

Spiritual Practices and Disciplines

"The practices and disciplines are means of grace, not tasks to accomplish or instructions to follow in order to grow in the life of faith. To do the latter would be to engage in the practices "according to the flesh" rather than "in the Spirit." Instead, these practices and disciplines are gifts to the community, by means of which God may use the community to establish and sustain all people in the new life given in the Spirit."

"...our basic task is not mastery and control. It is instead trust and grateful receptivity."

"The practices of faith are not ultimately our own practices but rather habitations of the Spirit, in the midst of which we are invited to participate in the practices of God."

Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices*.
Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1999.

A spiritual **discipline** is a broad understanding of life choices that a person makes for the purpose of entering into deeper awareness and relationship with God. **Practices** are specific exercises or techniques one might employ in keeping with a more general discipline. For example, "honoring the body" speaks of intentionally raising up the sacred nature of the human body, and as such is a spiritual discipline; practices such as fasting, physical exercise, or dressing are specific things one can do to honor the body.

It is important to understand that disciplines and practices, like those that follow, are not understood as a means to make God love us more than God already does; there is no earning God's love. But such exercise does open us up to hearing God's love for us more clearly.

Paul uses the analogy of an athlete for those engaged in spiritual discipline and practice, and it is an apt one. First, the strengths gained in one practice spill over into all of life; the endurance of the long distance runner makes for an easier trip when the elevator is not working, and saying "No," to food or certain types of food during a fast strengthens us to say the same to other temptations. Second, the athlete does not train for the last race, but for the one to come: we are not trying to gain God's love or forgiveness for what we have or have not done, but preparing to live out of God's love and forgiveness in the future.

These three books offer different, but related, spiritual practices:

Practicing Our Faith

Dorothy Bass (ed.), *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*.
San Francisco, NY: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997.

Honoring the Body	Discernment
Hospitality	Shaping Communities
Household Economics	Forgiveness
Saying Yes and Saying No	Healing
Sabbath Keeping	Dying Well
Testimony	Singing Our Lives

Celebration of Discipline (Renovaré)

Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*.
San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1988.

Meditation	Submission
Prayer	Service
Fasting	Confession
Study	Worship
Simplicity	Guidance
Solitude	Celebration

Growing in the Life of Faith

Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices*.
Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1999.

Worshiping God together	Suffering with and for others
Sharing the Christian story	Hospitality
Interpreting the Bible and church	Listening and talking attentively
Prayer	Consciousness of our context
Encouragement and vocation	Resistance to destructive forces
Faithful service and witness	Work with and for life-giving powers and patterns
Generous giving and receiving	