://www.amazon.ca/kindle-dbs/entity/author/B000APVBQW?encoding=UTF8&node=916520&offset=0&pageSize=12&searchAlias=stripbooks&sort=author-sidecar-rank&page=1&langFilter=default#formatSelectorHeader>

² Foster, *Celebration*. My hope for these primers is that readers would buy his books!

world and in the church have enforced “discipline for thee, but not for me.” To my mind, it is better to *harness discipline together with humility under the authority of grace and see it as a “practice,”* one in which discipline is a necessary foundation but not sufficient.

Foster divided the practices into three categories:

- the *inward*
- the *outward*
- the *corporate*

Here again is the summary outline.

<i>The Twelve Spiritual Practices</i>		
A. Inward	B. Outward	C. Corporate
<i>1. Meditation</i>	5. Simplicity	9. Confession
<i>2. Prayer</i>	6. Solitude	10. Worship
<i>3. Fasting</i>	7. Submission	11. Guidance
<i>4. Study</i>	8. Service	12. Celebration

This aide-mémoire is *a brief* introduction to the *outward practices*. It consists of *quotations* on the topics from Foster’s classic book. The hope is that readers will be reminded of the practices and be encouraged to take up some that have lapsed.³

If you would like to *buy the book*, research it on Amazon and then go get it from an independent bookseller. Please see one such link from Alibris below.⁴

The text follows below. We continue from the previous primer’s first four with the fifth practice: Simplicity.

³ This primer is only an introduction. I hope (*D.V.*) to explore individual practices more fully in future primers and add some practical ideas from Foster’s extensive resources.

⁴ <https://www.alibris.com/Celebration-of-Discipline-The-Path-to-Spiritual-Growth/book/980174?qsort=p&matches=667>

B. THE OUTWARD PRACTICES

5. SIMPLICITY

Simplicity is freedom. Duplicity is bondage. Simplicity brings joy and balance. Duplicity brings anxiety and fear. The preacher of Ecclesiastes observes that "God made man simple; man's complex problems are of his own devising" (Ecclesiastes 7:30, JB).⁵

Simplicity is an *inward reality* that results in an *outward life-style*. Both the inward and the outward aspects of simplicity are essential. We deceive ourselves if we believe we can possess the inward reality without it having a profound effect on how we live... Experiencing the inward reality liberates us outwardly. Speech becomes truthful and honest. The lust for status and position is gone because we no longer need status and position. We cease from showy extravagance not on the grounds of being unable to afford it, but on the grounds of principle. Our goods become available to others.⁶

Contemporary culture lacks both the inward reality and the outward life-style of simplicity. We must live in the modern world, and we are affected by its fractured and fragmented state. We are trapped in a maze of competing attachments. One moment we make decisions on the basis of sound reason and the next moment out of fear of what others will think of us. We have no unity or focus around which our lives are oriented.

Because we lack a divine Center our need for security has led us into an insane attachment to things. We really must understand that the lust for affluence in contemporary society is psychotic.

⁵ *Celebration*, p.79. Foster's quote in the NRSV Bible: "See, this alone I found, that God made human beings straightforward, but they have devised many schemes" (Ecclesiastes 7:29.)

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.79-80.

It is psychotic because it has completely lost touch with reality. We crave things we neither need nor enjoy. "We buy things we do not want to impress people we do not like."⁷ Where planned obsolescence leaves off, psychological obsolescence takes over. We are made to feel ashamed to wear clothes or drive cars until they are worn out. The mass media have convinced us that to be out of step with fashion is to be out of step with reality. It is time we awaken to the fact that conformity to a sick society is to be sick. Until we see how unbalanced our culture has become at this point, we will not be able to deal with the mammon spirit within ourselves nor will we desire Christian simplicity.⁸

a) *The Bible and Simplicity*

The biblical injunctions against the exploitation of the poor and the accumulation of wealth are clear and straightforward. The Bible challenges nearly every economic value of contemporary society.

(1) Old Testament

For example, the Old Testament takes exception to the popular notion of an absolute right to private property. The earth belongs to God, says Scripture, and therefore cannot be held perpetually (Leviticus 25:23).

The Old Testament legislation of the year of Jubilee stipulated that all land was to revert back to its original owner. In fact, the Bible declares that wealth itself belongs to God, and one purpose of the year of Jubilee was to provide a regular redistribution of wealth.

Such a radical view of economics flies in the face of nearly all contemporary belief and practice. Had Israel faithfully observed the

⁷ The quote is from Arthur G. Gish, *Beyond the Rat Race*, 1973, p. 21.

⁸ *Celebration*, p.80-1.

