

## Practice Makes Perfect (Almost?): Growing Deeper

“Keep your heart with all vigilance,  
for from it flow the springs of life”  
Proverbs 4:23.

### Background

Song: #545 “Moment by Moment” and 2 Cor 13:14

In Dallas Willard’s book on spirituality he wrote an appendix (II) from his article in *CT* where he spoke of two great omissions in the modern church. Later he would write a separate book on the great omission.

He noted that Matthew 28:19-20 set the agenda for the Church. Jesus said we should go and make disciples. The word disciple is used 269X in the NT; the term “Christian” only 3X. The two great omissions he spoke about were (1) focus on making disciples (not converts) and (2) teach them to do what Jesus taught.

#### ➤ **Reflect on Luke 14:25-33.**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor who died in a concentration camp at the end of WWII, wrote in 1937 about the cost of a disciple. A disciple went beyond “cheap grace” or “easy Christianity.”

Richard Foster has called for us to overcome an era marked by converts who aren’t disciples. We must determine to live under the tutelage of Jesus, to undertake the general pattern of life Jesus undertook, including the disciplines of prayer, solitude, simplicity, and service.

Different terms may be used to describe what we are saying: discipleship, servanthood, spirituality or spiritual formation. Some of the ideas underlying the life of a disciple can get quite distorted. But it is worth the risk to explore and commit to a life of discipleship if we meet the goal that Jesus set.

“**Nondiscipleship** costs abiding peace, a life penetrated throughout by love, faith that sees everything in the light of God’s overriding governance for good, hopefulness that stands firm in the most discouraging of circumstances, power to do right and withstand the forces of evil. In short, it costs exactly that abundance of life Jesus said he came to bring (John 10:10)” (Dallas Willard).

## Goal

John Ortberg correctly reminds us that a life of discipleship or spirituality needs to focus on the correct goal, that which is the center of the spiritual life and not the peripheral. Prayer, fasting, generosity, solitude, simplicity, meditation, study, service, confession, celebration, worship, etc. – all are secondary to the goal.

- **To be transformed into a person (and a church) that loves God and people.**

Discipleship is not about trying harder to be “spiritual.” This is always a danger and leads to self-righteous believers who are off track. It is about a love relationship with God and with the people he loves.

To grow in this love relationship calls for “training.” Like an athlete or like a married couple.

- **Olympic committee knocks at your door and asks you to be the next Olympic marathon runner for the USA. Ouch!**
- **Reflect on:**
  - **1 Corinthians 9:24-27**
  - **1 Timothy 4:7-10**
  - **Hebrews 5:14**

Klaus Issler says, “. . . we must make some lifestyle changes to know God more deeply” (31).

Please use the handout to reflect more on growing deeper. Look at the Scriptures, answer the questions as best as you can. I have included a simple bibliography among the 100s of books available and will add more as we go through the next few months.

## Reflection Questions

1. What are some reasons I fear giving my life completely to God?
2. Which areas of my life am I most reluctant to surrender to God?
3. In what ways have I experienced the heavy burden of “trying” to remain in control of my life?
4. Am I spiritually “inauthentic”?
5. Am I becoming judgmental or exclusive or proud in my spirituality?
6. Am I becoming more approachable, or less?
7. Am I growing weary of pursuing spiritual growth?
8. Am I measuring my spiritual life in superficial ways, in the things I don’t do or the things I do, rather than growth in love of God and people?

### **Additional Reflection Passages**

- Isaiah 25:6-9
- Isaiah 26:7-9
- Isaiah 55
- Ephesians 5:14

“Awake, O sleeper,  
and arise from the dead,  
and Christ (the Anointed One) will shine on you.”

### **Bibliography**

Richard Foster. *Celebration of Discipline*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998.

Klaus Issler. *Wasting Time with God: A Christian Spirituality of Friendship with God*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2001.

John Ortberg. *The Life You've Always Wanted*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.

Dallas Willard. *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988.

## Week 1 Handout

[Handouts are for further thought and reflection. You may want to add pages to your *Transformed Lifebook* where you can jot your thoughts]

Please use the handout to reflect more on growing deeper. Look at the Scriptures, answer the questions as best as you can. I have included a simple bibliography among the 100s of books available and will add more as we go through the next few months.

### **Think about what Dallas Willard says about nondiscipleship and jot some reactions to his thoughts:**

“**Nondiscipleship** costs abiding peace, a life penetrated throughout by love, faith that sees everything in the light of God’s overriding governance for good, hopefulness that stands firm in the most discouraging of circumstances, power to do right and withstand the forces of evil. In short, it costs exactly that abundance of life Jesus said he came to bring (John 10:10” (Dallas Willard).

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### **Additional Reflection Passages** (what does God say to you from these passages?)

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