

# **Celebration of Discipline Study Guide**

## **Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster (religion)**

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## Plot Summary

*Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* is a spiritual guidebook explaining the twelve Spiritual Disciplines and how they can bring a person closer to God. The disciplines are divided into three groups, Inward, Outward, and Corporate. The twelve disciplines are meditation, prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. The discussion of each discipline is supported with Scriptures and scholarly quotes that help readers grow closer to God.

The four Inward Disciplines are discussed—meditation, prayer, fasting, and study—which will improve a person's spiritual life. The four Outward Disciplines—simplicity, solitude, submission and service—reveal what people need to do to improve the world around them. The last four are the corporate disciplines—confession, worship, guidance, and celebration—which focus on the relationships within the community and growing closer to God. The author also shows how important faith, hope, and love are to the spiritual journey, and the benefits of living the life of discipline.

The author uses the scripture and personal examples to help explain the disciplines. Each one includes the explanation of the discipline and also what challenges the reader may face when practicing them. All of the disciplines are presented with equal importance—no one discipline is more important than another—all are needed to fully reach spiritual growth. Spiritual growth is what transforms people and allows them to become who God desires them to be. When they struggle with the journey all they need to do is look to Jesus for guidance and as the example. He walked the journey before us to clear the path.

The disciplines are presented for any person to practice in any part of the world at any time of day—they are available to all people equally. No matter what Christian denomination, age, gender, or nationality, the disciplines are a gift from God to enhance and bless lives. The true journey begins when readers put into action what they have learned.



# Introduction

## Introduction Summary and Analysis

This edition of the book is being written two decades after the book's first publication. This is the second time the publisher asked the author to revise the text to celebrate the publication anniversary. It is a testament to the writing that after over two decades people receive guidance in their daily walk with God through the principles in this book. The author is a Quaker pastor who includes examples from his personal and professional life. He explains twelve Spiritual Disciplines, which are broken into three categories; Inward, Outward, and Corporate Disciplines.

As a new pastor, Richard J. Foster was prepared to show the world what he could accomplish but was discouraged because instead of being a "shining light" to the people, he really just entered the desert like the former pastor had warned. To better serve his congregation, he begins to read the works of Augustine Hippo, Francis of Assisi, Julian of Norwich, and others, referring to them as the Devotional Masters of the Christian Faith. These were the first of three influences on his writing.

The second influence was Dr. Dallas Willard who led many of the Scripture studies at the church. His leadership and teaching went beyond the Scripture topic—he taught from his heart and touched the hearts of others.

The third influence was the pastor of a large influential Lutheran church near the author's small Quaker church. Pastor William Luther Vaswig taught the author about prayer through praying with him. A woman from his own congregation also showed the author how to make spirituality a reality within humanity.

These influences needed catalysts. The first catalyst was a former missionary, Bill Cathers, who prays over Richard to have the hands of a writer. Richard had never told anyone that he wanted to be a writer—the encounter with Cathers empowered him to begin his ministry of writing.

Author and Quaker leader D. Elton Trueblood was the second catalyst. Without any knowledge of Richard's desire to write a book, Trueblood asked Richard what book he was writing. When Richard responded the book was not ready, Elton responded "soon you must write a book."

Long-time friends and surrogate parents Ken and Doris Boyce were the third catalysts. They offered encouragement, support, and service. Doris helped type manuscripts, and they offered their motor home as a location for Richard to write.

After the catalysts came three divine providences. Richard naively contacted a prominent publishing company, Harper & Row, to discuss publication of his manuscript. Usually unpublished writers receive no response, but Richard meets with the religion editor who reads the manuscript and sends an acceptance letter.



In the meantime, Elton Trueblood had sent the book summary with a recommendation to Clayton Carlson, the religion publisher at Harper & Row where Elton had published all his books. Trueblood never told Richard about what he did. Only later did Mr. Carlson share it with Richard.

The third divine providence came after the acceptance of the proposal when Ron Woodard offered to cover the preaching assignments while Richard finished the book.

The book became more than mere squiggles. Through God's grace it has become a vessel for people to transform themselves and their relationship with God.



# The Spiritual Disciplines: Door to Liberations

## The Spiritual Disciplines: Door to Liberations Summary and Analysis

The spiritual disciplines call everyone who is willing to live life deeper and explore their spirituality. No matter your call in life, the spiritual disciplines are applicable within all types of relationships. Theological knowledge is not a requirement to understand or practice the disciplines—what is required is a longing for God.

There are two types of difficulties a person will face when delving into the spiritual disciplines. The first is philosophical and the second is practical.

The philosophic difficulty comes because the current times have more focus on materialism and therefore make it a challenge for a person to go past the physical world to properly explore the spiritual life. The practical difficulty comes down to people not knowing how to explore their spirituality. The author stresses that while striving to live the disciplines, people must also maintain their relationship and intimacy with God and not allow their lives to be overtaken by their duties.