Jubilee it would have dealt a death blow to the perennial problem of the rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer.⁹

Constantly the Bible deals decisively with the inner spirit of slavery that an idolatrous attachment to wealth brings. “If riches increase, set not your heart on them,” counsels the psalmist (Psalm 62:10). The tenth commandment is against covetousness, the inner lust to have, which leads to stealing and oppression.¹⁰

The wise sage understood that “He who trusts in his riches will wither” (Proverbs 11:28).¹¹

(2) Jesus

Jesus declared war on the materialism of his day. (And I would suggest that he declares war on the materialism of our day as well.) The Aramaic term for wealth is “mammon” and Jesus condemns it as a rival God:

No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (Luke 16:13).

He speaks frequently and unambiguously to economic issues. He says, “Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” and “Woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation” (Luke 6:20, 24).

He graphically depicts the difficulty of the wealthy entering the kingdom of God to be like a camel walking through the eye of a needle. With God, of course, all things are possible, but Jesus clearly

⁹ *Celebration*, p.82. The *Book of Leviticus* says: “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants” 25:23, *NRSV Bible*.)

¹⁰ *NRSV Bible*, Exodus 20:17: You shall not covet your neighbour’s house; you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.82.

understood the difficulty. He saw the grip that wealth can have on a person. He knew that “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,” which is precisely why he commanded his followers: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth” (Matthew 6:19-21). He is not saying that the heart should or should not be where the treasure is. He is stating the plain fact that wherever you find the treasure, you **will** find the heart.¹²

He exhorted the rich young ruler not just to have an inner attitude of detachment from his possessions, but literally to get rid of his possessions if he wanted the kingdom of God (Matthew 19:16-22).

He says, “Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15).

He counseled people who came seeking God, “Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail...” (Luke 12:33).

He told the parable of the rich farmer whose life centered in hoarding - we would call him prudent; Jesus called him a fool (Luke 12:16-21).

He states that if we really want the kingdom of God we must, like a merchant in search of fine pearls, be willing to sell everything we have to get it (Matthew 13:45, 46).

He calls all who would follow him to a joyful life of carefree unconcern for possessions:

Give to everyone who begs from you; and of him who takes away your goods do not ask them again (Luke 6:30).

¹² *Celebration*, p.82-3.

Jesus speaks to the question of economics more than any other single social issue. If, in a comparatively simple society, our Lord lays such strong emphasis upon the spiritual dangers of wealth, how much more should we who live in a highly affluent culture take seriously the economic question.¹³

Having said all this, I must hasten to add that God intends that we should have adequate material provision. There is misery today from a simple lack of provision just as there is misery when people try to make a life out of provision. Forced poverty is evil and should be renounced.

Nor does the Bible condone an extreme asceticism. Scripture declares consistently and forcefully that the creation is good and to be enjoyed. Asceticism makes an unbiblical division between a good spiritual world and an evil material world and so finds salvation in paying as little attention as possible to the physical realm of existence.¹⁴

Simplicity is the only thing that sufficiently reorients our lives so that possessions can be genuinely enjoyed without destroying us. Without simplicity we will either capitulate to the “mammon” spirit of this present evil age, or we will fall into an un-Christian legalistic asceticism. Both lead to idolatry. Both are spiritually lethal...

Simplicity sets us free to receive the provision of God as a gift that is not ours to keep and can be freely shared with others. Once we recognize that the Bible denounces the materialist and the ascetic with equal vigor, we are prepared to turn our attention to the framing of a Christian understanding of simplicity.¹⁵

¹³ *Celebration*, p.83. **(3) New Testament:** Foster goes on to survey the rest of the New Testament and shows how the followers of Jesus concurred with Jesus and lived it. We have to break away for considerations of space, but it is worth reading in full in Foster’s book.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.85.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.84-5.

b) *The Inward Reality of Simplicity*

Archimedes once declared, "Give me a place to stand and I will move the earth." ...We have such a focal point in the words of Jesus:

"Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.*"
(Matthew 6:25-33, italics added)¹⁶

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of Jesus' insight at this point. Everything hinges upon maintaining the "first" thing as first. Nothing must come before the kingdom of God, including the desire for a simple life-style.

Focus upon the kingdom produces the inward reality, and without the inward reality we will degenerate into legalistic trivia. Nothing else can be central. The desire to get out of the rat race cannot be

¹⁶ *Celebration*, p.86. This quote is from the Sermon on the Mount.

central, the redistribution of the world's wealth cannot be central, the concern for ecology cannot be central.¹⁷

As Jesus made clear in our central passage, freedom from anxiety is one of the inward evidences of seeking first the kingdom of God.¹⁸

Freedom from anxiety is characterized by three inner attitudes.

- (1) If what we have, we receive as a gift,
 - (2) and if what we have is to be cared for by God,
 - (3) and if what we have is available to others,
- then we will possess freedom from anxiety.

This is the inward reality of simplicity...

