

Spiritual Disciplines for Clergy
Global United Fellowship Pastors & Clergy Retreat

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Rev. Dr. Cynthia T. Turner, Presenter

Dear Lord: Good morning: Bless you for a brand spanking new day! One never witnessed before – fresh, new, promising – and one we'll never see again. Make us to know your works. Help us to see your beckoning finger bidding us to come closer and guide our following footsteps toward your awaiting breast. Show us through the gift of discernment which way to go and where to steer clear.

You are our God. Above you – next to you – instead of you – in addition to you – over you – there is no other.

We gather in this place today, seeking your face. We long for your presence to companion us – to work inside us giving us peace, authority, self-control, discipline, and truth – and to work outside us so that others will see you at work through us and be called toward your glory.

We love you today and we pray for all the routine things we know to pray for: for healing of the sick, for prosperity, for bread for the hungry, for water for the thirsty, for liberty for those who sit in captivity, for victory over sin. We seek you for deliverance from bitterness and liberation over any unforgiveness. We cry out to you for liberation from weaknesses and we press you, O God, for the kind of faith that it takes to accomplish your will. Increase our faith. Attune our hearts. Liberate our minds and saturate our thoughts. Take charge over our wills. Impress our hearts. And cultivate our souls for growing your harvest.

God we thank you – for everything you’ve done for us. We can’t count it all. Can’t even see it all. Surely don’t know it all and can’t even comprehend it all.

Publicly thank Bishop Neil C. Ellis – our presiding prelate -- for this vision. I feel like Sophia in the Color Purple. She said: “All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my uncles. I had to fight my brothers. A girl ~~child~~ PREACHER ain't safe in a ~~family~~ GATHERING of men, but I’m so glad, ... for the Global United Fellowship ..I because I can stand here and testify that FINALLY there’s a house that I ain't GOT TO FIGHT in. So me and Sophia rejoicing today that within GUF, the call of God on women’s lives is not a second class call, it’s not a you can come, but you gotta sit in coach call, it’s first class, because GUF recognizes that our call was a call by God – not by man – and God does not offer second class calls.

And I want to thank Bishop Leonard N. Smith, the Bishop of Pastors – my good friend, my mentor, my confidant and my encourager, whom I dearly dearly love – for the grace and tenacity to lead this summit and for the opportunity to share with you today.

*On a very personal note, let me say thank you to everyone for your prayers and concerns about my father, who has been hospitalized since we’ve been here. I am grateful for the sharing of this. You have truly lightened the load.

SAVE THE LAST 10 MINUTES...

And so the story goes...

The story is told of **a monastery** out on the countryside that was very **strict**. In order to enter, you had to take **a vow of silence**, where you were prohibited from speaking at all. But there was **one exception** to this rule. **Every ten years**, the monks were **permitted to speak just two words**.

After spending his first ten years at the monastery, one monk went to the head monk. "It has **been ten years**," said the head monk. "What are **the two words** you would like to speak?"

"Bed... hard..." said the monk.

"I see," replied the head monk.

Ten years later, the monk returned to the head monk's office. "It has been **ten more years**," said the head monk. "What are **the two words** you would like to speak?"

"Food... stinks..." said the monk.

"I see," replied the head monk.

Yet **another ten years passed** and the monk once again met with the head monk who asked, "What are your **two words now**, after these ten years?"

"I... quit!" said the monk.

"Well, I can see why," replied the head monk. "All you ever do is complain."



When was the last time you scheduled a day to spend with just you and the Lord?

Question: When was the last time you spent a day with the Lord? ... where you could not wait to rendezvous with the Redeemer, meet up with the master, set up some time with the Savior? Made a date with the Lover of your soul?

In order for the spiritual disciplines to have any

benefit at all -- There must be desire. There must be the acknowledgement from the disciple of a clear call – a yearning, a hungering, a deep longing that propels us toward the disciplines, otherwise we end up at the end of the exercise just as empty as we were when we started. There's no need in doing them just for the sake of doing them, just going through the motions, hoping to yield some kind of hocus pocus spiritual results or Kingdom benefit. Without the yearning and hungering and thirsting after righteousness, engaging in spiritual disciplines – fasting, praying, meditating, memorizing scripture, etc. – become nothing more than a sign of the ability to show great willpower.