Sin is a natural part of life—it comes forth through the actions of the body and mind and becomes an ingrained habit. But it is not through willpower that these habits are conquered. God is the one responsible for any changes that take place inside the heart, not humans. God's grace gives the gift of righteousness needed for the change of heart. God is the source of our transformation but people must not just sit back waiting. Living the spiritual disciplines brings us closer to God and opens us up for His gift of transformation. Grace from God is freely given, but in return a person must constantly make the correct choices to keep straight on the path God wants them to follow to transform them from the inside.

It is easy for the disciplines to become law-like and self-righteous. They begin to manipulate and control the human spirit rather than open it up to God. Pride takes over when people perceive they have become the "right kind of person," and fear takes over when control is being lost. To keep this from happening, the author shows how Jesus is ready to guide us gently back on His right path.

The author sets the tone of the book before explaining each of the disciplines. He shows the many things that can take us further away from God. The author's goal is to guide people closer to God and to remove barriers to spiritual growth.



# The Discipline of Meditation

## The Discipline of Meditation Summary and Analysis

Meditation is the first of the inward disciplines. The author observes how difficult it is to get beyond the superficial and delve deeper spiritually. To meditate effectively, a person must overcome the obstacles of the devil which include noise, business, and crowds, and find silence through contemplative prayer. During Christian meditation, faithfulness and obedience are the focus, resulting in behavioral changes. This is not only for common people and sinners, as Jesus often retreats by Himself to be closer to God. As people listen to and follow Jesus, they are in turn listening to and following God, and establishing the model for meditation.

The author observes how meditation gives the reader the opportunity to walk and talk with Jesus every day in a very intimate and reverent manner. The goal is to have this encounter not only during meditation but in all aspects of daily life. Christian meditation and Eastern meditation, while often confused, are actually quite the opposite. The author differentiates them by explaining how Christian meditation hopes to fill the mind, while Eastern meditation hopes to empty it.

Most people are initially scared away from mediation because it requires they meet God by themselves with no go between. Meditation needs to begin with a prayer for the desire to encounter God, and for God's grace, which can change how a person thinks and imagines. Imagination can be used for good or evil, but the more God becomes a part of someone's life, the more the imagination will be transformed for good.

Before meeting God through meditation, a person needs to prepare by considering the time, place, and posture. What is most important is realizing the potential of meditation throughout the day and making it a priority. The most important consideration regarding place is that it be conducive to meditation. The quieter and more peaceful the better. When discussing the correct posture, the author points out there is not one set position required for meditation, but there are things to consider. The first criteria is to make sure it is comfortable, which is different for different people. When it comes to time, place, and posture, the end result needs to ensure the body, mind, and spirit are all focused on meeting Christ.

Meditation is different from merely reading the Scriptures. This method makes the scriptures come to life and become more personal. The next form is "re-collection" and also "centering-down." This format requires being still, silent, and centering the mind. The next form is meditation upon creation when the focus is on appreciating and seeing all the wonder God created. Next is when the focus is on world events and having God reveal their significance in our lives. God can help show how these should truly affect lives and what action a person should take. No matter what method of mediation, the author stresses that as a person learns and grows in the spirit, so will they grow in their meditation.

Meditation is not difficult for God; once a person invites Him into his or her spirit, meditation no longer presents a challenge.





# The Discipline of Prayer

## The Discipline of Prayer Summary and Analysis

The next discipline is prayer. It is through prayer that change occurs. When people truly pray, they begin to match God's thoughts and desires, share what He loves and what He wills, and soon they see the world from the same point of view as God. But for true prayer to take place, prayer needs to be a way of life, not just an afterthought. There is comfort in knowing that God meets people in every stage of prayer. Once in communion with God, prayer will become deeper and spiritually stronger.

There is a learning process associated with prayer. In the Bible, the disciples ask, "Lord, teach us to pray." By looking at all the references to prayer in the Bible, the author saw errors in how he prayed; so he changed his prayer life. He realized that throughout the Bible, those who prayed understood God's will after being in close communion with Him. True prayer requires us to let go of our own will and give way to God's will. The author began to pray without ceasing and believing the answer would come.

Prayers can be offered regarding any topic, but most importantly, there must be prayers against evil. Prayers can be offered at any time, it can truly be a part of daily life, the part that makes life deeper and more meaningful. Prayer does not need to be a complicated process. God desires prayer to be simple, like the requests of a child asked without hesitation. This is the call of prayer, offering prayers to God in praise and thanksgiving as well as for our requests.

It is not impossible for adults to succeed in their prayer life. If readers follow what the author recommends, they can overcome the adult barriers to prayer and go back to praying like a child and enjoying the blessings that will come.



# The Discipline of Fasting

## The Discipline of Fasting Summary and Analysis

Fasting seems unheard of when "fast food" holds such a dominant position in today's society. In biblical times, fasting was quite prevalent. While interest is increasing, fasting needs to be better understood before it is more readily accepted and embraced.