(1) What we have we receive as a gift from God

To receive what we have as a gift from God is the first inner attitude of simplicity. We work but we know that it is not our work that gives us what we have. We live by grace even when it comes to "daily bread." We are dependent upon God for the simplest elements of life: air, water, sun. What we have is not the result of our labor, but of the gracious care of God. When we are tempted to think that what we own is the result of our personal efforts, it takes only a little drought or a small accident to show us once again how utterly dependent we are for everything.¹⁹

(2) What we have is cared for by God

To know that it is God's business, and not ours, to care for what we have is the second inner attitude of simplicity. God is able to protect what we possess. We can trust him. Does that mean that we should never take the keys out of the car or lock the door? Of course not. But we know that the lock on the door is not what protects the house. It is only common sense to take normal precautions, but if we

¹⁷ *Celebration*, p.87.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.87.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.87-8.

believe that precaution itself protects us and our goods, we will be riddled with anxiety. There simply is no such thing as “burglar proof” precautions. Obviously, these matters are not restricted to possessions but include such things as our reputation and our employment. Simplicity means the freedom to trust God for these (and all) things.²⁰

(3) What we have is available to others

To have our goods available to others marks the third inner attitude of simplicity. If our goods are not available to the community when it is clearly right and good, then they are stolen goods. The reason we find such an idea so difficult is our fear of the future. We cling to our possessions rather than sharing them because we are anxious about tomorrow. But if we truly believe that God is who Jesus says he is, then we do not need to be afraid. When we come to see God as the almighty Creator and our loving Father, we can share because we know that he will care for us. If someone is in need, we are free to help them. Again, ordinary common sense will define the parameters of our sharing and save us from foolishness.²¹

c) The Outward Expression of Simplicity

To describe simplicity only as an inner reality is to say something false. The inner reality is not a reality until there is an outward expression. To experience the liberating spirit of simplicity **will** affect how we live...

I follow their lead and suggest ten controlling principles for the outward expression of simplicity. They should never be viewed as laws but as only one attempt to flesh out the meaning of simplicity for today.²²

²⁰ *Celebration*, p.88-9.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.89.

²² *Ibid.*, p.89-90.

- (1) Buy things for their usefulness rather than their status.
- (2) Reject anything that is producing an addiction in you.
- (3) Develop a habit of giving things away.
- (4) Refuse to be propagandized by the custodians of modern gadgetry.
- (5) Learn to enjoy things without owning them.
- (6) Develop a deeper appreciation for the creation.
- (7) Look with a healthy skepticism at all “buy now, pay later” schemes.
- (8) Obey Jesus' instructions about plain, honest speech.
- (9) Reject anything that breeds the oppression of others.
- (10) Shun anything that distracts you from seeking first the kingdom of God.²³

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²³ *Celebration*, p.90-5. Please note that Richard Foster also wrote a whole book on simplicity called *Freedom of Simplicity* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).

6. SOLITUDE

Jesus calls us from loneliness to solitude... Our fear of being alone drives us to noise and crowds. We keep up a constant stream of words even if they are inane... But loneliness or clatter are not our only alternatives. We can cultivate an inner solitude and silence that sets us free from loneliness and fear. Loneliness is inner emptiness. Solitude is inner fulfillment.²⁴

Solitude is more a state of mind and heart than it is a place. There is a solitude of the heart that can be maintained at all times... But if we possess inward solitude, we do not fear being alone, for we know that we are not alone. Neither do we fear being with others, for they do not control us, In the midst of noise and confusion we are settled into a deep inner silence. Whether alone or among people, we always carry with us a portable sanctuary of the heart.²⁵

a) Jesus and Solitude

Jesus lived in inward “heart solitude.” He also frequently experienced outward solitude.

- He inaugurated his ministry by spending forty days alone in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11).
- Before he chose the twelve, he spent the entire night alone in the desert hills (Luke 6:12).
- When he received the news of John the Baptist's death, he “withdrew from there in a boat to a lonely place apart” (Matthew 14:13).
- After the miraculous feeding of the five thousand Jesus “went up into the hills by himself. . .” (Matthew 14:23).

²⁴ *Celebration*, p.96-7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.97.

- Following a long night of work, “in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place . . .” (Mark 1:35).
- When the twelve returned from a preaching and healing mission, Jesus instructed them, “Come away by yourselves to a lonely place” (Mark 6:31).
- Following the healing of a leper Jesus “withdrew to the wilderness and prayed” (Luke 5:16).
- With three disciples he sought out the silence of a lonely mountain as the stage for the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9)
- As he prepared for his highest and most holy work, Jesus sought the solitude of the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46).

The seeking out of solitary places was a regular practice for Jesus. So it should be for us.²⁶

Therefore, we must seek out the recreating stillness of solitude if we want to be with others meaningfully. We must seek the fellowship and accountability of others if we want to be alone safely. We must cultivate both if we are to live in obedience.²⁷

b) Solitude and Silence

Without silence there is no solitude. Though silence sometimes involves the absence of speech, it always involves the act of listening. Simply to refrain from talking, without a heart listening to God, is not silence. There is an old proverb to the effect that “all those who open their mouths, close their eyes!” The purpose of silence and solitude is to be able to see and hear. Control rather than no noise is the key to silence.²⁸

²⁶ *Celebration*, p.97.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.97-8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.98.

