

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY 205: FOUR CORPORATE 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 third in a three-part series on spiritual practices. The first was *203: Four Inward Practices* and the next one was *204: Four Outward Practices*.

Please note this does not contain the same introduction as the first one. 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.

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!

We can see more clearly nowadays how powerful people in the 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>	<i>5. Simplicity</i>	<i>9. Confession</i>
<i>2. Prayer</i>	<i>6. Solitude</i>	<i>10. Worship</i>
<i>3. Fasting</i>	<i>7. Submission</i>	<i>11. Guidance</i>
<i>4. Study</i>	<i>8. Service</i>	<i>12. Celebration</i>

This aide-mémoire is *a brief* introduction to the *corporate 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 four with the ninth practice: Confession.

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 CORPORATE PRACTICES

9. CONFESSION

At the heart of God is the desire to give and to forgive. Because of this, he set into motion the entire redemptive process that culminated in the cross and was confirmed in the resurrection... This redemptive process is a great mystery hidden in the heart of God...It is the ground upon which we can know that confession and forgiveness are realities that transform us. Without the cross the Discipline of confession would be only psychologically therapeutic. But it is so much more. It involves an objective change in our relationship with God and a subjective change in us. It is a means of healing and transforming the inner spirit...⁵

The Bible views salvation as both an event and a process. To converted people Paul says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). The Discipline of confession helps the believer to grow into "mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13)...⁶

"How is it that confession is listed under the Corporate Disciplines? I thought this was a private matter between the individual and God." Again, the answer is not "either/or," but "both/and."⁷ We are grateful for the biblical teaching, underscored in the Reformation,

⁵ *Celebration*, p.143-4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.145. In the *NRSV* Bible, the passage reads: "to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ."

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.145. In reading this chapter, we Anglicans have a benefit. Richard Foster writes from the Pentecostal tradition, where the practice of corporate confession had been lost. In Anglicanism, corporate confession has remained a strong part of our tradition. The penitential rite is an element, often the first element, of every liturgy. Forster's chapter still remains a grand reminder.

that “there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).⁸

We are also grateful for the biblical teaching, newly appreciated in our day, to “confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another. . .” (James 5:16).

Both are found in Scripture and neither need exclude the other.

Confession is a difficult Discipline for us because we all too often view the believing community as a fellowship of saints before we see it as a *fellowship of sinners*...We cannot bear to reveal our failures and shortcomings to others. We imagine that we are the only ones who have not stepped onto the high road to heaven. Therefore, we hide ourselves from one another and live in veiled lies and hypocrisy.

But if we know that the people of God are first a fellowship of sinners, we are freed to hear the unconditional call of God's love and to confess our needs openly before our brothers and sisters...We are sinners together. In acts of mutual confession, we release the power that heals. Our humanity is no longer denied, but transformed.⁹

a) Authority to Forgive

The followers of Jesus Christ have been given *the authority* to receive the confession of sin and to forgive it in his name.

“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20:23)... Such authority in no way threatens the value or efficacy of private confession.

The person who has known forgiveness and release from persistent, nagging habits of sin through private confession should rejoice

⁸ *Celebration*, p.145. In the NRSV Bible, the passage reads: “For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human...”

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.145-6.

greatly in this evidence of God's mercy. But there are others for whom this has not happened...¹⁰

God has given us our brothers and sisters to stand in Christ's stead and make God's presence and forgiveness real to us...

Bonhoeffer writes:

A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person. As long as I am by myself in the confession of my sins everything remains in the dark, but in the presence of a brother the sin has to be brought into the light.¹¹

The stylized form of this avenue of help has been called the Confessional or the sacrament of penance. Though many of us, myself included, would feel highly uncomfortable with that form of confession, it does have certain advantages.¹²

b) The Advantages of Confession

(1) Confession: no excuses

First, the formalized form of the printed confession does not allow for any excuses or extenuating circumstances. We must confess that we have sinned *by our own fault*, our own most grievous fault. Our sins cannot be called errors in judgment, nor is there any room to blame them on upbringing or family or mean neighbors. This is a *Reality Therapy* of the best sort since we are so prone to blame our sins on everybody and everything instead of taking *personal responsibility* for them.¹³

¹⁰ *Celebration*, p.146-7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.148. The quote is from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 1952, p. 116.