Throughout the Bible, many of the major spiritual people are found fasting; fasting was going without food for spiritual growth. This is in contrast to what many describe as modern fasting, where the goal is political or power-driven. The definition of fasting in the Bible is doing without all solid and liquid foods, but water is consumed unless it is an "absolute fast," which is usually much shorter and specifically in response to a call from God.

Although many Christians voluntarily participate in fasting, whether as an individual or group, there is no law regarding fasting in the Bible. Jesus does have discussions on the topic of "when you fast," but this does not mean it is a commandment or law. But Jesus does instruct His disciples to fast when the time comes for Him to leave them. Without specific biblical laws, individuals can decide how and when to fast.

From the start, fasting needs to be God-centered and God-initiated. No other reasons or benefits to fasting can be a higher priority or goal than fasting for God. Does food control the mind and spirit? During fasting, the cravings for unhealthy and unnecessary items disappear and they are replaced by the desire to commune more with God. Eventually the close bond between prayer and faster becomes clear, and then many spiritual breakthroughs can take place.

In a world struggling with weight and health issues, fasting would seem to be a desirable goal within the secular world. But in reality, its purpose and goals are misunderstood. It is not about doing without food—it is about removing what controls a person's spirit.



# The Discipline of Study

## The Discipline of Study Summary and Analysis

The last inward discipline is Study. The goal of all the disciplines are to transform the total person. The author refers to what the apostle Paul says in the Bible, "We are transformed through the renewal of the mind." The discipline of study is focused on the mind and the quest for knowledge of truth, which is biblically based. Jesus wants people to seek the truth because the truth sets them free.

The author explains what studying is by comparing and contrasting it to meditation. Study makes the environment more conducive for meditation. Perception and observation are important aspects to study. There are two types of study—verbal and nonverbal. Examples of verbal study are books and lectures. Non-verbal study is usually conducted in nature or within the desired environment.

There are four steps to study: repetition, concentration, comprehension, and reflection. The inner mind becomes well-trained through repetition. As a result, the ingrained habits previously discussed can be altered and replaced with positive ingrained thoughts. The author points out that it is through concentration that the mind becomes centered and increases the ability to learn more. In the final step of study, reflection, people start to "see things from God's perspective."

The spiritual discipline of study is very different from academic study. It is not about the number of facts known or the tests passed, it is about discerning the information and using it properly as tools to grow closer to God.



# The Discipline of Simplicity

## The Discipline of Simplicity Summary and Analysis

The first of the outward disciplines is simplicity and it is dependent on inward focus. Without placing inner focus on those things God desires for a person, it becomes impossible to simplify life in the manner He desires. It becomes clear the author is referring to simplicity as it relates to monetary spending. To be simple like God desires means to spend less and acquire less, therefore living life simply.

The author explains what the Bible says about simplicity. In the Old Testament the theme is that wealth belongs to God. In the New Testament, Jesus speaks against focusing more on wealth and material goods than on God. When the focus is placed first on communion with God, people will learn they can trust God to provide all they need.

The author provides three inner attitudes of simplicity. The first is that everything a person has is a gift from God, no matter how it is acquired, how hard they have worked for it, or how simple it is. The second is that we must trust God to protect and care for what He has given us. The third inner attitude is what God has given a person should be shared with others.

Ten principles are suggested by the author to help a person live a simpler life. 1. Buy because you need something, not to impress someone else. 2. Do not purchase items which can lead to addiction—not just addictions to food or drink, but even those items which control how you spend your time. 3. Give items away to others that have control over you. 4. Do not purchase items that are nothing more than useless gadgets. 5. Enjoy without having to buy. Many places and things are available for enjoyment for free. 6. Appreciate God's creation. 7. If you must buy something using credit, don't buy it. 8. Use honest, concise speech. 9. Do not buy items that contribute to the oppression of others. 10. Never lose focus on what is most important, seeking the Kingdom of God.



# The Discipline of Solitude

## The Discipline of Solitude Summary and Analysis

There is a difference between being alone and solitude. According to the author, "Loneliness is inner emptiness, and Solitude is inner fulfillment." In order for a person to have healthy relationships, they need to learn how to properly be alone.

Silence and solitude go hand in hand. Determining when to speak and when it is best to be silent is an important aspect to solitude. Many people feel helpless when they are being silent. Using words can fool someone into thinking they are in control, but using words to control becomes manipulation. When a person holds their words it give God the opportunity to work His plan in the situation.

The dark night of the soul is an intense experience of solitude that was originally described by Saint John of the Cross. It is a period of extreme stillness and solitude, where God creates the opportunity to transform a person's soul. Initially most people try to avoid it or see it as something negative. But if a person allows themselves to experience the time without distractions and emotions, they will in turn experience God in His fullness.

In a society where being social is a main focus, it seems hard to imagine or acknowledge the benefits of being alone, but if people give it a chance and open up their hearts freely in the process, they will soon feel the communion with God and witness the blessings He is ready to give.