James saw clearly that the person who could control his tongue is perfect (James 3:1-12).²⁹ Under the Discipline of silence and solitude we learn when to speak and when to refrain from speaking.³⁰

James' analogies of the rudder and the bridle suggest to us that the tongue guides as well as controls. The tongue guides our course in many ways. If we tell a lie, we are led to telling more lies to cover up the first lie. Soon we are forced to behave in a certain way in order to give credence to the lie. No wonder James declares that "the tongue is a fire" (James 3:6).

A person who is under the Discipline of silence is a person who can say what needs to be said when it needs to be said. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver" (Proverbs 25:11). If we are silent when we should speak, we are not living in the Discipline of silence. If we speak when we should be silent, we again miss the mark.

One reason we can hardly bear to remain silent is that it makes us feel so helpless. We are so accustomed to relying upon words to manage and control others. If we are silent, who will take control? God will take control, but we will never let him take control until we trust him. Silence is intimately related to trust.³¹

The tongue is our most powerful weapon of manipulation. A frantic stream of words flows from us because we are in a constant process

²⁹ James was the brother of Jesus. He led the Jerusalem church for 30 years after Jesus died. The central portion of the quote from the *Letter of James* is: "²For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. ³If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. ⁴Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. ⁵So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! ⁶And the tongue is a fire." (3:2-6a)

³⁰ *Celebration*, p.98-9.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.100-1.

of adjusting our public image... Silence is one of the deepest Disciplines of the Spirit simply because it puts the stopper on all self-justification.

One of the fruits of silence is the freedom to let God be our justifier. We don't need to straighten others out. There is a story of a medieval monk who was being unjustly accused of certain offenses. One day he looked out his window and saw a dog biting and tearing on a rug that had been hung out to dry. As he watched, the Lord spoke to him saying, "That is what is happening to your reputation. But if you will trust me, I will care for you - reputation and all." Perhaps more than anything else, silence brings us to believe that God can care for us – "reputation and all."³²

c) *The Dark Night of the Soul*

... At some point or points along the pilgrimage we will enter what St. John of the Cross vividly describes as "the dark night of the soul." The "dark night" to which he calls us is not something bad or destructive. On the contrary, it is an experience to be welcomed much as a sick person might welcome a surgery that promises health and well-being. The purpose of the darkness is not to punish or to afflict us. It is to set us free.³³

d) *Steps into Solitude*

The Spiritual Disciplines are things that we do. We must never lose sight of this fact... We are dealing with actions, not merely states of mind.³⁴

³² *Celebration*, p.101.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.102. We will cut away from the rest of Foster's discussion, for this topic requires an aide-mémoire of its own. For more information:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dark_Night_of_the_Soul

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.105.

(1) The “little solitudes”

The first thing we can do is to take advantage of the “little solitudes” that fill our day. Consider the solitude of those early morning moments in bed before the family awakens. Think of the solitude of a morning cup of coffee before beginning the work of the day... These tiny snatches of time are often lost to us. What a pity! They can and should be redeemed. They are times for inner quiet, for reorienting our lives like a compass needle. They are little moments that help us to be genuinely present where we are.³⁵

(2) A “quiet place”

We can find or develop a “quiet place” designed for silence and solitude. Homes are being built constantly. Why not insist that a little inner sanctuary be put into the plans, a small place where any family member could go to be alone and silent?... Those who already own a home could consider enclosing a little section of the garage or patio. Those who live in an apartment could be creative and find other ways to allow for solitude. I know of one family that has a special chair; whenever anyone sits in it, he or she is saying, “Please don't bother me, I want to be alone.”³⁶

(3) Places outside the home

Let's find places outside the home: a spot in a park, a church sanctuary that is kept unlocked, even a storage closet somewhere. A retreat center near us has built a lovely one-person cabin specifically for private meditation and solitude. It is called “The Quiet Place.” Churches invest millions of dollars in buildings. How about constructing one place where an individual can come to be alone for several days?³⁷

³⁵ *Celebration*, p.105-6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.106.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.106.

(4) Practice not speaking

Let's experiment with doing deeds without any words of explanation whatever. We note our sense of fear that people will misunderstand why we have done what we have done. We seek to allow God to be our justifier...