¹² Please remember that Foster is writing in the Pentecostal tradition.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.148.

(2) Absolution: forgiveness is spoken

A second advantage of the Confessional is that the word of forgiveness is expected and given in *the absolution*. The word of Scripture, or some similar word, is actually spoken out loud. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).¹⁴ The penitent is then told in clear, authoritative words that he is totally forgiven and set free of his sin.

(3) Penance: consider the cost

There is a third advantage to the institutionalized Confessional, namely, *penance*. If penance is viewed as a way of earning forgiveness, it is dangerous indeed. But if it is seen as an opportunity to pause a moment to consider the seriousness of our sin, then it has genuine merit...God pleads with us, “Oh, do not do this abominable thing that I hate!” (Jeremiah 44:4)¹⁵

c) Counsel in Making a Confession

What do we do? St. Alphonsus Liguori writes,

For a good confession three things are necessary:
an examination of conscience,
sorrow, and
a determination to avoid sin.¹⁶

(1) An examination of conscience

We are inviting God to move upon the heart and show us areas that need his forgiving and healing touch... we must be prepared to deal with *definite sins*. A generalized confession may save us from

¹⁴ *Celebration*, p.148. Every word of our Prayer Book is from scripture and this is a familiar quote from the penitential rite.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.148-9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.151. The quote comes from St. Alphonsus Liguori, “A Good Confession,” in *To Any Christian*, 1964, p. 192. He was a Catholic bishop and theologian (1696–1787).

humiliation and shame, but it will not ignite inner healing. The people who came to Jesus came with obvious, specific sins, and they were forgiven for each one. It is far too easy to avoid our real guilt in a general confession... I mean definite sins, the sins of the heart - pride, avarice, anger, fear - as well as the sins of the flesh - sloth, gluttony, adultery, murder.

In our desire to be specific we must not, however, run to the opposite danger of being unduly concerned to rout out every last detail in our lives...Francis de Sales counsels,

Do not feel worried if you do not remember
all your little peccadilloes in confession,
for as you often fall imperceptibly,
so, you are often raised up imperceptibly.¹⁷

(2) Sorrow

“Sorrow” is necessary to a good confession. Sorrow as it relates to confession is not primarily an emotion, though emotion may be involved. It is an abhorrence at having committed the sin, a deep regret at having offended the heart of the Father.

Sorrow is *an issue of the will* before it is an issue of the emotions. In fact, being sorrowful in the emotions without a godly sorrow in the will destroys the confession.¹⁸

(3) A determination to avoid sin

“A determination to avoid sin” is the third essential for a good confession....we ask God to give us a *yearning for holy living*, a hatred for unholy living. It is the will to be delivered from sin that we seek from God as we prepare to make confession. We do not have to

¹⁷ *Celebration*, p.151-2. The quote is from Douglas Steere, *On Beginning from Within*, 1943, p. 80. Francis de Sales was a Catholic bishop and saint (1567–1622), known for his writings on spiritual direction and spiritual formation.

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

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.152.

make God willing to forgive. In fact, it is God who is working to make us willing to seek his forgiveness.¹⁹

One further note on the preparation for confession; there must be a *definite termination* point in the self-examination process. Otherwise, we can easily fall into a permanent habit of self-condemnation. Confession begins in sorrow, but it ends in joy. There is celebration in the forgiveness of sins because it results in a *genuinely changed life*.²⁰

d) To whom to go to confess

It is quite correct theologically to say that every Christian believer can receive the confession of another,
(1) but not every Christian believer will have sufficient *empathy and understanding*.
(2)...it is a fact of life that some people seem unable to *keep a confidence*.
(3) Others are disqualified because they *would be horrified* at the revealing of certain sins.
(4) Still others, *not understanding* the nature and value of confession, would shrug it off with a "That's not so bad."²¹

Fortunately, many people do understand and would be delighted to minister in this way. These people are found by asking God to reveal them to us. They are also found by observing people to see who evidences a lively faith in God's power to forgive and exhibits the joy of the Lord in his or her heart.