# The Discipline of Submission

## The Discipline of Submission Summary and Analysis

Submission is the most abused of the spiritual disciplines. Submission offers freedom from the need to always get your way. It shows how much over-importance is often placed on things that don't matter. When it comes to submission, silence is the key. Let grace be the words that handle the situation.

Submission leads to the awareness that happiness should not be based on whether we get our way. Jesus leads the call to submission and he leads by example. A person should be ready to give up everything and follow Jesus, just like Jesus gave up everything for the world.

There are seven acts of submission. The first is to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The second act is submission to the Scripture. This means opening up our hearts to hear, receive, and obey the Word. The third is submission to the family. The next is submission to neighbors, which includes all people we meet and have contact with throughout the day. The fifth submission is to the Body of Christ—the church community. The sixth act of submission is to the broken and despised. And the final act of submission is to the world. A life of submission means living responsibly even when everything around us appears irresponsible.

At first reading, the discipline of submission is likely the least desirable to pursue. The term alone brings up many opinions and thoughts, many of which are not popular in modern culture. In a time where control and power is lauded, giving away power instills fear and resistance. But letting go can be a freeing experience that opens up a person's heart to all that God has to offer. Submission allows a person to let go and gives God more room in their lives.



# The Discipline of Service

## The Discipline of Service Summary and Analysis

The discipline of service is presented with the example set forth by Jesus. During the Last Supper when Jesus washed the feet of the disciples, He was giving them the chance to answer a call to service. It was no longer about who was the best but rather who would serve. But it is important to make sure it is not "self-righteous service." That means it needs to be done from a desire deep within that comes from God, not from human desires or goals. True service means doing so without receiving credit or rewards.

First he describes the service of hiddenness. This service helps reduce pride while still providing joy and spreading love. The next service is the service of small things. No act of service is too small. In fact, the small acts of service require a commitment of service and faithfulness. The service of guarding the reputation of others is next. This service helps to protect from gossip and disrespect. It requires continuous and deep service. The next is the service of being served, which is allowing others to serve you. It is not always easy or comfortable, but it is also a lesson in humility. Next is the service of common courtesy. The main goal is to "acknowledge others and affirm their worth." The service of hospitality is simply opening up one's heart or home to everyone, making them feel comfortable and welcome at all times and in all situations. The service of listening is necessary to show love in all relationships. It helps to quiet the mind. Next is the service of bearing the burdens of others. A person can look to Jesus as the example. The final service is the service of sharing the Word of Life. Sharing what God has placed on our hearts or spoken to us is a true gift of service.

Service is not always easy and often it takes practice, but because the Son of God came to serve rather than be served, surely we can find ways to serve God's people and earth through love and humility.



# The Discipline of Confession

## The Discipline of Confession Summary and Analysis

The discipline of confession is the first of the corporate disciplines. He starts the chapter with a quote from Augustine of Hippo, "The confession of evil works is the first beginning of good works." That could be the whole chapter summarized. A person cannot really do the great work of God without first admitting to and taking responsibility for the mistakes they make. Fear usually is what keeps a person from confessing. But God loves so unconditionally, He wants to forgive us and love us and help us be the people He knows we are capable of being.

There are two sides to this discipline, the giving of a confession and the receiving of a confession—both are important. The goal of examination of conscience is to ask God to open our minds and spirits to clearly see what we have done that needs to be forgiven and what in our spirits needs to be healed. This is asking for a deep healing so deep wrongs can be revealed. These are the sins of the heart and sins of the flesh.

After God has revealed what confession can heal within a person's heart and soul, it is vitally important that a person feels sorrow for what they have done. This is much deeper and important than the emotion of feeling sorry. This is acknowledging with remorse that you have willfully sinned against God. This is the heart of confession. A person must truly have deep sorrow for the confession to mean anything. The final step to confession must be to consciously keep from committing that sin again but also to avoid any temptations that might lead to sin. In this way, a person is committing to walking in the path God desires for us, which is free from sin, and letting go of our own will.

Now that a person knows what they must confess, they must determine to whom they will confess. The author explains that God calls all Christians to hear confessions. But not every person will keep the confidence required or listen to the call of God to handle confessions. To help determine to whom a person should confess, the author explains the guidelines of receiving a confession. Understanding the death of Jesus on the cross is a precursor to hearing a confession. Understanding a personal sinfulness and the relationship to the cross provides perspective in hearing another's confession. Accepting one's own sin and comprehending the magnitude of it makes it possible for them to hear another's sin. Compassion and understanding are very important.

It is also very important to keep in confidence someone's confession. This offers respect and shows understanding to the person confessing. The author describes from his own personal experience how prayer while hearing a confession helps maintain the presence of the cross and protects everyone involved.





# The Discipline of Worship

## The Discipline of Worship Summary and Analysis

The next discipline is worship. From the start, the author stresses that worship is not about the form of the worship. There are many forms, and all that matters with the respect to the form is that it is a form that works for the person. While the form is not critical or defined, it is important that worship is when "spirit touches spirit." Worship is something God desires for all people. He sends His love and grace to inspire worship within a person's spirit. God is waiting and willing to meet a person wherever they are to worship. No matter how long it takes, God is always ready to receive a person's worship.