Go another step. Try to live one entire day without words at all. Do it not as a law, but as an experiment. Note your feelings of helplessness and excessive dependence upon words to communicate. Try to find new ways to relate to others that are not dependent upon words. Enjoy, savor the day. Learn from it.³⁸

(5) Withdrawal to reorient goals (3-4 hours)

Four times a year withdraw for three to four hours for the purpose of reorienting your life goals. This can easily be done in one evening. Reevaluate your goals and objectives in life. In the quiet of those brief hours, listen to the thunder of God's silence. Keep a journal record of what comes to you...Goals are discovered, not made. God delights in showing us exciting new alternatives for the future.³⁹

(6) An annual retreat (2-3 days)

... We explored the idea of study retreats of two to three days' duration. Such experiences are heightened when they are combined with an inner immersion into the silence of God... Take a retreat once a year with no other purpose in mind but solitude.

The fruit of solitude is increased sensitivity and compassion for others. Thomas Merton observes,

“It is in deep solitude that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my brothers. The more solitary I am the more affection I have for them...Solitude and silence teach me to love my brothers for what they are, not for what they say.”⁴⁰

³⁸ *Celebration*, p.107.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.108.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.108. The quote is from *The Sign of Jonas*, 1953, p.261.

7. SUBMISSION

Of all the Spiritual Disciplines none has been more abused than the Discipline⁴¹ of submission...Nothing can put people into bondage like religion, and nothing in religion has done more to manipulate and destroy people than a deficient teaching on submission...⁴²

Every Discipline has its corresponding freedom... Demosthenes was free to be an orator only because he had gone through the discipline of speaking above the ocean roar with pebbles in his mouth. The purpose of the Disciplines is freedom. Our aim is the freedom, not the Discipline. The moment we make the Discipline our central focus, we turn it into law and lose the corresponding freedom.

The Disciplines are for the purpose of realizing a greater good. In and of themselves they are of no value whatever. They have value only as a means of setting us before God so that he can give us the liberation we seek. The liberation is the end; the Disciplines are merely the means. They are not the answer; they only lead us to the Answer. We must clearly understand this limitation of the Disciplines if we are to avoid bondage.⁴³

a) The Freedom in Submission

I said that every Discipline has its corresponding freedom. What freedom corresponds to submission? It is the ability to lay down the terrible burden of always needing to get our own way. The obsession to demand that things go the way we want them to go is one of the greatest bondages in human society today...⁴⁴

⁴¹ Please remember to read the word "Discipline" in the sense of a "Practice"; especially on the topic of submission. Words change meaning over time: think of "submission" as "self-transcendence," as in losing our attachment to the "storefront self" we hold so dear.

⁴² *Celebration*, p.110.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.110.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.111.

In the Discipline of submission, we are released to drop the matter, to forget it. Frankly, most things in life are not nearly as important as we think they are...

We insist that a critical issue is at stake; we are fighting for a sacred principle. Perhaps this is the case. Usually, it is not. Often, we cannot stand to give in simply because it means that we will not get our own way...

Only submission can free us sufficiently to enable us to distinguish between genuine issues and stubborn self-will...⁴⁵

There is the need for an all-encompassing spirit of grace beyond any kind of language or action which sets others and ourselves free.⁴⁶

The biblical teaching on submission focuses primarily on the spirit with which we view other people. Scripture does not attempt to set forth a series of hierarchical relationships but to communicate to us an inner attitude of mutual subordination...

In submission we are at last free to value other people. Their dreams and plans become important to us. We have entered into a new, wonderful, glorious freedom—the freedom to give up our own rights for the good of others. For the first time we can love people unconditionally. We have given up the right to demand that they return our love.

Do you know the liberation that comes from giving up your rights? It means you are set free from the seething anger and bitterness you feel when someone doesn't act toward you the way you think they should... It means you are free to obey Jesus' command, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Celebration*, p.111.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.112.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.112-3.

b) A Touchstone

Most of us have been exposed to such a mutilated form of biblical submission that either we have embraced the deformity or we have rejected the Discipline altogether. To do the former leads to self-hatred; to do the latter leads to self-glorification. Before we become hung on the horns of this dilemma, let's consider a third alternative.

The touchstone for the biblical understanding of submission is Jesus' astonishing statement, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34).

Almost instinctively we draw back from these words.

We are much more comfortable with words like "self-fulfillment" and "self-actualization" than we are with the thought of "self-denial" ... Self-denial conjures up in our minds all sorts of images of groveling and self-hatred...

On the contrary, Jesus calls us to self-denial without self-hatred. Self-denial is simply a way of coming to understand that we do not have to have our own way. Our happiness is not dependent upon getting what we want.⁴⁸

Self-denial does not mean the loss of our identity as some suppose... Self-denial is not the same thing as self-contempt.

Self-contempt claims that we have no worth, and even if we do have worth, we should reject it. Self-denial declares that we are of infinite worth and shows us how to realize it...

When we live outside of self-denial, we demand that things go our way. When they do not, we revert to self-pity – "Poor me!"

Outwardly we may submit but we do so in a spirit of martyrdom.

