

Pathways

Session 5
Community of faith



Resources for participants

Activities of a community of faith

Jesus' commission

Matthew 28:19, 20

New commandment

John 13:34,35

Beliefs of Christian communities

1 Corinthians 12:3

1 Corinthians 15:1-4

1 Timothy 2:1-6

2 Timothy 1:8-10

Living as a Christian community

Living in peace Colossians 3:5-17

Forgive one another Ephesians 4:30 - 5:2

Serving 1 Peter 4:10,11

Activities of Christian communities

Acts 2:43-47

Acts 4:32-37

Reflection

The school community of faith

What are some of the ways the school provides opportunities for the nurture of the community of faith?

Analyse one of the practices, eg, worship, prayer, staff devotion, Bible study, designed to nurture the community of faith.

- *What are the features of this activity in the school context?*
- *How does this activity nurture the community of faith?*
- *What challenges arise from conducting this activity in the school context?*
- *Are there any ways this activity could be enriched, enhanced?*

Make PowerPoint or poster to share your analysis with others.

Spiritual disciplines : for reflection

Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people or gifted people, but for deep people. The classical Disciplines of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into the depths. They invite us to explore the inner caverns of the spiritual realm. They urge us to be the answer to a hollow world. John Woolman counsels, 'It is good for thee to dwell deep, that thou mayest feel and understand the spirits of people.'

We must not be led to believe that the Disciplines are only for spiritual giants and hence beyond our reach, or only for contemplatives who devote all their time to prayer and meditation. Far from it. God intends the Disciplines of the spiritual life to be for ordinary human beings: people who have jobs, who care for children, who wash dishes and mow lawns. In fact the Disciplines are best exercised in the midst of our relationships with our husband or wife, our brothers and sisters, our friends and neighbours.

[Foster, R Celebration of discipline, p1]

The spiritual disciplines include:

The **inward** disciplines

Meditation
Prayer
Fasting
Study

The **outward** disciplines

Simplicity
Solitude
Submission
Service

The **corporate** disciplines

Confession
Worship
Guidance
Celebration

In today's session we will give you opportunity to focus in on some of the disciplines that particularly relate to the school context and to plan to explore one of these disciplines in the time between the next session.

Meditation

Christian meditation, very simply, is the ability to hear God's voice and obey his word. p21

The purpose of meditation is to enable us to hear God more clearly. Meditation is listening, sensing, heeding the life and light of Christ. This comes right to the heart of our faith. p37

Meditation is a more passive Discipline. It is characterised more by reflecting than by studying, more by listening than by thinking, more by releasing than by grabbing. In the Discipline of meditation we are not so much acting as we are opening ourselves to be acted upon. We invite the Holy Spirit to come and work within us – teaching, cleansing, comforting, rebuking. We also surround ourselves with the strong light of Christ to protect us from any influence not of God. p37

Exodus 24:15-18

Psalm 1:1-3

- What is your first reaction to the concept of meditation? Why do you think you react this way?
- Why do you think meditation may be an important discipline for the community of faith within the school?

Prayer

'Prayer catapults us on to the frontier of the spiritual life. Of all the Spiritual Disciplines prayer is the most central because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father....Real prayer is life creating and life changing. 'Prayer – secret, fervent, believing prayer – lies at the root of all personal godliness,' writes William Carey.

Real prayer is something we learn. p45

To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us' p42

Matthew 6:5-15

Psalms 150

- Why do you think Foster says that 'To pray is to change'?
- Why do you think it is important to view prayer as a learning process?

Solitude

Solitude is more a state of mind and heart than it is a place. There is a solitude of the heart that can be maintained at all times. Crowds, or the lack of them, have little to do with this inward attentiveness. ... Inward solitude has outward manifestations. There is the freedom to be alone, not in order to be away from people but in order to hear the divine Whisper better. Jesus lived in inward 'heart solitude.' He also experienced outward solitude. p120

Without silence there is no solitude. p 122

The fruit of solitude is increased sensitivity and compassion for others. There comes a new freedom to be with people. p133

Henri Nouwen has noted that, 'Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life.' Why is this so? Because in solitude we are free from our bondage to people and our inner compulsions, and we are freed to love God and know compassion for others. p133

Matthew 6:5,6

Matthew 9:35-38 (compassion comes from solitude)

- Why do you think we need both solitude and community in order to spiritually grow?
- Why do you think solitude would be important for staff in the school context?

