

Practice These 7 Spiritual Disciplines, and You'll Become More Like Jesus Every Day

Why aren't you more like Jesus?

God's plan for you is to "be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29). How's that working out for you? Would someone looking at your life say that you act like, talk like, respond like Jesus more today than you did when you first became a believer? Or more than a year ago?

And if you don't look more like Jesus today than you did a year ago, whose fault is that? If you're like most Christians, you'd be very reluctant to blame God. After all, He has "given us everything we need for life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3, ESV).

How about blaming the church or your pastor? Perhaps he or she isn't providing you the guidance you need. Or the devil—certainly he's out to sabotage your spiritual transformation. Could God's plan for you be less than "be conformed to the image of His Son" because of who your pastor is? Or how hard the devil is working? Certainly not.

So that leaves one person: you.

And immediately your knuckles whiten as you determine to try harder. The inner voices of shame and guilt scream that you're not doing it good enough. Or perhaps you're about to click away from this article because you've about given up on looking more like Jesus anyway; it's just too hard.

One of the most important things you and I can do to move

forward along the process of spiritual transformation is engage in the spiritual disciplines.

Ouch! Say *discipline* and listeners and readers (you?) are likely to scramble for cover faster than baseball fans in a thunderstorm. Most of us hate that word. It sounds like work. Isn't the gospel supposed to be free?

Spiritual Disciplines

A couple weeks ago we reviewed the 5 Catalysts for Spiritual Growth. The little things you do every day matter! When you get to heaven, God won't be looking at a checklist to see how many times you read your Bible through, or how many hours you spent in prayer, or how many days you fasted. Spiritual disciplines have nothing to do with earning grace; they're a catalyst for spiritual transformation.

As Dallas Willard says, God is not opposed to *effort*; He's opposed to *earning*. Our efforts do make a difference in how quickly we become like Jesus.

Spiritual disciplines have been practiced ever since the days of the early church. "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers" (Acts 2:42, MEV). Those were spiritual disciplines. We're talking about what you do every day that helps facilitate your spiritual growth.

Books have been written about these practices, and we won't exhaust that discussion here. But take a look at this partial list and see how many of these practices you are incorporating into your daily, weekly and yearly rhythm.

1. Silence and Solitude

These have sometimes been listed individually. What's important is getting away from all human or digital distractions, and letting your heart become quiet enough to

hear God's voice. God does not often speak over the cacophony of sound in your head or in your world. Intentionally getting alone and silent gives your heart a chance to align with God's presence, and for His voice and presence to impact your soul deeply.

Silence and solitude also remind you that God is much more interested in who you are and who you are becoming than in any "work" that you do.

2. Prayer

If Jesus needed to spend extended time in prayer, do you think you can become like Him without doing the same? Daily prayer needs to be more than a "Bless this food." Bookending your day with prayer at the beginning and the end will keep you from unraveling. Practice speaking to God about everything throughout your day.

Then every week, devote a more extended time to converse with God—not just listing your needs and wants, but conversing with Him as you would with a friend. And ideally setting aside an even more extended time quarterly or yearly to pray in His presence will do wonders for your spiritual growth.

3. Worship

Both corporate worship and individual worship bring you into the presence of God as little else can. Even corporately, be alert for the Spirit's invitation to "go deeper." When alone, intentionally invite God's presence into your home, closet, car, life and focus on Him. You are changed in His presence (See 2 Cor. 3:18).

4. Bible Study

Two kinds of Bible study are useful; "searching the Scriptures" for information and learning, and taking in Scripture as spiritual food. Take time to do both. (More on

that here.)

5. Service

Your life is not your own. God has not only saved you *from* something; He has saved you *for* something. If you're still breathing, you have a purpose on this earth. That purpose will in some way involve serving others, demonstrating to them the love of Jesus. Find someone who needs help and help them. Ask Jesus who in your world He wants to love through you.

And then just do it!

6. Fasting.

Fasting clarifies the mind and heart as little else can. Our human world, especially in the west, is so full of stuff that we easily become "fat and content." Fasting reminds us that we cannot be dependent on our own efforts to supply what we need; we must depend on God. Our appetites become submitted to our heavenly Father. Many people affirm that they hear God's voice so much more clearly during or after a period of fasting.

7. Fellowship

Human beings change best in community. Your choice of whom to spend time with matters. This is not about how often you go to church; it's about connecting with others in a deep enough way that you do life together. You need others who are close enough to speak into your life, to "spur you on" to becoming more like Jesus, to encourage you, hold you accountable and celebrate with you.

What specific things are on your list of spiritual practices (OK, disciplines) is less important than that you make them part of your life regularly. Again, these practices do *not* earn you brownie points with God; they facilitate your spiritual transformation.

And as you do, you *will* be looking more and more like Jesus.

Your Turn: *If you really wanted to be an athlete, you wouldn't balk at practice. Are you serious about becoming like Jesus? What spiritual practices might you embrace in a new way? Leave a comment below.* {eoa}

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