This spirit of self-pity, of martyrdom, is a sure sign that the Discipline of submission has gone to seed.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *Celebration*, p.113.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.114.

c) *Revolutionary Subordination as Taught by Jesus*

The most radical social teaching of Jesus was his total reversal of the contemporary notion of greatness.⁵⁰ Leadership is found in becoming the servant of all. Power is discovered in submission. The foremost symbol of this radical servanthood is the cross. “He [Jesus] humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8). But note this: Christ not only died a “cross-death,” he lived a “cross-life.” The way of the cross, the way of a suffering servant was essential to his ministry.⁵¹

It is impossible to overstate the revolutionary character of Jesus' life and teaching at this point. It did away with all the claims to privileged position and status. It called into being a whole new order of leadership. The cross-life of Jesus undermined all social orders based on power and self-interest...He flatly told his disciples, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9:35)... The cross-life is the life of voluntary submission. The cross-life is the life of freely accepted servanthood.⁵²

d) *The Limits of Submission*

The limits of the Discipline of submission are at the points at which it becomes destructive. It then becomes a denial of the law of love as taught by Jesus and is an affront to genuine biblical submission (Matthew 5, 6, and 7 and especially 22:37-39).⁵³

⁵⁰ *Celebration*, p.115. Richard Foster notes that he is indebted for this section to John Howard Yoder and his book *The Politics of Jesus*, 1972.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.115-6.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.116. We're skipping Foster's next section “Revolutionary Subordination as Taught in the Epistles,” because of considerations of space. It is well worth reading in full.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.120. Mathew chapters 5-7 contains the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 22:37-39 has the great commandment: He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

...Submission reaches the end of its tether when it becomes destructive. In fact, they illustrated revolutionary subordination by meekly refusing a destructive command and being willing to suffer the consequences. The German thinker Johannes Hamel says that subordination includes “the possibility of a spirit driven resistance, of an appropriate disavowal and a refusal ready to accept suffering at this or that particular point.”⁵⁴

e) The Acts of Submission

Submission and service function concurrently. Hence, much of the practical outflow of submission will come in the next chapter. There are, however, seven acts of submission that I would like to mention briefly.⁵⁵

(1) The first act of submission is to the Triune God.

As the first words of the morning are of submission, so are the last words of the night.

(2) The second act of submission is to the Scripture.

As we submit ourselves to the Word of God living (Jesus), so we submit ourselves to the Word of God written (Scripture). We yield ourselves first to hear the Word, second to receive the Word, and third to obey the Word. We look to the Spirit who inspired the Scriptures to interpret and apply them to our condition.

(3) The third act of submission is to our family.

The dictum for the household should be “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:4). Freely and graciously the members of the family make allowance for each other. The primary deed of submission is a

⁵⁴ *Celebration*, p.120-1. The quote is from Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 1972, p.186.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.121-2.

commitment to listen to the other family members. Its corollary is a willingness to share, which is itself a work of submission.⁵⁶

(4) The fourth act of submission is to our neighbors and those we meet in the course of our daily lives. The life of simple goodness is lived before them. If they are in need, we help them. We perform small acts of kindness and ordinary neighborliness: sharing our food, baby-sitting their children, mowing their lawn, visiting over important and unimportant matters, sharing our tools.⁵⁷

(5) The fifth act of submission is to the believing community, the body of Christ. If there are jobs to be done and tasks to be accomplished, we look at them closely to see if they are God's invitation to the cross-life. We cannot do everything, but we can do some things.

(6) The sixth act of submission is to the broken and despised. In every culture there are the “widows and orphans”; that is, the helpless, the undefended (James 1:27). Our first responsibility is to be among them... we must discover ways to identify genuinely with the downtrodden, the rejected. There we must live the cross-life.

(7) The seventh act of submission is to the world.

We live in an interdependent, international community. We cannot live in isolation. Our environmental responsibility, or the lack of it, affects not only the people around the world but generations yet to be born. Starving peoples affect us. Our act of submission is a determination to live as a responsible member of an increasingly irresponsible world.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ *Celebration*, p.122.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.122.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p.123.

8. SERVICE

Jesus never taught that everyone had equal authority. In fact, he had a great deal to say about genuine spiritual authority and taught that many did not possess it. But the authority of which Jesus spoke is not the authority of a pecking order. We must clearly understand the radical nature of Jesus' teaching on this matter. He was not just reversing the "pecking order" as many suppose. He was abolishing it. The authority of which he spoke was not an authority to manipulate and control. It was an authority of function, not of status.

Jesus declares,

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them,
and their great men exercise authority over them.
It shall not be so among you [italics added]...

How then was it to be among them?

"Whoever would be great among you must be your servant . . .
even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve"
(Matthew 20:25-28).

Therefore, the spiritual authority of Jesus is an authority not found in a position or a title, but in a towel.⁵⁹

a) Self-righteous Service Versus True Service

If true service is to be understood and practiced, it must be distinguished clearly from "self-righteous service."⁶⁰

⁵⁹ *Celebration*, p.127-8. Foster's reference to the "towel" relates to the story in chapter 13 of John's Gospel. At their last Passover meal together, Jesus washed his followers' feet to demonstrate servant leadership. We remember that in Holy Week on Maundy Thursday.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.128.