The key qualifications are

¹⁹ *Celebration*, p.152-3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.153.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.153.

- spiritual maturity,
- wisdom,
- compassion,
- good common sense,
- the ability to keep a confidence, and
- a wholesome sense of humor.

Many pastors - though by no means all - can serve in this way. Often *ordinary folk* who hold no office or title whatever are among the best at receiving a confession.²²

But *what if* there is an offense [that] we could never bring ourselves to reveal? What if we lack the courage to open a particular corner of our lives? Then all we need to do is say to our brother or sister; "I need your help. There is a sin that I cannot bring myself to confess." Our confessor/friend will

"then adopt an easy means of dragging from its den the wild beast that would devour you. All you will have to do is to answer Yes or No to his interrogations. And behold, both the temporal and the eternal hell have disappeared, the grace of God is recovered, and peace of conscience reigns supreme."²³

e) Counsel in the Receiving of a Confession

Like any spiritual ministry there is a *preparation* involved in being able to hear rightly the confession of a brother or sister. We begin by learning to "*live under the cross.*" Bonhoeffer writes,

Anybody who lives beneath the Cross and who has discerned in the Cross of Jesus the utter wickedness of all men and of his own heart will find there is no sin that can ever be alien to him. Anybody who has once been horrified by the dreadfulness of

²² *Celebration*, p.153.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.154. The quote is from St. Alphonsus Liguori, "A Good Confession," p.193.

his own sin that nailed Jesus to the Cross will no longer be horrified by even the rankest sins of a brother.²⁴

This is the one thing that will save us from ever being offended in the confession of another. It forever delivers us from conveying any attitude of superiority... Therefore, there is nothing that anyone can say that will disturb us. Nothing... If we live in that reality, we will convey that spirit to others. They know it is safe to come to us... They know we will never condescend to them but, instead, understand...²⁵

We want to learn how to live so that *our very presence* will speak of the love and forgiving grace of God. Also, we should pray for an increase of the *gift of discernment*. This is especially important when we minister to them following the confession. We need to be able to perceive the real healing needed in the deep, inner spirit.

It is important that when others are opening their griefs to us, we discipline ourselves to *be quiet*. We will be tempted severely to relieve the tension of the situation by some offhanded comment. This is very distracting and even destructive to the sacredness of the moment. Neither should we try to pry out more details than are necessary. If we feel that out of embarrassment or fear they are holding something back, the best method is to *wait silently and prayerfully...*

It is often helpful by prayer to *set the cross between yourself and the penitent*. This protects them from receiving merely human emotion from you and protects you from receiving any harmful influences from them. Everything is filtered through the light of the cross... You are praying for them through the *power of the cross*.²⁶

²⁴ *Celebration*, p.154. The quote is from Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, p. 118.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.154-5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.155-6.

It hardly needs to be said that as they share, you are praying for them. Inwardly and imperceptively (it would be unkind to make a display of your praying) you are sending prayers of love and forgiveness into them. Also, you are praying that they will share the “key” that will reveal any area needing the healing touch of Christ.

Finally, it is extremely important that you *pray for the person* and not just counsel with them. Before or during the prayer we should announce to them that the forgiveness that is in Jesus Christ is now real and effective for them... The prayer is for the healing of the inner wounds that the sin has caused. It is best to accompany the prayer with the “*laying on of hands*” which is an elemental teaching of the Bible and is a means through which God communicates his lifegiving power (Hebrews 6:2)...²⁷

The Discipline of confession brings an *end to pretense*. God is calling into being a Church that can openly confess its frail humanity and know the forgiving and empowering graces of Christ. Honesty leads to confession, and *confession leads to change*. May God give grace to the Church once again to recover the Discipline of confession.²⁸

(pto: please turn over)

²⁷ *Celebration*, p.156.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.157.