Jesus makes it very clear who should be the object of worship. "You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve." There are so many obviously insignificant things that sneak into worship that take the focus off of God. In biblical times there are many warnings against false gods or idols. In modern times it is often easy to identify false gods because they do not take on the traditional form of an idol. But any person, place, or thing that we place more importance on than God is an idol.

God desires proper worship to be a priority. As with other disciplines, worship is meant to be a part of daily routine. In every moment of the day, there are opportunities to worship God. And as a person grows deeper in the relationship with God, the more genuine worship becomes.

Preparing for worship means that people are about to enter into a communion with God, and their hearts and minds need to be in the proper state. The author's discussion focuses on worship as a group, although a person can individually worship as well. When worshipping in a group, there is the chance for the spirit to move and grow within the group, increasing the worship experience.

This is a time when many people desire to be the one in charge, to lead others. There can only be one leader, Jesus Christ—He brings the spirit within to life. Human leaders also play an integral part, but they must answer the call to lead from God, and do so with a heart and spirit focused on how Jesus would lead.

The author outlines the steps to improved obedience through worship. The first step is to strive for a personal encounter with God daily. The time can include prayer, thanksgiving, meditation, or however a person desires to commune with God. The next step is to worship God in different ways and places. The third step is to prepare in every possible way for worship. The next step is a strong desire to be present before God for worship. The fifth step is to live a life relying solely on God. The next step is to overcome obstacles and distraction with a gracious heart. The final step is to willingly give time to God for worship no matter the cost or the difficulty.



# The Discipline of Guidance

## The Discipline of Guidance Summary and Analysis

The author discusses the group guidance aspect of the discipline of guidance. He uses examples of the groups of people God led throughout the Bible. The description of guidance is opening the heart to respond to God's directions and call. He is ready to lead, therefore His people must prepare to follow. The best example of following the call of God can be found in Jesus. Together the group can try to understand what God desires for them and they can step out in faith in response.

He recounts events when saints came together in prayer to receive direction from God for a specific need of one of them. The community gives a gift when they come together for a common request to pray, wait, discern, and then act.

In the past it was common for people to seek guidance through spiritual direction. Spiritual direction is not meant to replace seeking guidance directly from God. It is meant to facilitate ultimate guidance from God. Spiritual direction goes beyond the spirit needs and ministers to the whole life of a person.

Spiritual direction can take on many forms, and spiritual directors can come from many places, but the guidance they offer comes from only one source, God. It is easy within a group for different people to hear different guidance from God based on their own personal agendas and desires. To protect the discipline from this effect, the Grace of God must be paired along with the guidance.



# The Discipline of Celebration

## The Discipline of Celebration Summary and Analysis

The final discipline is celebration. The beginning of Jesus' ministry was marked with His announcement of a year of Jubilee. When Christ enters the world, there is joy, a joy that remains today by keeping Jesus in a person's heart. As people grow closer to God through the disciplines, their lives become void of stress and worry and become filled with peace and joy.

The author ties together celebration, joy, and strength. He stresses how strength is necessary in many areas of life where challenges will be endured. Once one is successfully on the other side of the challenge, it becomes natural for a person to feel joy. This truly is a call to be obedient to God—it requires surrender of our will and an acceptance of God's will. This is a strange idea for some, because often they feel God's will brings frustration and even possibly pain. But the joy discussed by the author is not defined as the absence of pain, but true communion with God.

The author warns against false or empty celebrations. Our celebration must be sincere. If people have been practicing the disciplines, they should be working toward having a greater relationship with God, which will increase their faith, which will replace the fear, and celebration becomes evident.

The author provides five examples of celebration. 1. Celebrate by making a joyful noise. Joy seems to naturally flow from song and prayer and other noise lifted up in praise to God. 2. Laughter. It is hard not to find joy out of laughter and laughter is contagious and spreads the joy through the crowd. 3. Creativity and imagination—whether through stories, games, or arts and crafts. 4. Celebrating during family events. Special traditions each year for birthdays, anniversaries, and other family events help create memories that last a lifetime, and for generations. 5. Festivals and holidays—should be easy to celebrate but often the focus is taken off God during those celebrations. It is important that holidays and festivals focus on joy and celebration, not stress and busyness.



# **In Celebration of Celebration of Discipline**

## **In Celebration of Celebration of Discipline Summary and Analysis**

This section added by the author after the final chapter is a compilation of testimonies and reflections he received after the tenth anniversary. Authors, teachers, pastors, and others share the impact the book had on their lives and others they know.

Reading the testimonies can inspire readers to implement the principles in their own lives in hopes of having the same experience. Real people sharing real life stories can help anyone hesitant to try. The author presents a clear and thorough presentation on Spiritual Disciplines. A notes guide, bibliography, scripture index, and subject index are also included by the author at the end of the book. The result is a complete study guide anyone can use to either begin or further their journey to spiritual growth.



