

### ***Retreat: An Intro to Spiritual Disciplines (updated: August 2019)***

- Objectives: Connect to God; connect to each other; learn (more) about prayer and other spiritual disciplines
- For us, attendance is just short of mandatory—and everyone pays for it to strongly encourage attendance.
- An all-day or overnight retreat is preferable for the camaraderie that it will build and to allow more time for reflection and exercises. (If you end up with a shorter, four-hour evening retreat, you could have an hour for dinner, an hour for each session, and time for exercises.)
- Another reason for a longer retreat: time for DC'ers to share aspects of “their story” (God, family, work) with each other.
- Make sure to arrange for appropriate worship (including copies of lyrics or PowerPoint for lyrics if necessary), seating arrangements, microphone, snacks, etc.
- Send out directions, instructions on what to bring (e.g., Bible, DC101 book, pen; towels, bedding, ear plugs), encouragement not to bring/use a cell phone, and a reminder to dress appropriately for being outside.
- If the Retreat Center is unfamiliar and/or you have a larger group, make sure to determine arrangements for car-pooling, parking, etc.
- If you have capacity for it, make separate sleeping arrangements for snorers.
- If you have multiple groups, sleep group members together, strongly consider teaching them separately (to maintain and extend small group dynamics and to foster discussion), but have corporate worship.

*Assuming a Friday evening through Saturday noon retreat, our suggested schedule:*

-Friday evening

-Name tags and Fellowship—6:00; Dinner—6:30-7:40

-Intro and Icebreaker/Scripture memory quiz (incl. Barney Fife video clip:

[http://teachertube.com/viewVideo.php?title=Barney\\_Fife\\_The\\_Preamble\\_To\\_The\\_Constitution&video\\_id=16465](http://teachertube.com/viewVideo.php?title=Barney_Fife_The_Preamble_To_The_Constitution&video_id=16465))—7:45-8:10

-Corporate Worship; give instructions for late PM and early AM—8:10-8:25

-Teach on Intro to Spiritual Disciplines in Smaller Groups—8:30

-Snack and Fellowship (CornHole, Bonfire, etc.)—10:00

-Saturday morning

-Meet for instructions on Solitude/Silence—6:50

-Solitude/Silence/Meditation—7:00 (incl. potential mini-fast from coffee if pre-breakfast)

-Breakfast—8:00

-Teaching on Prayer—9:00-10:30 (including a discussion of solitude/silence)

-Break—10:30

-Communicate vision; “praying the Scriptures”, “Circle of Five”, and if time (to close things out), popcorn prayers—10:45-11:45

-Wrap-up—11:45

### ***Friday evening: Teaching Session #1***

-Friday evening teaching session: an *introduction* to the “why of spiritual disciplines”—a key to the Christian life—using excerpts from Dallas Willard’s *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (as detailed below) and in-depth discussion of verses and questions in the DC course book. Fill out the two pages in the book. Weave in the four articles as appropriate. Taken separately, each of the sections— the articles, the questions (p. 111), and the verses (p. 112)—should each take 20-35 minutes. Don’t skimp!

-By way of introduction, it’s worth noting that our coverage tonight is only an intro. But they are a key to the Christian life—as with the game Othello’s motto: “a minute to learn; a lifetime to master”.

#### ***1a.) What makes something a discipline?***

-disciple under a mentor; typically benefits from good coaching/counsel

-short-run costs and long-run benefits

-implies difficulty of means and ends; hate tests vs. tests not prepared for

-often, at least initially, the means are not “reasonable” (e.g., Karate Kid’s “wax on/off”; various exercises in “The King’s Speech”; writing notes vs. listening only in a sermon; Scripture memory) and the ends are not always measurable, esp. early-on (e.g., patience in lifting weights)—taken on faith and the testimony of others

-see: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2015/07/23/tim-tebow-philadelphia-eagles-tom-house-quarterback-coach/30575803/>

-a nice definition of a discipline from Willard’s *Divine Conspiracy*: “A discipline is any activity within our power that we engage in to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort.”