10. WORSHIP

To worship is to experience Reality, to touch Life. It is to know, to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community. It is a breaking into the *Shekinah* of God, or better yet, being invaded by the *Shekinah* of God.*

(* "*Shekinah*" means the glory or the radiance of God dwelling in the midst of his people. It denotes the immediate Presence of God as opposed to a God who is abstract or aloof.)²⁹

Worship is our response to the overtures of love from the heart of the Father. Its central reality is found "in spirit and truth." It is kindled within us only when the Spirit of God touches our human spirit. Forms and rituals do not produce worship, nor does the disuse of forms and rituals. We can use all the right techniques and methods, we can have the best possible liturgy, but we have not worshiped the Lord until Spirit touches spirit...Our spirit must be *ignited by the divine fire*.³⁰

a) *Preparation for Worship*

A striking feature of worship in the Bible is that people gathered in what we could only call a "holy expectancy." They believed they would actually hear the *Kol Yahweh*, the voice of God.

How do we cultivate this holy expectancy? It begins in us as we enter the *Shekinah of the heart*. While living out the demands of our day, we are filled with inward worship and adoration. We work and play and eat and sleep, yet we are listening, ever listening, to our Teacher...³¹

²⁹ *Celebration*, p.158.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.158-9.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.162.

Brother Lawrence knew the same reality. Because he experienced the presence of God in the kitchen, he knew he would meet God in the Mass as well. He writes, “I cannot imagine how religious persons can live satisfied without *the practice of the Presence of God.*”³² Those who have once tasted the *Shekinah* of God in daily experience can never again live satisfied without “the practice of the presence of God.”

Live throughout the week as an heir of the kingdom, listening for his voice, obeying his word. Since you have heard his voice throughout the week, you know that you will hear his voice *as you gather* for public worship. Enter the service ten minutes early. Lift your heart in adoration to the King of glory... Invite the real Presence to be manifest. Next, lift into the light of Christ the pastor and other worship leaders. Picture the *Shekinah* of God's radiance surrounding them... When people begin to enter the room, glance around until you see someone who needs your intercessory work. Perhaps their shoulders are drooped, or they seem a bit sad... Hold them as a special intention throughout the service. If only a few in any given congregation will do this, it will deepen the worship experience of all.³³

In addition, when the people of God meet together, there often comes a sense of being “gathered” into one mind, becoming

³² *Celebration*, p.162. Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, 1950, p. 32. Brother Lawrence (1614–1691) had been a soldier, and then served as a lay brother in a Carmelite monastery in Paris, working mainly in the kitchen. He had a reputation for experiencing profound peace and visitors came to seek spiritual guidance from him. The wisdom he passed on to them later became the basis for the book, which quickly became a classic text on Christian spirituality.

More info at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brother_Lawrence.

Please don't try an old translation. The best translation I have read is by retired Baptist minister Marshall Davis, *Brother Lawrence, The Practice of the Presence of God in Modern English*, 2013. It is self-published on www.amazon.ca.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.163.

of one accord (Philippians 3:15). This experience far transcends *esprit de corps*. It is not in the least dependent upon homogeneous units or even knowing information about one another's lives.

There comes a *divine melting* of our separateness.

In the power of the one Spirit, we become “wrapped in a sense of unity and of Presence such as quiets all words and enfolds [us] within an unspeakable calm and interknittedness within a vaster life.”³⁴

b) Steps into Worship

(1) First, learn to practice the presence of God daily.

...Have *personal times* of inner worship and confession and Bible study and attentiveness to Christ, your present Teacher. All this will heighten your expectancy in public worship because the gathered experience of worship just becomes a continuation and an intensification of what you have been trying to do all week long.³⁵

(2) Second, have many different experiences of worship.

Worship God when you are alone. Have *home groups* not just for Bible study, but for the very experience of worship itself. Gather little groups of two and three and learn to offer up a sacrifice of praise. Many things can happen in smaller gatherings that, just by sheer size, cannot happen in the larger experience. All of these little experiences of worship will empower and impact the larger Sunday gatherings.

(3) Third, find ways to really prepare for the gathered experience of worship.

(4) Fourth, have a willingness to be gathered in the power of the Lord. That is, as an individual I must learn to let go of my

³⁴ *Celebration*, p.164. The quote is from Thomas R. Kelly, *The Eternal Promise*, 1966), p.74.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.170-1.

agenda, of my concern, of my being blessed, of my hearing the word of God. The language of the gathered fellowship is not “I,” but “we.” There is *a submission* to the ways of God. There is a submission to one another in the Christian fellowship. There is a desire for God's life to rise up in the group, not just within the individual.³⁶

(5) Fifth, cultivate holy dependency.

