

The Joy of the Disciplines Part 3

Joy Comes from Connection to God and Others

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

Text: Matthew 1:22-23, 28:18-20; Genesis 28:16-17

Let me remind you 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.

1. **Relationally:** engaging in a relationship with God, not just doing a ritual; to engage a person, not just doing an activity to mark off our checklist.
2. **Intimately:** pursuing intimacy with God.
3. **Intently:** with sufficient intensity and intentionality; effort; rhythm; practice.

God the Father is at work in our lives to shape our lives into the image of his Son, Jesus (Romans 8:28-29).

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 unless we have been doing what Jesus did in his spiritual rhythms and practices as the regular habit of our lives.

The early Christians were called followers of "the Way." The "Way" that they were talking about was "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.**

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

P1: Our first message in this series was Part 1, an introduction.

P2: On Jan. 22, we talked about the vision of joy for the spiritual practices.

P3: This week we want to consider that joy comes from connection to God and others. When you connect with God through Jesus Christ, you begin to experience joy (1) as a result of divine, mutual connection, (2) as a result of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life, and (3) as a result of connection with others.

The vision of joy: for the joy set before us.

1. **Like Jesus, we need a vision of joy to do life and to participate in spiritual practices in a long-term, lifetime sustainable way.**
 - a. *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses [who are cheering us on], let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (Hebrews 12:1-3).*
 - i. Jesus had a vision of joy that enabled him to overcome pain, shame, and obstacles to his obedience to God and love for God.
 - ii. Jesus had a vision of intimacy with God and experienced God's love; that experience fueled his passion for God the Father and his reliance upon the Spirit of God.
 - b. **Nathan Foster** wrote a powerful book called, [*The Making of an Ordinary Saint: My Journey from Frustration to Joy with the Spiritual Disciplines*](#).
 - i. Nathan Foster was just a child when his father's classic *Celebration of Discipline* brought the spiritual disciplines into our consciousness. More than thirty years later, Nathan made his own journey into the spiritual disciplines. As he sought day by day to develop habits that would enable him to live more like Jesus, he encountered problems both universal and unique. In an engaging narrative-style, he draws insights from saints of old to uncover fresh ways of living for us today.

- ii. **Through his successes, struggles, and failures, Foster invites readers on a journey of freedom, pain, frustration, and ultimately joy as he learns to rise above selfish desires, laugh at his own failures, and fall in love with God.** Those who have read *Celebration of Discipline* will find in Nathan's book creative new ways to practice the disciplines that have been so formative in their lives. Those who are new to the spiritual disciplines will find that developing a vital, interactive, conversational relationship with God is within their grasp. As a result, the holy habits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are truly possible for all.

2. What is joy?

- a. Joy is more than an emotion. It is a **supra emotion** where we can live and even process alongside the big emotions of life like pain, sorrow, grief, loss, and even anger.
- b. Joy is often called a choice.
 - i. Yes, we can choose joy.
 - ii. But, what is the source of joy?
 1. The source of happiness, meaning, and purpose from the world or from ourselves is fleeting and won't last.
 2. **God is the source of joy.**

3. Joy comes from connection to God and others.

- a. **When you connect with God through Jesus Christ**, you begin to experience joy (1) as a result of **divine, mutual connection** and (2) as a result of the **fruit of the Holy Spirit** in your life.
 - i. *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full (John 15:9-11 ESV).*
 - ii. *Some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean by saying, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,' and 'Because I am going to the Father?'" 18 They kept asking, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying." 19 Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, "Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me'? 20 I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. 21 A woman giving birth to a child has pain*

because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. 22 So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy (John 16:17–22).

- iii. “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them” (John 17:13).
 - iv. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13).
 - v. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:22–23).
 - vi. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:4–7).
 - vii. But about the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy” (Hebrews 1:8-9).
 - viii. Joy comes from connection to God through Jesus Christ and by the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- b. **Joy also comes as you connect deeply with others and experience authentic community of shared life and a shared vision.**
- i. Paul experienced great joy as he did life with others.
 1. **I have found significant transformation, meaning, love, and joy as I join Jesus on his mission, together with others.**
 2. Here are some of the corporate spiritual practices which God has used to transform me and to help me develop a closer walk with him.
 - a. **Church services:** worship, word, and works (receiving and doing ministry).
 - b. **Worship and prayer** (harp and bowl): Monday night and Thursday morning.