(1) Human effort versus relationship with the divine

Self-righteous service comes through human effort...
so we can “help those people.”

True service comes from a relationship with the divine Other deep inside. We serve out of whispered promptings, divine urgings...⁶¹

(2) “Big deals” versus no difference

Self-righteous service is impressed with the “big deal”...
True service finds it almost impossible to distinguish the small from the large service...

(3) External rewards versus hiddenness

Self-righteous service requires external rewards...
True service rests contented in hiddenness...⁶²

(4) Results-oriented versus service delight

Self-righteous service is highly concerned about results...
True service is free of the need to calculate results. It delights only in the service. It can serve enemies as freely as friends.⁶³

(5) Discriminates versus non-discrimination

Self-righteous service picks and chooses whom to serve...
True service is indiscriminate in its ministry...

(6) Fickleness versus faithfulness

Self-righteous service is affected by moods and whims...
True service ministers simply and faithfully because there is a need... The service disciplines the feelings rather than allowing the feeling to control the service.⁶⁴

⁶¹ *Celebration*, p.128.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.128.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.128-9.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.129.

(7) Temporary versus lifestyle

Self-righteous service is temporary. It functions only while the specific acts of service are being performed...

True service is a life-style. It acts from ingrained patterns of living. It springs spontaneously to meet human need.⁶⁵

(8) Insensitive versus patience

Self-righteous service is insensitive... It demands the opportunity to help. True service can withhold the service as freely as perform it.

It can listen with tenderness and patience before acting.

It can serve by waiting in silence.

(9) Fracturing versus community building

Self-righteous service fractures community. In the final analysis, once all the religious trappings are removed, it centers in the glorification of the individual. Therefore, it puts others into its debt and becomes one of the most subtle and destructive forms of manipulation known.

True service builds community. It quietly and unpretentiously goes about caring for the needs of others. It draws, binds, heals, builds.⁶⁶

b) Service and Humility

More than any other single way, the grace of humility is worked into our lives through the Discipline of service... Of all the classical Spiritual Disciplines, service is the most conducive to the growth of humility.

When we set out on a consciously chosen course of action that accents the good of others and is, for the most part, a hidden work, a deep change occurs in our spirits.

⁶⁵ *Celebration*, p.129.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.129-30.

Nothing disciplines the inordinate desires of the flesh like service, and nothing transforms the desires of the flesh like serving in hiddenness. The flesh whines against service but screams against hidden service. It strains and pulls for honor and recognition. It will devise subtle, religiously acceptable means to call attention to the service rendered. If we stoutly refuse to give in to this lust of the flesh, we crucify it. Every time we crucify the flesh, we crucify our pride and arrogance...⁶⁷

The result, then, of this daily discipline of the flesh will be the rise of the grace of humility. It will slip in upon us unawares. Though we do not sense its presence, we are aware of a fresh zest and exhilaration with living... Joyous hidden service to others is an acted prayer of thanksgiving. We seem to be directed by a new control Center - and so we are.⁶⁸

c) Yes . . . But

A natural and understandable hesitancy accompanies any serious discussion of service. The hesitancy is prudent since it is wise to count the cost before plunging headlong into any Discipline. We experience a fear that comes out something like this: "If I do that, people will take advantage of me; they will walk all over me."⁶⁹

We find those words hard to deal with today. (You must understand that I, too, struggle even to listen to the devotional masters on this point.) We fear that such an attitude will lead irrevocably down the path of excessive asceticism and self-mortification. In the Church we are only now emerging from a "worm theology" that terribly devalued human ability and potential.

⁶⁷ *Celebration*, p.130. Foster points out that "lust of the flesh" should not be reduced to sex. Please see that it is a metaphor for all that binds us to the way of death.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.131-2.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.132.

Does service lead back to that? No, certainly not. No doubt it is a danger we must always guard against. But we must also watch for the enemy in the opposite direction. As Bonhoeffer says,

“If there is no element of asceticism in our lives, if we give free rein to the desires of the flesh ... we shall find it hard to train for the service of Christ.”⁷⁰

d) *Service in the Marketplace*

Service is not a list of things that we do, though in it we discover things to do. It is not a code of ethics, but a way of living. To do specific acts of service is not the same thing as living in the Discipline of service. Just as there is more to the game of basketball than the rule book, there is more to service than specific acts of serving. It is one thing to act like a servant; it is quite another to be a servant.⁷¹

(1) The service of hiddenness

At the outset there is the service of hiddenness... If all of our serving is before others, we will be shallow people indeed... Hiddenness is a rebuke to the flesh and can deal a fatal blow to pride.⁷²

(2) The service of small things

There is the service of small things. Like Dorcas, we find ways to make “coats and garments for the widows” (Acts 9:39)... Francis de Sales says that the great virtues and the small fidelities are like sugar and salt. Sugar may have a more exquisite taste, but its use is less frequent. Salt is found everywhere. The great virtues are a rare occurrence; the ministry of small things is a daily service.