Holy dependency means that you are utterly and completely *dependent upon God* for anything significant to happen...

(6) Sixth, absorb distractions with gratitude.

If there is noise or distraction, rather than fussing and fuming about it, learn to take it in and conquer it. If little children are running about, bless them. Thank God that they are alive and that they have energy. Become *willing to relax* with distractions - they may be a message from the Lord...³⁷

(7) Seventh, learn to offer a sacrifice of worship.

Many times, you will not “feel” like worship...But you need to go anyway. You need to *offer a sacrifice* of worship. You need to be with the people of God and say, “These are my people. As stiff-necked and hard-hearted and sinful as we may be, together we come to God.”

Isaac Pennington says that when people are gathered for genuine worship,

They are like a heap of fresh and burning coals warming one another as a great strength and freshness and vigor of life flows into all.

One log by itself cannot burn for very long, but when many logs are put together, even if they are poor logs, they can make quite a fire.³⁸

³⁶ *Celebration*, p.171.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.172.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.172. The quote is from D. Elton Trueblood, *The People Called Quakers*, 1966, p. 91.

11. GUIDANCE

a) *Corporate Guidance*

Much of the teaching on divine guidance in our century has been noticeably deficient on the corporate aspect. We have received excellent instruction on how God leads us through Scripture and through reason and through circumstances and through the promptings of the Spirit upon the individual heart...But we have heard little about how God leads through his people, the body of Christ. On that subject there is profound silence.

For this reason, I have chosen to list guidance among the Corporate Disciplines and to *stress its communal side*. God does guide the individual richly and profoundly, but he also guides groups of people and can instruct the individual through the group experience.³⁹

...With quiet persistence Jesus showed them what it meant to live in response to the voice of the Father. He taught them that they, too, could hear the heaven sent voice and most clearly when together.

If two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For *where two or three are gathered in my name*, there am I in the midst of them (Matthew 18:19, 20).

In those words, Jesus gave his disciples both assurance and authority. There was the assurance that when a people genuinely gathered in his name his will could be discerned.

The superintending Spirit would utilize the checks and balances of the different believers to ensure that when their hearts were in unity they were in rhythm with the heartbeat of the Father. Assured that they had heard the voice of the true Shepherd, they were able to

³⁹ *Celebration*, p.175-6.

pray and act with authority. His will plus their unity equaled authority.⁴⁰

... No doubt those experiences in discerning the will of God in community contributed greatly to Paul's understanding of the Church as the body of Christ. He saw that the gifts of the Spirit were given by the Spirit to the body in such a way that interdependence was ensured. No one person possessed everything. Even the most mature needed the help of others. The most insignificant had something to contribute. No one could hear the whole counsel of God in isolation.⁴¹

...It is possible for business decisions to be made under a sense of the corporate leading of the Holy Spirit. Quakers have done so for years and have demonstrated the feasibility of such an approach. Business meetings should be viewed as worship services. Available facts can be presented and discussed, all with a view to listening to the voice of Christ. Facts are only one aspect of the decision-making process and in themselves are not conclusive. The Spirit can lead contrary to or in accord with the available facts. God will implant a spirit of unity when the right path has been chosen and trouble us with restlessness when we have not heard correctly. Unity rather than majority rule is the principle of corporate guidance. Spirit-given unity goes beyond mere agreement. It is the perception that we have heard the *Kol Yahweh*, the voice of God.⁴²

b) *The Spiritual Director*

In the Middle Ages not even the greatest saints attempted the depths of the inward journey without the help of a spiritual director.

⁴⁰ *Celebration*, p.177.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.177.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.182.

Today the concept is hardly understood, let alone practiced, except in the Roman Catholic monastic system.⁴³ That is a tragedy, for the idea of the spiritual director is highly applicable to the contemporary scene. It is a beautiful expression of divine guidance through the help of our brothers and sisters.