- c. **Prophetic intercession and group prayer** (4 – 5 times a week): Staff Prayer, NWPIP Prayer, MPN USA Prayer, GHPC, etc.
 - d. **Ministry Teams** (doing the works of Jesus together with others).
 - e. **Authentic community** (in small groups and missional communities): Pastors Prayer Group, Elders, Deacons, Staff, etc.
 - f. **Missional communities**: Faithwalking, Staff, Hairgrove Partnership Team.
 - g. **Discerning the voice of the Holy Spirit through dialogue.**
 - h. Walking in the light/ transformation conversations.
- ii. *I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:3-6).*
 - iii. *But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. 18 For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan stopped us. 19 For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? 20 Indeed, you are our glory and joy (1 Thessalonians 2:17-20).*
 - iv. *But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you [mutual love]. 7 Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. 8 For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. 9 How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? 10 Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith (1 Thessalonians 3:6-10).*
 - v. *I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my*

prayers. 4 Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy (2 Timothy 2:3-4).

- vi. **Joy comes from connecting deeply with others and experiencing authentic community of shared life and a shared vision.**
4. [Life Model Works](#) is teaching us that our brains were wired to run on the fuel of joy (Jim Wilder).
 - a. According to **The Life Model**, our brains are hard wired to connect with God and with others.
 - b. There are tools and practices that help us connect with God and to fuel our joy.
 - c. [The Other Half of Church: Christian Community, Brain Science, and Overcoming Spiritual Stagnation](#), Jim Wilder and Michel Hendricks.
 - d. [Thinking with God: Weaving God's Thoughts into Human Identities and Relationships](#), Jim Wilder, paper from June 2020.
 - e. [Thinking Biblically About The Life Model](#), Michael Sullivant.
 - i. Here is the [link](#) to the book online.

When I practice the spiritual disciplines, I remind myself of what God has said which reminds me and builds my faith that God wants to meet with me.

1. *Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (Philippians 2:12-13).*
 - a. God has taken the initiative to work and to will in our lives for his good pleasure and his good purpose in Christ.
 - b. Our joy is getting to work out and getting to respond to the divine initiative the Lord has taken in our lives.
 - c. God always is taking the initiative in my life.
 - d. God's initiative is the inspiration for my response through the spiritual practices.
2. *So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. 2 Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God [present awareness]. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. 3 I'm speaking to you out of deep*

gratitude for all that God has given me, and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you. Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace, it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No, God brings it all to you. The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him (Romans 12:1-3 MSG).

- a. God is helping us.
 - b. God says that our daily lives and activities can be an act of worship and encounter (offering).
 - c. God invites us to embrace what he is doing for us as the best thing we can do for him.
 - d. God declares that fixing our attention on God and what he is doing changes us from the inside out.
 - e. God helps us to respond to him, which results in bringing out the best in us and matures us.
 - f. *The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him (Romans 12:3 MSG).*
3. *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him (Hebrews 11:6).*
- a. God wants us to believe that our lives can give him pleasure. God has put the desire in our hearts to please him. That is why we are responding to his initiative in our lives, following him, and believing in him.
 - b. God wants us to believe that he exists. Our God is real, alive, and active.
 - c. God wants us to believe that he is a rewarder of those who seek him.
 - d. God tells us to believe him and to expect that he rewards those who earnestly, intentionally, zealously pursue him.
 - e. *This reality of who God is and what God is doing empowers our practice of the spiritual disciplines.*
4. *But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18 NASB).*
- a. Even as we dimly behold God, we are being transformed from glory to glory.
 - b. Ill: going through the X-ray security devices at airports. Something is happening to you whether you feel it or not. So it is with beholding the Lord.
5. *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12 Then (1) you will call upon me and (2) come [to me] and (3) pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13*

*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. 14 **I will be found by you,**" declares the LORD... (Jeremiah 29:11-14).*

6. *Draw me after you; let us run [together]. The king has brought me into his chambers (Song of Songs 1:4 ESV).*
 - a. The Lord has put a desire in us to be known by our Bridegroom King, to be drawn after our living God. "Draw me after you."
 - b. From a place of intimacy, we can run and journey with our God.
 - c. The goal of our lives is intimacy with the Lord, as illustrated by the phrase "the king has brought me into his chambers."

God loves you and me and pursues us with love; he wants you and me to live in his love and to experience his love.

1. *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. **Abide in my love.** 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full (John 15:9-11 ESV).*
2. *Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. 26 I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them" (John 17:26).*

Summary and call to action:

Like Jesus, we need a vision of joy to do life and to participate in spiritual practices in a long-term, lifetime sustainable way.

Joy comes from connecting to God and others.

When you practice the spiritual disciplines, remind yourself of what God has said in order to remind yourself and to build your faith that God wants to meet with you.

When you practice the spiritual disciplines, remind yourself and declare over yourself that God loves you and pursues you with love. Remind yourself that your God wants you to live in his love and to experience his love.

Ministry Time: 2'5'23