# Characters

## Richard J. Foster

Richard J. Foster is the author of the book *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, which *Christianity Today* placed on its list of the top ten books of the twentieth century. This is his first book, and at the time he writes it he is a Quaker pastor. He went on to write many other best selling books. Mr Foster is also the founder of a church renewal movement and is editing a study bible.

The author uses his personal and professional experiences to share the *Spiritual Disciplines*. Since writing is not his first vocation, Richard needs influences, catalysts, and providences to help him on his journey to writing the book. The journey to writing is similar to the journey he outlines for *Spiritual Disciplines*. As an author he learns how growing closer to God and discerning his voice is what opens up a whole world of blessings. As a pastor he knows the blessings available when a person takes a spiritual journey to grow closer to God and his plan.

Mr. Foster has immense knowledge on the subject of *Spiritual Disciplines* and has read many of the great scholars to gain insight into the subject. He shows respect for people of various church denominations, and brings together teachings and quotations from various sources, both modern and ancient, as well as from the bible.

Mr. Foster, through his writing, shows how he evolves from pastor, to author, to scholar, sharing what God places in his heart with others so they may find their true calling and grow closer to God.

## God

God is the most prominent figure in the book. He is integral to the entire journey the author explains. Just like life without God would be empty and void, the book would have no substance or foundation without Him. God is the focus of the author's personal journey to writing the book. The result is God also being the focus of the journey to *Spiritual Growth*.

God plays a role in everyone of the *Spiritual Disciplines*. He is the voice that guides, the source of peace, and the vessel of love that are needed for a person to be successful in conquering the *Disciplines*. God's role in the lives of believers is timeless. Yesterday, today, or tomorrow, God is a part of life and what it has to offer.

Since the book is about developing a stronger relationship with God, it becomes easy to see through the examples how strong and long lasting His relationships have been and can be. God is always ready and waiting to have a relationship. Without God there would not be a need for this book, much less any book. The desire to be close to God is what motivates the author to write, and his hope is that others will see the blessings



available when one gets closer to God. Without God there could not be any Disciplines. He is their foundation, He is their support, and He is their reward. He is the all and all.

## **Dr. Dallas Willard**

Dr. Dallas Willard is a philosopher from Richard Foster's congregation. He teaches bible studies at the church and his teaching is the author's second converging influence in the process of writing the book

## **William Luther Vaswig**

William Luther Vaswig is a Lutheran pastor at a large church near the author's church. The author spent prayer time with him, and as a result he was the third converging influence during the writing of the book.

## **Beth Shapiro**

Beth Shapiro is a nurse at a local hospital who is head of the elders at the author's church. She joins the author for prayer time at the church on her way home from work. The time the author spent with her was part of the third influence when writing the book.

## **Bill Cathers**

Bill Cathers is a former missionary friend of the author's and was the first empowering catalyst when he was writing the book.

## **D Elton Trueblood**

D Elton Trueblood is a spiritual author who has written over thirty-six books. He becomes the second catalyst for the author when Mr Trueblood asks the author when he is writing a book. Later Mr Trueblood also helps with the book's publication when he contacts the publishing company to recommend the author's manuscript.

## **Ken Boyce**

Ken Boyce is a stand-in father to the author after his parents die. He offers encouragement and support and is part of the third catalyst for the author to write the book. The first chapters of the book are written in the Boyce's driveway in their motor home.



## **Doris Boyce**

Doris Boyce is a stand-in mother to the author after his parents die. She helped type the author's term papers and dissertation and is part of the third catalyst for the author to write the book. The first chapters of the book are written in the Boyce's driveway in their motor home.

## **Roy M Carlisle**

Roy M Carlisle is a religion editor with Harper & Row publishers. He is the first editor the author meets with regarding the book. He is the editor who sends the acceptance letter to the author when the book is accepted for publishing.

## **Ron Woodward**

Ron Woodward is the head of the ministry team of the church where the author is the pastor. He also assists the author in many of the church projects and activities. He attends many of the conferences with the author. When the author's book is accepted for publication, Ron helps the author with the goal by taking on many of the church responsibilities to give the author time to finish the book.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Newberg Friends Church**

Newberg Friends Church is the church where the author is pastor.

### **Harper & Row**

Harper & Row is the publisher that accepts and publishes this book.

### **The Bible**

The Bible is the source for the scripture references used in the book.

### **ourselves**

Ourselves is what the author says should be the principle object of our study.

### **Kingdom of God**

The Kingdom of God is heaven. It is where people should seek to spend eternity in communion with God.

### **Christianity**

Christianity is the religion practiced by those who believe Jesus Christ is the son of God. It is the foundation of the Disciplines discussed in this book.

### **Disciplines**

Disciplines are the subject matter of the book. They are the central spiritual practices of Christianity.

### **Flesh**

Flesh is used in the context of the book to refer to actions made by the body as opposed to the spirit guided by God.