Spiritual directorship has an exemplary history. Many of the first spiritual directors were the desert Fathers⁴⁴ and were held in high regard for their ability to “discern spirits.” People would often travel for miles in the wilderness just to hear a brief word of advice, a “word of salvation,” which summed up the will and judgment of God for them in their actual concrete situation.

What is *the purpose* of a spiritual director? The seventeenth century Benedictine mystic, Dom Augustine Baker, writes,

In a word, he is only God's usher,
and must lead souls in God's way, and not his own.

His direction is simply and clearly to lead us to our real Director. He is *the means of God* to open the path to the inward teaching of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵

His function is purely and simply charismatic. He leads only by the force of his *own personal holiness*. He is not a superior or some ecclesiastically appointed authority. The relationship is of an adviser to a friend. Though the director has obviously advanced further into

⁴³ *Celebration*, p.185. Foster uses, as was the custom of his time, mostly masculine pronouns. We recognize that today's writers and readers are more accustomed to inclusive language, but we also try to view history with compassion.

⁴⁴ Please see Aide-Mémoire 202: Spiritual Wisdom from Scripture for more on the Desert Fathers and Mothers.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.185. The quote is from *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, 1960, p.12.

Fr. Augustine Baker, OSB, was a well-known English Benedictine mystic and an ascetic writer (1575 –1641).

the inner depths, the two are *both learning and growing* in the realm of the Spirit.⁴⁶

Spiritual direction is concerned with *the whole person* and the interrelationship of all of life. Thomas Merton tells of a Russian spiritual director who was criticized for spending so much time earnestly advising an old peasant woman about the care of her turkeys. “Not at all,” he replied, “her whole life is in those turkeys.” Spiritual direction takes up *the concrete daily experiences* of our lives and gives them sacramental significance. We learn “the sacrament of the present moment” as Jean-Pierre de Caussade put it.⁴⁷

Spiritual direction is first born out of *natural, spontaneous human relationships*. A hierarchical, or even organizational system, is not essential to its function and is often destructive to it. The ordinary kinds of caring and sharing that belong to the Christian community are the starting point for spiritual direction. Out of them will flow “kingdom authority” through mutual subordination and servanthood.

A spiritual director must be a person who has developed a comfortable acceptance of himself or herself. That is, a *genuine maturity* must pervade all of that person's life. Such persons are *unmoved* by the fluctuations of the times. They can *absorb* the selfishness and mediocrity and apathy around them *and transform* it. They are unjudging and unshakable. They must have *compassion* and *commitment*. Like Paul who thought of Timothy as his “beloved child,” they must be prepared to take on certain parental responsibilities. Theirs must be *a tough love* that refuses to give

⁴⁶ *Celebration*, p.185.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.186. The quotes are from Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, 1960, p.8, and from Jean-Pierre de Caussade, *The Sacrament of the Present Moment*, tr. Kitty Muggeridge, 1982.

approval to every whim. They should also *know enough of the human psyche* that they will not reinforce unconscious and infantile needs for authoritarianism.⁴⁸

Spiritual directors must be on the *inward journey themselves* and be willing to share their own struggles and doubts. There needs to be a realization that together they are learning from Jesus, their ever-present Teacher.

How does such a relationship come about? As with all other things in the kingdom of God, it is *arranged by prayer*. Bringing and resting our case with God, we wait patiently for his way to be manifest. If he should invite us to speak to someone or make certain arrangements, we gladly obey.⁴⁹

If we have the *humility* to believe that we can learn from our brothers and sisters and the understanding that some have gone further into the divine Center than others, then we can see the necessity of spiritual direction. As Virgil Vogt of Reba Place Fellowship says, "If you cannot listen to your brother, you cannot listen to the Holy Spirit."⁵⁰

In reflecting on the value of this ministry for centuries of Christians, Thomas Merton says that the spiritual director was something of a spiritual father who 'begot' the perfect life in the soul of his disciple by his instructions first of all, but also by his prayer, his sanctity and his example. He was ... a kind of 'sacrament' of the Lord's presence in the ecclesiastical community.⁵¹

⁴⁸ *Celebration*, p.186.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.186-7.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.187. The quote is from Dave and Neta Jackson, *Living Together in a World Falling Apart*, 1974, p. 101.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.187. The quote is from *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, 1960, p.9.