I would purport to you this morning that we must approach the disciplines the same way the deer pants for the waterbrook. We approach them the same way we would when it's time to rendezvous with an old friend, a cherished lover, a soulmate – with anticipation, excitement, and joy – knowing that when we leave we will somehow be better, refreshed, fulfilled, and restored for having taken the time alone with the Lord.

The Dangers of Neglecting the Disciplines



And so we come to the disciplines out of the same sentiment that Paul prayed: I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:27 NLT)

And yet, if we are honest, in large part, that's where we find ourselves as clergy: depleted, washed out performers – looking well, sounding well, but in actuality, always running on E, with nothing authentic, nothing, true, nothing holy to offer, because we have not taken time to discipline ourselves.

Mile Wide – Inch Deep
Many preachers will develop their preaching style, whoop, business sense and admin skills, but will neglect spiritual disciplines.

Downfalls: Let's face it--

- **Our success has resulted in our own detriment. We have built great cathedrals, have packed the house or the room, have served hundreds, or thousands, or dozens; have reached the masses and have had great impact and yet, while everyone else has been well tended to, we find ourselves suffering from spiritual anemia, parched souls, charity fatigue, wearied spirits, and impotent passions. Have we become too busy, too tired, too involved, too much in demand, too unstable, too spiritually impoverished, and too weak to provide the kind of leadership that's worthy of coming from a child of God, who has been called to lead and shepherd God's people.**



- **Malnourishment:** Spiritual anemia. Spiritually flaccid, impotent, with no capacity or ability to inject life or do greater works, because we have not “done the work” or taken the time to feed ourselves, to replenish our souls, or tend to our interior selves. We pray: “The Lord is my Shepherd – I shall not want.” This

is the model prayer, but in reality, because of our own busy-ness, we are left wanting. Wanting to be fed, to be filled, to be poured back into, to be tapped again, to come alive again.

- **“When we feed others without nourishing our own souls, the Great Commission can become the Great Affliction.”**



- **Self-reliance:** -- Leaving God, Jesus, and the Spirit out altogether. -
- Some of us have become so adept at manipulating the people, we have learned what it takes to jerk the chain, to “pull it,” to say

the right phrases and words and bump the crowd, and put a hum and a hoop in just the right places, that we don't even really need the Lord anymore. ... Much less do we even spend time in the study, because we've so mastered the technique that it no longer matters what we say, because we know that there's a certain crowd who cares not so much WHAT we say, but they are more concerned with HOW to say it. And at the close of the day, though we have "slayed" the people, we ourselves are not slayed.

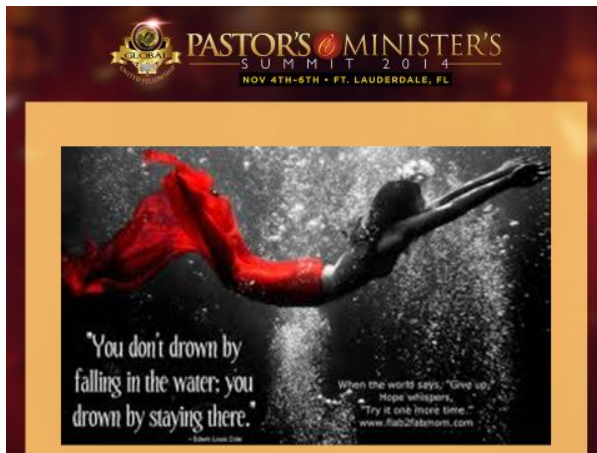
- **Inability to Deflect Criticism.** Undealt with hurt. Most of us are hurt or discouraged by criticism, especially when it comes from authority figures or those we're trying to help.
- **Intense Stress.** Handling constant conflict. Anybody who is engaged in the work of the church (which becomes "church work"), will go through difficult conflicts, intense prayer needs, and draining experiences.
- **Isolation.** In ministry we may develop a "Lone Ranger" mentality, whether from a desire to be a hero or out of self-pity, and try to do it all ourselves. Feeling and acting as if we are all alone. Shame. Blame. Guilt. Depression.
- **Pride.** We can make great theater, great entertainment, which represents a great God. However, we must always check our egos to ensure it's about God and not about self.
- **Misguided Ambition.** It's not about us! Yesterday's question: Is there anything wrong with ambition. No! When our ambition is to lift Jesus up, as a way to draw men and women and boys and