-disciplines require work, diligence, focused effort, working hard and working smart (Willard, p. 24)

***1b.) What makes something a spiritual discipline? Why should one practice spiritual disciplines in general? Why should one practice any given spiritual discipline?***

-the goal: love God more passionately and serve others more effectively

-and both, reflexively—especially when under pressure (*Willard's p. 8 on loving one's enemies*; Mt 26:41's willing spirit but weak flesh)

-see: "Muscle memory". Tony Gwynn was an excellent hitter who would incessantly watch videotapes of opposing pitchers. The time to swing is so miniscule, that the body must simply know what to do—rather than thinking about it. A nice analogy for the spiritual walk—that our reflexes would ideally be transformed by the Spirit and spiritual disciplines. In the heat of a difficult moment, if you have to think about it, it's usually too late! You see the same principle in music (no time to think about playing fast notes!) and mundane activities like running stairs, riding a bike, etc.

-disciplines have no value in and of themselves; means and ends (e.g., Scripture memory; *Willard's p. 138a*)

-dealing w/ mind/body habits (see: me and Tonia pre-Christ background); all inter-related

-SD as esp. important in areas where one struggles (see: baseball—a la *Willard's p. 138b*)

-see: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-secret-left-handed-life-of-odell-beckham-1447258252>

-understanding the connection between body and mind with respect to habits, the spillover effects to other areas of life from having discipline in one area (or not), etc.

-will take effort, strategy, and diligence (*Willard's p. 24*); unexpected side benefit of DC

-in contrast, one might be tempted to think that "it should be easier (or quicker)"

-see: fasting to focus or to break addiction to a neutral/bad practice; commit to apologize; putting the toilet seat down

**1c.) What are the potential dangers in practicing spiritual disciplines?**

-legalism/duty (wrt J&S)

-When practicing disciplines, avoid legalism. If you fail, you're prone to guilt and despair; if you succeed, you're prone to pride, self-righteousness, and judgmentalism; if you don't try, you're prone to all sorts of things! (*Willard, p. 137-138; Bridges' article on learner vs. legalist*).

-guilt/despair (if failure) vs. pride/self-righteousness/judgmental (if success)

-confuse means and ends—SD vs. a SD'ed life

-a great way to express it: **the goal is a spiritually-disciplined life not the spiritual disciplines per se** (*Willard, p. 3-4*).

**2.) What are some examples of spiritual disciplines of omission/commission?**

-Omission refers to things you don't do—so, this includes disciplines like solitude, silence, and fasting. (See: *Patterson on Fasting and Sanford on Silence*.)

-fasting's absence in the face of consumerism and our frequent failure to wrestle with the things that grab our ankles and slow us down

-see: various forms of fasting, incl. speeding, TV, sports talk radio; vs. various forms of gluttony

-Commission refers to things you do—so, this includes service, worship, study, etc.

→ Sleep can be either!

→ Disciplines of omission are useful to deal with sins of commission; disciplines of commission are useful to deal with sins of omission.

→ Encourage your group members here (and next week) to engage in a spiritual discipline as a result of this weekend's study—to make the time (see: *Fleming's article on "finding the time"*).

### ***Friday evening (cont'd)***

→ Although it may not seem like much, spend a lot of time *tearing into* the five Bible verses; they're unbelievably rich in application and connections to this topic. *But let them do most of the talking; you can fill in the blanks!* It should be as simple as asking them to talk about words and verses that strike them—with a few follow-up questions as useful.

**3a.) Luke 9:23** “Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

- to “all” but “anyone” implies a choice—but a choice that is required for discipleship
- “cross”—not an icon or on jewelry back then; sounds poetic today, but an instrument of torture and death then...*nothing* positive!
  - crucify a la Gal 5:24's flesh and 6:14's world
- “deny” and “take up” as omission and commission
- verbs: all active and aggressive/offensive
- this as pre-cross—and note that Christ had help carrying his literal cross

**3b.) Romans 12:1-2** “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual (NKJV's “reasonable”!) act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

- “Therefore...”—in light of ch. 11's emphasis on God's glory and 12:1's “mercy”; if God is not all that—and doesn't want the best for you, then it will be impossible to do this
- 1's body and 2's mind
- 2a's “conform”—habits, peer pressure/culture
- 2a's “any longer” implies this is something we often do and are looking to stop/reduce
- 2b's “then”—if not, then you can't!

**3c.) I Timothy 4:7-8** “...train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”

- 7a can be a discipline for some!
- train vs. try; train hard and smart
- implication: if I'm not godly, I'm not training well

**3d.) Hebrews 12:1** “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” (a la Eph 2:10)

-“therefore...”—motivated on ch. 11’s “hall of faith/hope”—the faith/hope of others; based on God moving in history and in our lives

→ Are we inspired by others? Are we an inspiration to others?