12. CELEBRATION

Celebration is at the heart of the way of Christ... Celebration brings joy into life, and joy makes us strong...

We may be able to begin tennis instruction or piano lessons by dint of will, but we will not keep at them for long without joy. In fact, the only reason we can begin is because we know that joy is the end result. That is what sustains all novices; they know there is a sense of pleasure, enjoyment, joy in mastery.

Celebration is *central to all* the Spiritual Disciplines. Without a joyful spirit of festivity, the Disciplines become dull, death breathing tools in the hands of modern Pharisees. Every Discipline should be characterized by carefree gaiety and a sense of thanksgiving.⁵²

Joy is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Often, I am inclined to think that *joy is the motor*, the thing that keeps everything else going. Without joyous celebration to infuse the other Disciplines, we will sooner or later abandon them. Joy produces energy. Joy makes us strong.⁵³

a) *The Path to Joy*

When the power that is in Jesus reaches into our work and play and redeems them, there will be joy where once there was mourning. To overlook this is to miss the meaning of the Incarnation.

That is why I have placed celebration at the end of this study. Joy is *the end result* of the Spiritual Disciplines' functioning in our lives.

⁵² *Celebration*, p.190-1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.191. The full quote from Paul's Letter to the church in Galatia:

"By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."

God brings about the *transformation of our lives* through the Disciplines, and we will not know genuine joy until there is a transforming work within us. Many people try to come into joy far too soon. Often, we try to pump up people with joy when in reality nothing has happened in their lives. God has not broken into the routine experiences of their daily existence. Celebration comes when the common ventures of life are redeemed.⁵⁴

b) The Spirit of Carefree Celebration

The apostle Paul calls us to “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again, I say, Rejoice” (Philippians 4:4, KJV). But how are we to do that?⁵⁵

...When we *trust* God, we are free to rely entirely upon him to provide what we need: “By prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” Prayer is the means by which we move the arm of God; hence we can live in a spirit of carefree celebration.⁵⁶

Paul, however, does not end the matter there. Prayer and trust by themselves are not adequate to bring us joy. Paul proceeds to tell us to set our minds on all the things in life that are *true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and gracious* (Philippians. 4:8). God has established a created order full of excellent and good things, and it follows naturally that as we give our attention to those things, we will be happy. That is God's appointed way to joy. If we think we will have joy only by praying and singing psalms, we will be disillusioned.

⁵⁴ *Celebration*, p.193.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p.194.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p.1945. The quote is also from Paul's Letter to the Galatians, chapter 4:

⁶“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

But if we fill our lives with *simple good things and constantly thank God* for them, we will be joyful, that is, full of joy. And what about our problems? When we determine to dwell on the good and excellent things in life, we will be so full of those things that they will tend to swallow our problems.

The decision to set the mind on the higher things of life is an *act of the will*. That is why celebration is a Discipline. It is not something that falls on our heads. It is the result of a *consciously chosen way of thinking and living*. When we choose this way, the healing and redemption in Christ will break into the inner recesses of our lives and relationships, and the inevitable result will be joy.⁵⁷

c) *The Benefits of Celebration*

(1) Not taking ourselves too seriously

Far and away the most important benefit of celebration is that it saves us from taking ourselves too seriously. This is a desperately *needed grace* for all those who are earnest about the Spiritual Disciplines. It is an occupational hazard of devout folk to become stuffy bores. This should not be. Of all people, we should be the most free, alive, interesting. Celebration adds a note of gaiety, festivity, hilarity to our lives. After all, Jesus rejoiced so fully in life that he was accused of being a winebibber and a glutton. Many of us lead such sour lives that we cannot possibly be accused of such things.⁵⁸

(2) Antidote for sadness

Celebration also can be an *effective antidote* for the periodic sense of sadness that can constrict and oppress the heart. Depression is an epidemic today and celebration can help stem the tide.

⁵⁷ *Celebration*, p.195.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.196.