girls to Jesus. When our ambition is to bring glory to God through the indwelling of Christ in us because we recognize that we are the hope of glory. No! when our ambition is to decrease so the Christ may increase. No! There's nothing wrong with ambition when the ambition is right. But when our ambition is more about promoting ourselves than about keeping our souls fed, keeping our hearts clean and our spirit right, about lifting ourselves, increasing our own ratings, -- when we start blowing ourselves up, then there's a danger.

●

Deuteronomy 4 says: Give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently"

And it's got to be considered a part of our disciplined routine because if we don't keep at it, we run the risk of losing it, or slowing down, of missing moments or taking shortcuts, of giving way to temptations, and just plain running dry.



And it's especially important for we, who are the called – who are pastors and clergy and ministers – because of all the professions and vocations in the world, clergy are some of the most messed up, dysfunctional, insecure, broken, narcissistic, confused, exhausted,

depressed, inflated, deflated, schizophrenic, suicidal, paranoid bunch of men and women I've ever known. (And don't get me wrong, that's not

judgment, that's just fact. That's not even our fault – God called us like this. God know what condition we were in when God called us. And the glory and wonder and celebration is that God called us anyway! But – don't miss this – God does not want us to stay that way. It's not what happens to you, it's WHAT YOU DO WITH what happens to you that matters. It's not what happens TO you, it's what happens IN you that matters. And God is trying to work a work in us.)

And oftentimes, it's at the moment of submission and the acceptance of our call that we feel closest drawn to God – but then we get into this thing – and if we are not careful to discipline ourselves, we can lose our closeness to God. –

You remember over In 1 Kings 19 – after an intense season of ministry – Elijah finally just sat under a broom tree in the desert and collapsed in despair. He was ready to cash it in. “Take me now, Lord, I've had enough. You can have this ministry back. In fact, you can have your life back. This is not what I bargained for. I'm the only one out here doing this work. You've left me alone. Blah blah blah” ***Anybody ever been there?*** But then the Lord – out of God's infinite mercy and love -- began to minister to Elijah – the prophet of God – and long story short, Elijah began to recover his strength and joy. What was it that the Lord did to help him experience renewal?

Lots of **sleep, and sustenance (food), and solitude, and** seeking God's face (**praying** out his emotions, e.g., fatigue, fear, sadness, isolation) listening to God, re-engaging with the community of Yahweh's prophets (7,000 were faithful to the Lord), and being given Elisha to mentor. (1 Kings 19:3-18)

The hymnwriter William Cowper, who battled depression all his life, said:

O for a closer walk with God
a calm and heavenly frame
A light to shine upon the road
that leads me to the Lamb.

...

Where is the blessedness I knew
when first I met the Lord.
Where is the soul refreshing view
of Jesus and His Word.



So How Do We Keep the Fire Burning?

You stoke it. Because nobody stays in a state of passion. There are down periods. There are dry seasons. There are dark nights of the soul. The spiritual disciplines are designed to make us better, so that when we are tested we do not become bitter, but if we don't do with

the hungering and yearning, we can spend a lot of time going through the motions, but gaining no benefits.

So let's start there with the WHY of spiritual disciplines?



Then we will look at WHAT are the disciplines?

And then we'll turn our attention to the HOW – the PRACTICAL?

You can have a great church, filled pews, thriving bible study and an unhealthy pastor and an unhealthy first family, which then will lead to an unhealthy church.