Worship

To worship is to experience Reality, to touch Life. It is to know, to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community. p197

We desperately need to see who God is: to read about his self-disclosure to his ancient people Israel, to meditate on his attributes, to gaze upon the revelation of his nature in Jesus Christ. When we see the Lord of hosts 'high and lifted up,' ponder his infinite wisdom and knowledge, wonder at his unfathomable mercy and love, we cannot help but move into doxology.

Glad thine attributes confess

Glorious all and numberless. p199

If the Lord is to be Lord, worship must have priority in our lives.

Worship is our response to the overtures of love from the heart of the Father. Its central reality is found 'in spirit and truth.' It is kindled within us only when the Spirit of God touches our human spirit. Forms and rituals do not produce worship, nor does the disuse of forms and rituals. We can use all the right techniques and methods, we can have the best possible liturgy, but we have not worshipped the Lord until Spirit touches spirit. p198

One reason worship should be considered a Spiritual Discipline is because it is an ordered way of acting and living that sets us before God so he can transform us. p205

Mark 12:30

Psalms 96

- What forms of worship have you experienced that have been particularly meaningful to you?
- How well do you think the school worship makes room for Spirit to touch spirit?

Celebration

Celebration is the heart of the way of Christ. He entered the world on a high note of jubilation: 'I bring you good news of a great joy,' cried the angel, 'which shall come to all people' (Luke 2:10). He left the world bequeathing his joy to the disciples. 'These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full' (John 15:11).

The carefree spirit of joyous festivity is absent in contemporary society. Apathy, even melancholy, dominates the times. Harvey Cox says that modern man has been pressed 'so hard towards useful work and rational calculation he has all but forgotten the joy of ecstatic celebration...' p238

Celebration brings joy into life, and joy makes us strong. Scripture tells us that the joy of the Lord is our strength (Neh 8:10). We cannot continue long in anything without it. p238

Phil 4:4

Psalms 103

- Why do you think people can find it difficult to celebrate?
- What are some ways we can celebrate as a group?

Spiritual disciplines : inward, outward, corporate

[Excerpts taken from *Celebration of Discipline, the path to spiritual growth* by Richard Foster]

THE INWARD DISCIPLINES

Meditation

'Christian meditation, very simply, is the ability to hear God's voice and obey his word.' p21

The purpose of meditation is to enable us to hear God more clearly. Meditation is listening, sensing, heeding the life and light of Christ. This comes right to the heart of our faith. p37

Meditation is a more passive Discipline. It is characterised more by reflecting than by studying, more by listening than by thinking, more by releasing than by grabbing. In the Discipline of meditation we are not so much acting as we are opening ourselves to be acted upon. We invite the Holy Spirit to come and work within us – teaching, cleansing, comforting, rebuking. We also surround ourselves with the strong light of Christ to protect us from any influence not of God. p37

Prayer

'Prayer catapults us on to the frontier of the spiritual life. Of all the Spiritual Disciplines prayer is the most central because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father ... Real prayer is life creating and life changing. 'Prayer – secret, fervent, believing prayer – lies at the root of all personal godliness,' writes William Carey.

To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us' p42

Fasting

'The central idea in fasting is the voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity.' p73

Fasting must forever centre on God. It must be God-imitated and God-ordained. Like the prophetess Anna, we need to be 'worshipping with fasting' (Luke 2:37). p67

Study

The apostle Paul tells us that we are transformed through the renewal of the mind (Rom 12:2). The mind is renewed by applying it to those things that will transform it. 'Finally brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things' (Phil 4:8). The Discipline of study is the primary vehicle to bring us to 'think about these things.' p78

THE OUTWARD DISCIPLINES

Simplicity

The central point for the Discipline of simplicity is to seek the kingdom of God and the righteousness of his kingdom first and then everything necessary will come in its proper order. It is impossible to overstate the importance of Jesus' insights at this point. Everything hinges upon maintaining the 'first' things as first. Nothing must come before the kingdom of God, including the desire for a simple life-style. p106

Simplicity is openness, unself-consciousness, naturalness. It is the opposite of subtlety, cunning, duplicity. Where simplicity abounds words can be taken at face value: there is no hidden agenda.' p116

Solitude

Solitude is more a state of mind and heart than it is a place. There is a solitude of the heart that can be maintained at all times. Crowds, or the lack of them, have little to do with this inward attentiveness ...