(3) Gives us perspective

Another benefit of celebration is its ability to give us perspective. *We can laugh at ourselves.* We come to see that the causes we champion are not nearly so monumental as we would like to believe. In celebration the high and the mighty regain their balance and the weak and lowly receive new stature. Who can be high or low at the festival of God? Together the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless all celebrate the glory and wonder of God. There is no leveler of caste systems like festivity.⁵⁹

(4) Frees us from judgementalism

Thus, freed of an inflated view of our own importance, we are also *freed of a judgmental spirit.* Others do not look so awful, so unspiritual. Common joys can be shared without sanctimonious value judgments.

(5) Celebration begets more celebration

Finally, an interesting characteristic of celebration is that it tends toward more celebration. *Joy begets joy.* Laughter begets laughter. It is one of those few things in life that we multiply by giving.⁶⁰

d) The Practice of Celebration

If celebration is primarily a corporate Discipline, and if it brings such benefit to the people of God, how is it practiced?

The question is a good one, for modern men and women have become so mechanized that we have snuffed out nearly all experiences of spontaneous joy. Most of our experiences of celebration are artificial, plastic.

⁵⁹ *Celebration*, p.196.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.196-7.

(1) Singing and dancing

One way to practice celebration is through *singing, dancing, shouting*. Because of the goodness of God, the heart breaks forth into psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Worship, praise, adoration flow from the inner chambers.⁶¹

(2) Laughter

Laughing is another way we practice celebration. The old adage that *laughter is the best medicine* has a lot going for it... So, poke fun at yourself. Enjoy wholesome jokes and clever puns. Relish good comedy. Learn to laugh; it is a discipline to be mastered. Let go of the everlasting burden of always needing to sound profound.⁶²

(3) Creativity

A third way to encourage celebration is to accent the *creative gifts* of fantasy and imagination... imagination can release a flood of creative ideas, and it can be lots of fun...

Let us also *relish the creativity of others*. Those who create sculptures and paintings and plays and music are a great gift to us. We can organize art shows to display their work. We can sing their music in intimate gatherings and formal concerts. We can arrange for dramatic productions of our friend's works. We can have a family art show and feature the kid's paintings from school.⁶³

Another thing we can do is to make *family events* into times of celebration and thanksgiving. This is particularly true of the various *rites of passage* in our culture like birthdays, graduations, marriages, anniversaries...

We can also celebrate *lesser, but equally important events* like finishing a major project, securing a job, receiving a raise.

⁶¹ *Celebration*, p.197.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.198.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.198-9.

In addition, why not form *regular rituals of celebration* that are not connected with special events.⁶⁴

A fifth thing we can do is to take advantage of the *festivals* of our culture and really celebrate...We are not limited to established festivals; we can *develop our own*...⁶⁵

Celebration *gives us the strength* to live in all the other Disciplines. When faithfully pursued, the other Disciplines bring us deliverance from those things that have made our lives miserable for years which, in turn, evokes increased celebration. Thus, an unbroken *circle of life and power* is formed.⁶⁶

RICHARD FOSTER'S CONCLUSION

We have seen how *meditation* heightens our spiritual sensitivity which, in turn, leads us into *prayer*. Very soon we discover that prayer involves *fasting* as an accompanying means. Informed by these three Disciplines, we can effectively move into *study* which gives us discernment about ourselves and the world in which we live.

Through *simplicity* we live with others in integrity. *Solitude* allows us to be genuinely present to people when we are with them. Through *submission* we live with others without manipulation, and through *service* we are a blessing to them.⁶⁷

Confession frees us from ourselves and releases us to *worship*. Worship opens the door to *guidance*. All the Disciplines freely exercised bring forth the doxology of *celebration*.

⁶⁴ *Celebration*, p.199.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.199-200.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.201.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.201.

The classical Disciplines of the spiritual life beckon us to the Himalayas of the Spirit. Now we stand at timber line awed by the snowy peaks before us. We step out in confidence with Guide who has blazed the trail and conquered the highest summit.⁶⁸

SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

In Aide-Mémoire 205 we introduced 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.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ *Celebration*, p.201.

⁶⁹ Compiled for the Anglican Parish of St. Mary's, Russell, by Gerrit Botha, February, 2021.