

Spiritual Disciplines

"The spiritual disciplines" sounds like a phrase for another era of history. Whenever a book is written or a sermon is preached on the subject, people wonder if it is a subject only for ancient saints or a group of monks cloistered away in a mountain retreat.

The spiritual disciplines, however, play a significant role in our spiritual development. **They represent practices of our faith that give us the opportunity to interact with Christ.**

To better understand them, LifeWay Research conducted a survey of over 2,900 Protestants in the U.S.A. using English, French, and Spanish. In the book [Transformational Discipleship](#), the authors Geiger, Kelley, and Nation describe a "discipleship deficiency" that is plaguing the church. Given the research, I agree with their descriptor.

On a daily basis, only 48% "set aside time for prayer of any kind" on a daily basis. Even fewer - 19% -- are reading the Bible on a daily basis. There is simply no good light in which to cast these discoveries.

So how do we address the fact that Protestants in the U.S.A. who attend church at least once a month (the basic requirements for participation in the survey) are not engaging in the most basic spiritual disciplines.

First, **leaders must lead by example.** I am one to give those in ministry leadership the benefit of the doubt. But I also believe in a high level of accountability. If a leader wants the people to read, pray, fast, and all the rest, then make sure you are doing it as well. The vision for spiritual maturity in a church will rarely exceed that of the leader's life. So go where you want to take people.

Second, **find ways to practice the disciplines in community.** There is an old saying about leadership: If you are leading and no one is following then you are just out for a walk. Don't walk alone toward spiritual maturity. Discover the various ways to lead people. The list is endless. Read the New Testament together over the summer months. Memorize a key passage that is follows the theme of a message series and repeat it during worship. Commit to a church-wide fast while making key decisions. Often the spiritual disciplines are misrepresented as exclusively practiced in solitude. Make sure they are used to draw the body of Christ closer together as well.

Thirdly, **never measure disciplines as an end to themselves.** For the sake of research, we measured people's behavior at relatively broad level. As a local church leader and/or member, you are called to a deeper engagement. Over the last three years, we have studied the issue of transformation in the lives of Christians throughout North America. Our study gives conclusive evidence that lives, churches, and communities are being changed... but not without leadership and effort.

In the Transformational Discipleship study, an attribute that was discovered has been termed

"Unashamed." One of the issues we have known intuitively came hurtling out of the research: believers willing to publicly own their faith and have accountability for growing in their faith display lives of transformation. It is to this end that we create assessment tools to survey personal development. Whether you use a tool or simple conversations, you need to measure personal advancement.

Leaders need to grow, lead through community, and hold followers accountable. Using the spiritual disciplines as instruments for spiritual growth provides a great platform to do all of these.

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