

Nine Actions that Produce Lasting Growth

Spiritual disciplines... that phrase has such a strange ring to it. We think of “discipline” as correction, or perhaps as greuling hard work that never ends. It doesn’t usually have a positive connotation, unless you’re into that sort of thing.

Having said that, I believe that deep down, we all crave to become people of self-discipline. God put that desire in us to help us become more like Christ, which is his ultimate desire and purpose for everyone who follows his Son, Jesus.

I’ve loved and grown through the writings of [Don Whitney](#), [Dallas Willard](#), [R. Kent Hughes](#), [Richard Foster](#), and [Chuck Swindoll](#), all of whom have written excellent [books about the subject of spiritual disciplines](#).

They all have different lists. I’ve looked them over many times, but ultimately arrived at my own combination of spiritual disciplines I consider essential to spiritual growth for the Christian life. It isn’t comprehensive, but it’s fairly complete. I divide my list into three categories...

1. Spiritual disciplines for my walk with God.
2. Spiritual disciplines for my walk with other believers.
3. Spiritual disciplines for my walk in the world.

These three overlapping circles really represent the realm in which believers live in this world while living an other-worldly life. And the nine disciplines, as I see them are...

Spiritual Disciplines for my Walk with God

- **Prayer** – In prayer, we talk to God. And in prayer, we follow Jesus’ model which included praise, purpose, provision, pardon, people, protection.
- **Fasting** – Fasting actually improves our discipline, and it’s highly appropriate when we’re praying over “drop your fork” sized moments in life.
- **Study** – Reading the Bible is a great start, but study involves getting into the Word and getting the Word into your life through meditation and memorization as well.

Spiritual Disciplines for my Walk with Others

- **Worship** – And while all of life can be worship, I’m referring more specifically to gathering corporately with God’s people to praise Jesus as a crowd.
- **Fellowship** – And inside the crowd, we need a smaller group of people with whom we do life together for mutual encouragement and accountability and where we learn to live in love toward others.
- **Giving** – If corporate worship matters greatly to me and the mission of the church is important, tithing and giving generously to support the body must become a discipline.

Spiritual Disciplines for my Walk in the World

- **Moderation** – I use the word *moderation* to refer to a broad sense of self-control for our testimony's sake. We can't just eat, spend, drink, or party all we want to. There are limits. There is moderation.
- **Sharing** – That is, telling others about Jesus and sharing our faith story. If sharing my faith isn't a discipline to which I apply some intentional planning, it often won't happen.
- **Caring** – Living on mission and contributing to human flourishing, serving the needs of fellow human beings and becoming unselfish and more like Christ.

Again, my list doesn't cover everything, but these three categories and these nine practices prepare the way for me to grow in my relationship with God and with others, both inside and outside the body of Christ.

What's really important is that we understand that the disciplines aren't intended to earn us any favor from God in and of themselves. Having gone to church and read our Bibles doesn't make God love us more or like us better. These disciplines simply create the capacity in which God leads and teaches us, day by day, to fulfill his purposes for our lives.

This isn't a checklist in which can find a path to self-sufficiency. Rather, it's a guide to the practices that help us root our sufficiency entirely in the person of Jesus Christ.

The [spiritual disciplines](#) are relational, not transactional. Imagine if I said to my wife, "*Honey, we're supposed to talk and stuff – it's on my list. So let's spend thirty minutes talking so you'll be happy with me.*" I don't think the conversation would flow well beyond that point. But because I love my wife and want to have an intimate relationship with her, we share times of conversation, and we're purposeful about it, but those conversations naturally flow out of our mutual desire to know one another better.

Another big truth about the spiritual disciplines is that they definitely cost us energy and time, but the cost of *not* being disciplined is always greater than the momentary sacrifice of disciplining ourselves.

When I am disciplined in my eating, I give up some of the pleasure of tasting all the sugar and fat I want. But when I am *not* disciplined in my eating, I wind up with major health issues and hospital bills.

In the same vein, when I'm disciplined in my spiritual walk, I give up some time to read my Bible, my Sunday mornings to gather with my church family, some of my income as I pay my tithe and give my offerings. But when I'm *not* disciplined in my spiritual walk, I drift from God and experience the painfulness of that distance.

The disciplines are worth the cost of practicing them, both now and in eternity.

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