Definition

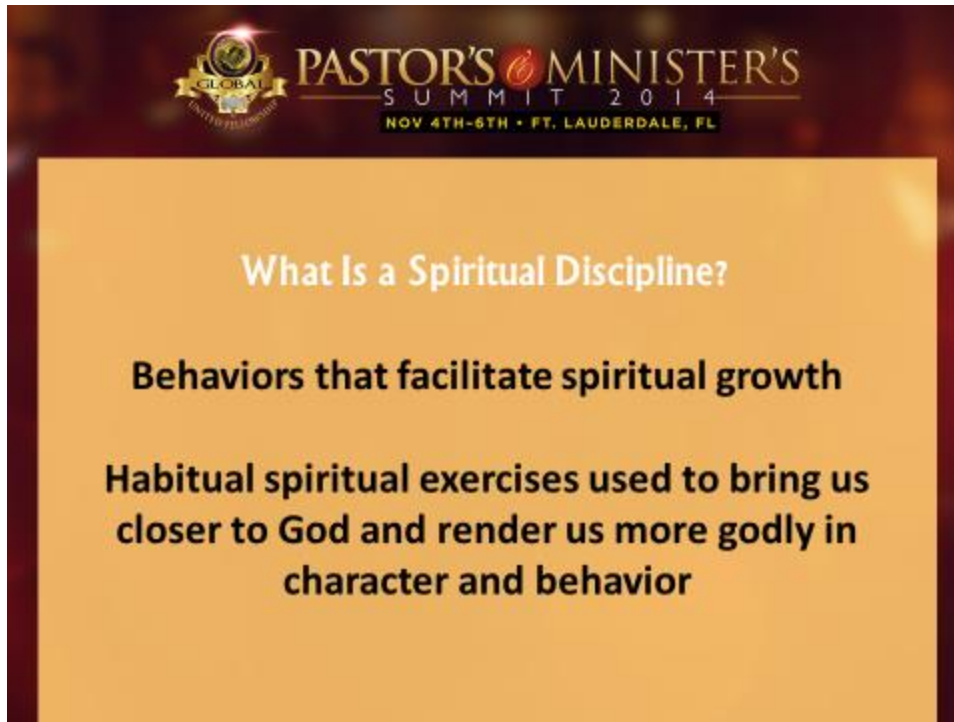
Spiritual disciplines are **the practices that protect our faith**. Paul described them in his first letter to Timothy: 'Spend your time and energy in training yourself for spiritual fitness. Physical exercise has some value, but spiritual exercise is much more important, for it promises a reward in both this life and the next' (1 Timothy 4:7-8).

The spiritual disciplines are means by which individuals and communities can very literally **“practice” their faith**. They are **tools by which Christians seek to know God, yield to the Holy Spirit’s sanctifying power, and surrender to the Divine Will in their lives**. The disciplines can be instrumental tools as we seek to “tune” ourselves to God’s desires and see his kingdom as he sees it. These holy actions have been practiced by believers since the earliest times, and are firmly rooted in Christ’s commands and examples in the Gospels.

A. DEFINITION OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE...

1. In general terms, discipline means:
 - a. "any training intended to develop moral character, or produce a pattern of behavior."
 - b. "training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character - **Merriam-Webster**





2. Regarding spiritual disciplines in particular:
- a. "A spiritual discipline is, when practiced faithfully and regularly, a habit or regular pattern in your life that repeatedly brings you back to God and opens you up to what God is saying to you."
 - b. "Spiritual disciplines can be described as behaviors that facilitate spiritual growth."

OR Spiritual disciplines, then, are spiritual exercises that one engages in habitually which bring one closer to God and thus become more godly in character and behavior



CTT: Spiritual disciplines are spiritual practices that bring us back to center and that are aimed at dismantling that within us that keeps trying to convince us that we can do this work, this service, apart from a companioning God, whose very deep love for creation would allow that same creation to wound him AND at the same time create within God’s self the capacity to forgive the very ones who inflicted the blows.

