

The Joy of the Disciplines Part 1

Introduction to Spiritual Practices

Thesis: We are a people who are becoming aware of his presence, God with us.

Text: Matthew 1:22-23; Genesis 28:16-17

I am really excited about our word for the year: **God with us—becoming a people aware of his presence.**

How do we become aware of God's presence with us?

I believe it is through practicing the spiritual disciplines of Jesus relationally, intimately, and intently.

Today, I am going to start a few messages called, **The Joy of the Disciplines.**

Before we begin to talk about spiritual practices or disciplines, **I want to invite you to think back to when you became a Christian.**

1. Can you remember **why** you gave your life to the Lord?
2. Can you remember **when** you became a follower of Jesus?

Here is my story. (Share my testimony.)

I didn't sign up for religion. I didn't sign up for ritual. With the help of the Holy Spirit, I responded to an invitation to know God and to give my life to Jesus.

So, what did you sign up for when you became a Christian? Was it to be a religious person? Was it to get a ticket to heaven? Was it because of a fear of going to hell? Was it because you needed help? Was it because you saw your need for God? Was it because a friend told you about Jesus? Was it because God sovereignly caught you off guard and brought you to himself as an act of his love? Was it because you saw how God changed the life of a relative or friend? Was it because you loved God and wanted to know him?

I know this: **We come to God for many different reasons.** Some people simply did what Romans 10:13 says, *"Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."* Others had someone share the good news with them in church or in person. Maybe a parent shared the love of God with us.

Some people have had a divine visitation from the Lord, where God intervened dramatically.

Some people simply said “yes” to the tug of God on their hearts and followed Jesus.

Some people made a choice to respond to the good news, to choose the God who chose them.

Billy Graham could remember the day and hour when God called him and he came into a relationship with the Lord. On the other hand, Ruth Graham, Billy’s wife, never knew a day or time when she came to Jesus. She was called to follow Jesus as a very young child and could not remember a time when she was without a relationship with God through Jesus.

There are many ways that God wakes us up to our need for a relationship with himself. But this I know. If you have been a Christian for any time, **God has put a desire in you for an intimate relationship with the Living God.** Anything less fails to satisfy.

And, I also know that God has communicated to you somehow that he has a divine purpose for your life in Christ. **Listen to Romans 8:28-29.**

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son... (Romans 8:28-29).

What is the purpose of God in our lives? To conform us to the image of Jesus. Listen to how Eugene Peterson translates Romans 8:28-30.

That’s why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good. 29–30 God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son. The Son stands first in the line of humanity he restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in him. After God made that decision of what his children should be like, he followed it up by calling people by name. After he called them by name, he set them on a solid basis with himself. And then, after getting them established, he stayed with them to the end, gloriously completing what he had begun (Roman 8:28-30 MSG).

For every child of God, the Father is at work in our lives:

1. To shape our lives according to life of the Son, Jesus.
2. To show us the original and intended design of our lives in Jesus.

How does God do this?

1. He calls us by name. God chose you. God chose me.
2. He sets us on a solid foundation of love with himself. God takes the initiative in our lives to put us right with him.
3. He continues to work with us and to live with us always, gloriously finishing what he has begun in us. The God who began a good work in you and me will complete it in Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).

If God is going to shape our lives into the image of his Son, Jesus, then he intends for us to follow the same practices which Jesus did.

People often ask the question, "What would Jesus do?" I submit to you that we can't do what Jesus did when it is crunch time unless we have been doing what Jesus did in his spiritual rhythms and practices as the regular habit of our lives.

Did you know that early Christians were called followers of "the Way?" What "Way" were they talking about? The Way of life, or the practices of life, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The early disciples looked like Jesus, talked like Jesus, and did the works of God just like Jesus did.

How was this possible? The disciples heard about and saw the spiritual practices of the Lord Jesus in his relationship with his Father. **The disciples were engaged in the same spiritual practices as Jesus, so that they could do what the Father was doing and could say what the Father was saying, just like Jesus modeled for them.**

1. **Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin in Acts 4 for healing the crippled man and for sharing about Jesus.**
 - a. *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And **they recognized that they had been with Jesus** (Acts 4:13).*
2. **After the death of Steven in Acts 8, followers of Jesus were first called followers of the Way.**
 - a. *But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found **any belonging to the Way**, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem (Acts 9:1-2 ESV).*
3. **When Paul's team ministered in the synagogues in Ephesus, "some of them [the Jews] became obstinate; **they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way**" (Acts 19:9).**

4. **During the spiritual awakening in the region around Ephesus, “there arose a great disturbance about the Way” (Acts 19:23).**
5. **Listen to Paul’s testimony of how he came to Christ (Acts 22:2-21).**
 - a. Acts 22:2 Then Paul said: 3 “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. 4 **I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death**, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, 5 as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished. 6 About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. 7 I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’ 8 ‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked. ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied... (Acts 22:2-21).
6. **In his testimony before Gov. Felix, Paul talked about “the Way,” and Felix was well acquainted with “the Way” (Acts 24:10-24).**

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Our word for the year is this: **God with us—becoming a people aware of his presence.**

How do we become aware of God’s presence with us?

I believe it is through practicing the spiritual disciplines of Jesus relationally, intimately, and intently (with sufficient intensity).

Spiritual practices are not supposed to be drudgery, dry, or demoralizing. Rather, God wants us to experience his joy, his life, his celebration as the outcome of our spiritual disciplines. So, we are starting a series of messages on **The Joy of the Disciplines**.

Today's message was Part 1, an introduction.

Next week, we will dive into this series together. I am really excited to make this journey of joy with you, as we become a people more aware of his presence, of God with us.

Ministry Time: