

Spiritual Discipline Exercises
For the People of St. Luke's Parish

by Kent Walley

There is a big difference between merely wanting to live more in tune with God and actually bringing yourself in tangible ways to experience His transformation. The following exercises draw on four classic spiritual disciplines that Christians throughout the ages have found helpful in training themselves to more wholly love God and their neighbor. I offer them to you as a simple step to practice the Presence of God.

I urge you to begin each exercise with prayer in a few moments of unhurried time and in a quiet place. Seek the Presence of the Lord with you through His Holy Spirit and ask Him to work inwardly on your heart, keeping you from focusing on merely the outward, external practice of each. You might wish to make this a four-week exercise – doing one per week.

1. Fasting – *This exercise is about self-denial. It is about remembering that we need God to provide even the most basic things of life that we so often take for granted. It is a reminder that drawing our spiritual life from God, living for God is far more important than feeding our stomachs.*

Fast from a meal, perhaps lunch for 3 days in a row. When the time comes that you would normally be eating this meal, read the following verses of Scripture. Meditate on what they mean and how they speak to you when you are hungry. As you experience hunger throughout the day, before the next meal softly repeat the verse to yourself and seek to feast upon being in the Presence of God. Scripture for day one: John 4:32
Day Two: Mathew 4:4. Day Three: John 6:35.

2. Solitude – *This exercise is about removing ourselves from the distractions and hurried pace of life to slow down and listen for God. The emphasis here is on “being” rather than on “doing”. The concept of Sabbath as ceasing from work to honor God is also a part of this exercise. In doing this we remember that our work means nothing if done apart from God. He is in the midst of anything of true or lasting significance. The world will keep turning without our work. This is about trusting God.*

For this exercise you need at least 90 minutes; two hours would be preferable. Find a place to be alone and quiet. You could choose to take a walk as part of this exercise. The goal is merely to be alone and do no work. Don't read a book, even the Bible. Don't write anything down. Don't even work hard at prayer; let it come easily and slowly. Just listen and focus on being in the Presence of the Lord. Focus on resting in Him. Focus on “being” and let go of your compulsion to “do”.

3. Scripture Study – *This exercise is about seeking the Presence of the Lord through Holy Scripture. The Holy Spirit has been pleased for ages to work through the Scriptures. The following passage and questions are offered for you to see what is in the text and then listen for how God might want to speak to you through it.*

Read John 3:1-36. Consider the following questions: 1) Who is Nicodemus and how does he approach Jesus? 2) What might Nicodemus find surprising in Jesus' response to him? 3) What happens at physical birth; what does it mean to a person? 4) What might it mean to be born by the Spirit or born ‘from above’? How do verses 12-17 help our understanding of this? 5) What does this passage suggest is our role and what is God's role in our salvation and eternal life? What is hard about that for us? What makes that really good news? 6) How does this passage suggest that belief in the Son of God be found to be genuine? 7) What might God want to say to you about your life in light of Jesus' teaching here? 8) What would you seek Jesus for – if He were here with you right now? How might you be surprised as Nicodemus undoubtedly was? 9) Jesus is here with you right now – seek Him – talk to Him about what you have seen in this passage.

4. Giving – *This exercise is set to challenge the hold material things can have upon us. Although there are many ways to give in service to our Lord, this one acknowledges the power money can hold upon us. It has been said that the poor are most deprived because they lack the ability to give.*

Prayerfully read the following Scriptures: Luke 21:1-4 and Matthew 6:19-21. Then ask the Lord to show you some place or someone where He might want you to invest and make a financial contribution. Do this as a special offering to the Lord over and above any pledges or planned giving. Do it anonymously – not for the recognition to be received, but to experience the blessing in giving. This is to be a voluntary free offering to give somewhere to someone, that is unexpected. You may wish to give to the church, a special ministry fund, organizations that minister to the needy in our community and worldwide. You may feel led to bless an individual you know of in need.