NOTE WELL: They keep us from engaging in prayerless preaching, trifling teaching, misery in ministry, judgmental emotions, and empty exercises.

There’s stuff inside us, systems around us, and a demanding carnal cultural atmosphere that demands feeding constantly needs dismantling.

They help us to ... Embrace Our INNER & OUTER WORLDS

Many Christians are spiritually undisciplined - the result is a lack of maturity, power and fruit in their lives. Whitney describes these people as being, "*a mile wide and an inch deep*" - there are no deep channels of God in their life, they dabble and have a little knowledge but lack any depth.

Many people will discipline their life to grow in other areas (sport, business etc.), but ignore spiritual disciplines and the sacrifice needed to grow and succeed.



Parker Palmer says: "If we do not understand that the enemy is within (that's constantly seeking center stage), we will find a thousand ways of making someone 'out there' into the enemy, becoming leaders who oppress rather than liberate others."

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CONFRONT THE ENEMY WITHIN?

A powerful old story captures the importance of the messages that we listen to inside of our heads.

An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life:

"A fight is going on inside me," he said to the boy." It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil – he is anger, envy,

sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.” He continued, “The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you – and inside every other person, too.”

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: “Which wolf will win?”

You might have heard the story ends like this: The old Cherokee simply replied, **“The one you feed the most my son.”**

In the Cherokee world, however, the story ends this way...

The old Cherokee simply replied, **“If you feed them right, they both win.”** and the story goes on:

“You see, if I only choose to feed the good wolf, the bad one will be hiding around every corner waiting for me to become distracted or weak and jump to get the attention he craves. He will always be angry and always fighting the good wolf. But if I acknowledge him, he is happy and the good wolf is happy and we all win. For the bad wolf has many qualities – tenacity, courage, fearlessness, and strong-willed – that I have need of at times and that the good wolf lacks. But the good wolf has compassion, caring, strength and the ability to recognize what is in the best interest of all.

“You see, son, the good wolf needs the bad wolf at his side. To feed only one would starve the other and they will become uncontrollable. To feed and care for both means they will serve you well and do nothing that is not a part of something greater, something good, something of life. Feed them both and there will be no more internal struggle for your attention. And when

there is no battle inside, you can listen to the voices of deeper knowing that will guide you in choosing what is right in every circumstance. Peace, my son, is the Cherokee mission in life. A man or a woman who has peace inside has everything. A man or a woman who is pulled apart by the war inside him or her has nothing.

“How you choose to interact with the opposing forces within you will determine your life. Starve one or the other or guide them both.”

Discipline is Essential

To excel at anything, you must have discipline. (hence, disciple)

A discipline is an activity that I engage in to receive power. (D. Willard)

A *disciple* is "anyone whose ultimate goal is to live as Jesus would live if he were in their place."

Discipline depends on what you're training for. Marathon runners train by running. Dancers train by dancing. Writers train by writing.

It's not about how many disciplines – it's about what you're training for.

“Spiritual disciplines are not a gauge of my spiritual maturity. The disciplined person is not someone who does a lot of disciplines. The disciplined person, the disciple, is someone who is able to do what needs to be done [say what needs to be said, react in a way that the situation needs to be handled]. The whole purpose of disciplines is to enable you to do the right thing at the right time in the right spirit....” d. Willard/cturner

Consider what some commentators have written...

- a. "cultivate piety, and seek to become more holy" - **Barnes**
- b. "Timothy is told that as an athlete trains his body, so the Christian must train his soul." - **Barclay**
- c. "Such exercise involves reading and studying the Bible, prayer, meditation..." - **BBC**

Train vs. Try

Train yourself to be godly. (1 Timothy 4:7)

Train – arranging our life around those activities or practices that enable us to do what we cannot do/achieve now by direct effort.