⁷⁰ *Celebration*, p.133-4. The quote is from *The Cost of Discipleship*, 1963), p. 188. I also struggle with how to be a true servant. It is a great, worthwhile challenge and we all need much help.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.134.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.134.

Large tasks require great sacrifice for a moment; small things require constant sacrifice.⁷³

(3) The service of guarding the reputation of others

How necessary this is if we are to be saved from backbiting and gossip. The apostle Paul taught us to “speak evil of no one” (Titus 3:2). We may clothe our backbiting in all the religious respectability we want, but it will remain a deadly poison.

There is a discipline in holding one's tongue that works wonders within us.

Nor should we be a party to the slanderous talk of others...

Guarding the reputation of others is a deep and lasting service.⁷⁴

(4) The service of being served

When Jesus began to wash the feet of those he loved, Peter refused. He would never let his Master stoop to such a menial service on his behalf. It sounds like a statement of humility; in reality it was an act of veiled pride. Jesus' service was an affront to Peter's concept of authority. If Peter had been the master, he would not have washed feet!

It is an act of submission and service to allow others to serve us. It recognizes their “kingdom authority” over us. We graciously receive the service rendered, never feeling we must repay it.⁷⁵

(5) The service of common courtesy

Such deeds of compassion have fallen on hard times in our day. But we must never despise the rituals of relationship that are in every culture. It is one of the few ways left in modern society to acknowledge the value of one another. We are “to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all” (Titus 3:2).⁷⁶

⁷³ *Celebration*, p.135.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.136.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.136-7.

(6) The service of hospitality

Peter urges us to “Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another” (1 Peter 4:9). Paul does the same and even makes it one of the requirements for the office of bishop (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)... Sometimes we limit ourselves because we make hospitality too complicated... Just a chance to be together and share - that is the stuff of hospitality.⁷⁷

(7) The service of listening

We desperately need the help that can come through listening to one another. We do not need to be trained psychoanalysts to be trained listeners. The most important requirements are compassion and patience.

We do not have to have the correct answers to listen well. In fact, often the correct answers are a hindrance to listening, for we become more anxious to give the answer than to hear. An impatient half-listening is an affront to the person sharing. To listen to others quiets and disciplines the mind to listen to God. It creates an inward working upon the heart that transforms the affections, even the priorities, of life.⁷⁸

(8) The service of bearing each other's burdens

“Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2)...

Love is most perfectly fulfilled when we bear the hurts and sufferings of each other, weeping with those who weep. And especially when we are with those who are going through the valley of the shadow, weeping is far better than words.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.137.

⁷⁷ *Celebration*, p.137-8.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.138.

If we care, we will learn to bear one another's sorrows.
I say "learn" because this, too, is a discipline to be mastered...
We can learn to uphold the burdens of others without being
destroyed by them...We can begin in some small corner somewhere
and learn. Jesus will be our Teacher.⁷⁹

(9) The service of sharing the word of Life with one another

This is a gracious service to be rendered for no individual can hear all that God wants to say. We are dependent upon one another to receive the full counsel of God... It is, of course, a fearful thing to proclaim these words to each other... Such realities humble us and throw us in deep dependence upon God. But we must not draw back from this service for it is desperately needed today.⁸⁰

FOSTER'S CONCLUSION TO THE OUTWARD PRACTICES

The risen Christ beckons us to the ministry of the towel. Such a ministry, flowing out of the inner recesses of the heart, is life and joy and peace. Perhaps you would like to begin by experimenting with a prayer that several of us use. Begin the day by praying,

"Lord Jesus, as it would please you,
bring me someone today whom I can serve."

SUMMARY

In Aide-Mémoire 203 we introduced the four *Inward Practices*:

1. Meditation
2. Prayer
3. Fasting
4. Study

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.139.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.139-40.

In this Aide-Mémoire 204 we introduced the four *Outward Practices*:

5. Simplicity
6. Solitude
7. Submission
8. Service

(My apologies for the length of this primer. I use a big font and lots of white space for readability, and I could not reduce the extracts much further without losing comprehensibility :=)

The next primer in this series, Aide-Mémoire 205, will cover the four *Corporate Practices*:

9. Confession
10. Worship
11. Guidance
12. Celebration

Later on, the hope is to circle back and look at the spiritual practices in more depth, with more information on practicalities. As always, the good Lord willing and the creek don't rise :=)

Thank you for reading.⁸¹

⁸¹ Compiled for the Anglican Parish of St. Mary's, Russell, by Gerrit Botha, February, 2021.