-“everything...” vs. “sin...”—what’s the difference? Former as good/neutral vs. great; former as relatively subtle

-on “throw off”, see: Steve Taylor’s song, [“Finish Line”](#)

**3e.) I Peter 2:11-12** “Dear friends, I urge (Rom 12:1) you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul (Gal 5:16). Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds (Eph 2:10) and glorify God on the day he visits us.”

-11’s “aliens and strangers” vs. 12’s “among the pagans” (Rom 12:2; see: Stott’s “rabbit-hole Christianity”)

-Jesus’ ministry known more for what he did (esp. among the pagans), than for what he didn’t do

-something that one gets better at (II Pet 3:18)

## *Disciplines Retreat: Saturday AM (cont'd)*

### I. Solitude / “Be still”

-what solitude isn't: reading the Bible (perhaps meditate on a verse); talking to God (some, but more about listening)

-slow the mind, see things you don't usually see; a reminder that we're finite

II. teaching session #2: a discussion of the concepts, questions, principles, and verses in the DC course book (p. 113-115)

-Open with some discussion (5-10 minutes) of their time in solitude/silence.

→ Don't get bogged down on #1-3 (p. 113). At minimum, run through the list, noting the possibilities. (Some of these will be provocative or even revolutionary for your group members.) Beyond that, you might want to comment on some of the particulars—as they interest you or as you have value-added.

-#1: People often feel guilty for falling asleep while praying. While that shouldn't be the only time and type of communication with God, what's the problem with falling asleep while talking to your Father and laying in His lap?

-#3: ACTS is useful as a model of balanced prayer—as opposed to the habit of focusing on only one or two aspects. APTAT is a John Piper tool that refers to prayer as a lifestyle—over a period of time, when facing a challenge or temptation that requires action. Daniel 3:16-18's praying to stay within difficult circumstances is a challenging but important concept to master (and finds a famous parallel in Christ's trial in the Garden of Gethsemane). You could add “The Prayer of Jabez” as another example.

→ Spend the bulk of your time on Questions 4 and 5.

-#4c: The context of Joshua 10 was a covenant that Joshua had established with the Gibeonites, promising to protect them. In this situation, there wasn't anything to pray about! (Note also that God speaks to Joshua after he does the right thing.) The Isaiah 1 passage points to the same thing: the prophet telling them to do the right thing or their prayers were worthless. And in Isaiah 37, the prophet does not pray when asked to do so; he already knew the answer. More broadly, sometimes, prayer is a cop-out when we already know what God wants.

-Two other provocative questions: When is repetitive prayer passionate vs. faithless? When is praying for “God's will” appropriate and humble vs. a faithless cop-out?



## *Disciplines Retreat (cont'd)*

### III. the Saturday morning prayer activity session

→ If it all possible, do at least a prayer exercise. At the least, try something familiar like prayer partners. Or hopefully, you'll lead them through something more adventurous.

-“Circle of five” prayer: One person directs the group with what to pray about, how long to pray, a 15-second warning, etc. Have X group members seated in an inner circle and another X in an outer circle. (For us, X is typically five. If you have multiple groups, try to keep group members together.) Each outside person prays for an inside person (for about two minutes), and then rotates to the next inside person. After completing the prayers, the inside and outside people trade places and then repeat the process.

-Suggested areas for prayer:

1. one thing for which you are especially grateful
2. one heavy burden—someone close to you who is sick, having marriage problems, etc.
3. one spiritual discipline in which you especially want to grow
4. one sin of omission from which you want to repent
5. bless the person's spouse by name and pray for their marriage to be strong (or for them as a single)
6. one way in which you want to grow within your prayer life

-“Prayer Imaging” (from Richard Foster)—e.g., imagine Jesus sitting alongside your enemy; imagine you and Jesus looking down on your family; you with Christ while He hands you gifts; you and Jesus by a lake having a difficult conversation; and so on.

-“Praying through the Scriptures” (a la Don Whitney):

-explain method: prayers based on phrases/verses moving through a Psalm [or after some experience, an epistle])

-provide an example: Ps 23:1a's “The Lord is my Shepherd” might result in thankfulness that the Lord has been my Shepherd in a certain area, prayer that I would be a good shepherd to others, and so on. Ps 23:1b's “I shall not want” might thank God for his provision, encourage me to be more generous to others, etc.

-do this briefly as a group: leader reads verse/phrase and pauses while they pray about things that come to mind from the passage

-“Popcorn” prayer: short, spontaneous prayers over a wide range of topics—or following the Lord's Prayer line-by-line