## **Spirit**

Spirit is used in context of the book to refer to the inner spirit that is guided by God.

## **Year of Jubilee**

Year of Jubilee is a celebration during biblical times where debts are cancelled and slaves are released. It is a celebration of all that God has given.

## **Towel**

A Towel is the symbol for service referred to in the book. It is based on Jesus showing as an example of service when he took a towel and washed the feet of the disciples during the last supper.

# Themes

## Spiritual Growth

Spiritual growth is the dominant theme of the book. The author's goal of the book is for readers to better understand and therefore follow the proper path to achieve spiritual growth. While the book addresses many Disciplines and steps that are available as part of a group, spiritual growth is something very personal and individual. The basis of spiritual growth comes from an inner transformation of the spirit. It is available to all individuals, but often it is not accomplished by very many of them. Perhaps it is lack of understanding or a minimal desire to change. As with any type of growth it requires change. A change of heart, a change of habits, a change of focus.

The theme of spiritual growth is throughout the entire book. Every topic that is introduced is a component available to achieve spiritual growth. Taking steps to move closer in relationship with God is part of accomplishing spiritual growth. While the choice to pursue spiritual growth is an individual's choice, one involving their free will, they must rely on and include God in their quest. Spiritual growth may seem like the end of the journey, but really it is not an end but a means to live one's life with more joy, love, and communion with God.

Spiritual growth is not a guarantee for no pain or suffering. In fact pain, suffering and challenges are a part of the growth process. In each moment it may not look as if much growth is being accomplished. But over time, the feelings, actions, and spirit of the person are transformed and spiritual growth becomes evident. There is no shortcut to this journey of spiritual growth and there is not a timeline to follow to guarantee the results. As long as a person has breath of life left in them, there is a chance for more spiritual growth. There really is no end definition. Each person knows what growth will mean to them, and it will be different from person to person.

Following the path outlined in the book and understanding what spiritual growth means can help people experience it to its fullest. Spiritual growth is about growing with, in, and towards God. There is no end to the path during earthly life. The experience and results have the opportunity to get deeper and richer every day.

## Surrender

Surrender is a theme in this book because so many of the Disciplines require a person giving way to God's will instead of their own. It is a struggle, since current times seem to encourage a person to control more and more and resist any type of outside control. Of course from a spiritual sense control must lie in the hands of God for true peace and spiritual growth to exist. Throughout the book there are examples of surrender. Even choosing to read the book may require a surrender of control if a person is to open their mind to what is being offered to them. They must surrender their previous habits to



make room for those outlined in the book if there is any use for the book in their lives at all.

If a person surrenders their mind, body, and spirit, true blessings can flow. Allowing another to control one is not a sign of weakness like many may try and describe. It takes strength to step back and with trust fall into God's embrace, trusting him to catch you when you fall. Letting Go and letting God is a common phrase used in modern times. This is exactly what the theme of surrender is trying to show in the book. First we have to surrender, then God will do his work. This is not because God cannot work on us while we have control. He is God and he can do his work no matter what. But surrender must take place for a person to see what God is offering and trying to accomplish in our lives.

## Celebration

Celebration is part of the title as well as an important theme of the book. What good is change if in the end a person can not celebrate the results? Often people pray for change or for results, and when they receive the answers they forget to celebrate whatever is the response. Any time we enter into communion with God there should be joy and celebration. It is more than an expression of emotion, it the response to subjects or events. It is about finding joy in the knowledge of something or someone. It is to commemorate a special event or memory. It is something a person can choose to do anytime or any place.

To celebrate also shows how well you understand or accept what has happened or what you have learned. If a person really does not understand or comprehend, the celebration would not be very substantial. It may not always be easy to get to the point where a celebration is warranted. But if a person allows themselves to celebrate, no matter the size of the victory or what it is about, the journey, no matter how hard, becomes worth it.

Heaven is more than likely one big celebration. When you look at celebration throughout this book, it is evident that with every discipline there is an opportunity to celebrate. In the end, there is hope for a stronger and deeper communion with God, and that will definitely call for a celebration.



# Style

## Perspective

The perspective of the story is from the author's perspective. It is evident through the writing the author has personally observed or studied the subject matter. The author seems trustworthy, not only because of his background but also in the manner he presents and treats the subject matter. He believes in what he is writing and is excited to share it with the readers.

The subject matter is presented through biblical and scholarly teachings that the author himself has read or studied. There are some firsthand accounts of events and experiences. There are also stories he shares that others have shared with him first. The book does not read like a story; it is a guidebook, but the reader is not just following along with the author. The author draws them in to become a part of the journey. He offers the readers opportunities for self examination and is really giving them the chance to implement his suggestions while they read the book. It is more than just a follow-the-steps book, it is a study and a life companion a reader can use as frequently as they desire to make as many life changes as they desire.