Inward solitude has outward manifestations. There is the freedom to be alone, not in order to be away from people but in order to hear the divine Whisper better. Jesus lived in inward 'heart solitude.' He also experienced outward solitude. p120

Without silence there is no solitude. p122

Henri Nouwen has noted that, 'Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life.' Why is this so? Because in solitude we are free from our bondage to people and our inner compulsions, and we are freed to love God and know compassion for others. p133

Submission

I said that every Discipline has its corresponding freedom. What freedom corresponds to submission? It is the ability to lay down the terrible burden of always needing to get our own way. The obsession to demand that things go the way we want them to go is one of the greatest bondages in human society today. People will spend weeks, months, even years in a perpetual stew because some little thing did not go as they wished ... In the Discipline of submission we are released to drop the matter, to forget it. Frankly most things in life are not nearly as important as we think they are.' p138

Service

... service enable us to say 'no!' to the world's games of promotion and authority. It abolishes our need (and desire) for a 'pecking order'. p158

Of all the classical Spiritual Disciplines, service is the most conducive to the growth of humility. When we set out on a consciously chosen course of action that accents the good of others and is, for the most part, a hidden work, a deep change occurs in our spirits.

Nothing disciplines the inordinate desires of the flesh like service, and nothing transforms the desires of the flesh like serving in hiddenness. p161

Service is not a list of things that we do, though in it we discover things to do. It is not a code of ethics, but a way of living. p165

THE CORPORATE DISCIPLINES

Confession

At the heart of God is the desire to give and to forgive. p179

True confession and forgiveness brings joy to the Christian community and healing to the parties involved.

Most wonderful of all it spells reconciliation with God the Father, for as the beloved apostle said long ago, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. p195

Worship

We desperately need to see who God is: to read about his self-disclosure to his ancient people Israel, to meditate on his attributes, to gaze upon the revelation of his nature in Jesus Christ. When we see the Lord of hosts 'high and lifted up,' ponder his infinite wisdom and knowledge, wonder at his unfathomable mercy and love, we cannot help but move into doxology.

Glad thine attributes confess

Glorious all and numberless. p199

If the Lord is to be Lord, worship must have priority in our lives.

One reason worship should be considered a Spiritual Discipline is because it is an ordered way of acting and living that sets us before God so he can transform us. p205

Mark 12:30

Guidance

Guidance is the most radical of the Disciplines because it goes to the heart of this matter of walking with God. Guidance means the glorious life of hearing God's voice and obeying his word.

The goal of guidance is not specific instructions about this or that matter but conformity to the image of Christ. p233

In the Middle Ages not even the greatest saints attempted the depths of the inward journey without the help of a spiritual director. Today the concept is hardly understood, let alone practised, except in the Roman Catholic monastic system. That is a tragedy, for the idea of a spiritual director is highly applicable to the contemporary scene. It is a beautiful expression of divine guidance through the help of our brothers and sisters. p228

Celebration

Celebration is the heart of the way of Christ. He entered the world on a high note of jubilation: 'I bring you good news of a great joy,' cried the angel, 'which shall come to all people' (Luke 2:10). He left the world bequeathing his joy to the disciples. 'These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full' (John 15:11).

The carefree spirit of joyous festivity is absent in contemporary society. Apathy, even melancholy, dominates the times. Harvey Cox says that modern man has been pressed 'so hard towards useful work and rational calculation he has all but forgotten the joy of ecstatic celebration ...' p238

Celebration brings joy into life, and joy makes us strong. Scripture tells us that the joy of the Lord is our strength (Neh 8:10). We cannot continue long in anything without it. p238

Meditation

Be still and know that I am God.

Psalm 46:10

Stillness exercise

Sit in a comfortable chair.

Make sure your feet are placed on the floor.

Place your hands in your lap or rest them palms up on your thighs.

Close your eyes and focus on what you can feel in your body.

As you locate any tension, tighten and release this. It may be helpful to work from your toes upwards.

Concentrate on what your body is feeling and not on any thoughts you have.

Focus on your breathing. Focus on the in and out breath.

Focus on the quiet and relaxing effect of concentrating on your own breathing.

After some time say the words of Psalm 46 in your head: *Be still and know that I am God.*

Repeat the verse lingering at each word.

As you meditate on the verse become aware of what God may be saying to you. This may be in an image, a sense of God's presence, an insight.

Be silent and rest in God's presence.

Close with the Lord's prayer or any other prayer you know by heart.