## Tone

The tone of the book is very upbeat and positive. It provides motivation not just to continue reading but to put what you read into action. There is so much hope throughout the book. Even when the truth that times may not always be easy is presented, the tone is so upbeat and hopeful that it is more easily accepted. There is not really any depression or negativity in the book. The language is also very simple and informal, which helps support the hopeful tone of the book.

The writing is also very personal in nature. One can sense how much the subject matter means to the author and how much he believes in what he is trying to convey. It appears the author really wants the reader to understand the writing, and one can feel the care he has taken to present it in the most understandable and enjoyable manner.

The tone of the book also shows respect for the reader, the subject matter, and for God, and continues to follow the spiritual and upbeat tone of the book. From the beginning, the author shares how the book is a result of God's plan. This tone is evident through the book and the reader can sense that each word, topic, and chapter is part of the plan God presented to the author through prayer.

## Structure

The structure of the book is a chapter book. There are thirteen chapters total. One of those is the introduction. The other twelve chapters each cover one of the Disciplines

and are divided into three parts. Each of the parts covers a specific group of Disciplines, each part covers four chapters. There is also a notes section, bibliography, scripture index, and subject index. Each chapter has a title and within each chapter there are various paragraph titles that separate out some topics within the chapter.

The book covers the subjects fairly evenly. Most of the chapters are the same size. Each chapter covers one of the Disciplines and does so with a good amount of detail. The chapters could be stand alone and do not really build on each other. There is very little cross over but there are common themes across the chapters.

The language of the book is between medium and advanced. It is easy to understand and follow. There are numerous quotes from scripture which could be challenging for a reader unfamiliar with the bible, but it is helpful that the author provided a scripture index in the back. Since many of the subjects discussed may be new to some readers, it is also helpful the author included a subject index. There is some historical subject matter, but the majority of the text is phrased as a guidebook where the historical references are used to help support the suggestions by the author.



## Quotes

"The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people." Chap. 1 p. 1

"Joy is the keynote of all Disciplines." Chap. 1 p. 2

"Everybody thinks of changing humanity and nobody thinks of changing himself." Chap. 1 p. 11

"Of all the Spiritual Disciplines prayer is the most central because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father." Chap. 3 p. 33

"Now is the time for all who hear the voice of Christ to obey it." Chap. 4 p. 61

"The purpose of the Spiritual Disciplines is the total transformation of a person." Chap. 5 p. 62

"God made man simple; man's complex problems are of his own devising." Chap. 6 p. 79

"May God give you - and me- the courage, the wisdom, the strength always to hold the kingdom of God as the number one priority of our lives. To do so is to live in simplicity." Chap. 6 p. 95

"Inward solitude has outward manifestations." Cha. 7 p. 97

"The fruit of solitude is increased sensitivity and compassion for others." Chap. 7 p. 108

"Every Discipline has its corresponding freedom." Chap. 8 p. 110

"The Disciplines are for realizing a greater good." Chap. 8 p. 110

"As the cross is the sign of submission, so the towel is the sign of service." Chap. 9 p. 126.

"At the heart of God is the desire to give and to forgive." Chap. 10 p. 143

"To worship is to experience Reality, to touch life." Chap. 11 p. 158

"Just as worship begins in holy expectancy, it ends in holy obedience." Chap. 11 p. 173

"Celebration is at the heart of the way of Christ." Chap. 13 p. 190

"Celebration brings joy into life, and joy makes us strong." Chap. 13 p. 191

"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." Chap. 13 p. 201



## Topics for Discussion

Which of the Spiritual Disciplines are already a part of your everyday life? How have they already helped you? What new ways have you learned they can help you?

Which Spiritual Discipline is the most difficult to make a part of your daily life? Why is that? What changes must you make to add it?

Describe the ideal environment in which you could meditate? How do you think meditation could help your daily life?

Think about a time when prayer helped your life. Were you asking for something specific or praising God? Is there a time you wish you would have prayed?

What would be the hardest part of fasting for you? What would be the easiest? Have you ever tried to fast before? What was the outcome?

Think about a book you have read that helped you gain the most knowledge with respect to spiritual growth. What about it touched you the most?

Do you think you live a life of simplicity? What do you think you could change to be more simple? What would be the hardest thing to change?

Think of a time when you have experienced solitude. Was it a positive or negative experience? How did that affect your desire to seek solitude again?

Do you agree with the author's definition of submission? Is it something you agree with? Is it something you believe you could do?

When have you served someone the way Jesus calls people to serve? How did you feel when it was done? Have you ever been served like Jesus serves his Disciples? How did that make you feel?

What is the hardest part of making a confession? When you have made a confession how did you feel afterwards? Do you feel more comfortable with private or public confession? Do you feel you are ready to hear someone else's confession?

How comfortable do you feel with public worship? What is your favorite method of worship? Do you like to lead or follow the worship?

Think of a time when you turned to God for guidance? Do you feel it was easy to hear and accept his response? Have you ever asked for guidance from a spiritual director? How did you feel afterwards?

Think of your favorite celebrations in your life. What are they and why? What celebrations would you like to add to your life and why?