Dallas Willard bases his entire spiritual disciplines book on his understanding of Matthew 11:29, 30, which says, *“Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light.”* Willard cites this passage at the beginning of a chapter entitled “The Secret of the Easy Yoke,”⁴ Willard says, “And in this truth lies the secret of the easy yoke: the secret involves living as he lived in the entirety of his life—adopting his overall life-style.”⁵ He also says, “We have to discover how to enter into his disciplines from where we stand today—and no doubt, how to extend and amplify them to suit our needy cases.”⁶ He claims that the “yoke” is to try to emulate Jesus’ lifestyle in every possible way.⁷ Willard interprets Jesus’ “yoke” as the practice of spiritual disciplines like solitude, silence, and simple living.

Author and pastor [Richard Foster](#) identifies 12 crucial spiritual disciplines. These practices are further organized into sections:

- inward,
- outward, and
- corporate.

Or they can be viewed in two categories:

- Abstaining from (Abstinence)
 - The first, “Disciplines of Abstinence,” are designed to help us remove destructive and unhelpful things from our lives through acts that force us to stop, wait, remove, or eliminate.
- Adding to (Engagement)
 - The “Disciplines of Engagement” are intended to build the right kinds of attitudes and habits into our daily lives.

Or

- Putting on
- Putting off



DISCIPLINES OF SERVICE WITH THE BODY OF CHRIST (CORPORATE)

- Confession – acknowledging one’s sin with and to others in the community of faith ([James 5:16](#))
- Guidance – giving and receiving direction from others along the journey with Jesus ([Acts 15:8](#))
- Celebration – taking joy in what God has done ([1 Cor 5:8](#))
- Worship – giving God glory through attitudes and actions ([1 Cor. 14:26](#))



DISCIPLINES OF SERVICE TO THE BODY OF CHRIST (OUTWARD)

- Simplicity – seeking God’s Kingdom first ([Matt. 6:33](#))
- Submission – placing God’s will above one’s own ([Luke 22:42](#))
- Solitude – withdrawing from the world to spend time with God ([Matt. 14:23](#))
- Service – supportive action toward others ([Mark 10:45](#))



DISCIPLINES OF PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT (INWARD)

- Prayer – communicating with God ([Matt. 6:9](#))
 - A. W. Tozer – 1897-1864 spent hours in prayer every day. Prayer was so much a part of his life he had his pants tailored to be reinforced at the knees so he could pray longer. He often lay prostrate on the floor when praying.
 - He was a mystic. – a follower of Julian of Norwich, a fellow mystic
 - End of ministry prayer: “Pray for me in the light of the pressures of our times. Pray that I will not just come to a wearied end – and exhausted, tired old preacher, interested only in hunting a place to roost. Pray that I will be willing to let my Christian experience and Christian standards cost me something right down to the last gasp!”
 - Times of extended prayer, ask:
 - Who are You Lord?

- What would you have me to do?
- Meditation – focusing on God and his will ([Phil. 4:8](#))
- Fasting – a reminder of the source of all nourishment ([Luke 5:35](#))
- Study – careful attention to the reality that God reveals to us, especially through Holy Scripture ([Luke 2:46](#))

The disciplines can help move our perspective from a naturalistic point of view to one that is more holy.

The Natural Man

- is ignorant of God's ways
- is arrogant concerning his place in the universe
- is busy making his own plans
- constantly invites noise into his life
- denies his sin
- is attracted to idols

All of this obstructs our view of Jesus, the one who is worthy of attention, honor, praise, and worship, because of who he is and what he has done.

The disciplines can help clear the path and bring us back into line-of-sight with the Savior.

EXAMPLES OF HOW REAL CHANGE HAPPENS

The Disciplined Christian can know God's ways through study...

He or she spends time soaking in Scripture, becoming intimately familiar with its message, learning the history of God's church, and gaining understanding of the practical implications of theology.

The Disciplined Christian is reminded of the source of all blessing and sustenance through fasting...

Abstaining from food, time commitments and distractions, from anything that takes focus from Jesus brings clarity, focus, and humility.

The Disciplined Christian can slow down through simplicity...

Seeking the kingdom of God first ultimately causes the believer to cast aside anything that is not holy. The pursuit of wealth and power are the antithesis of the kingdom that Jesus models.

The Disciplined Christian can hear God's voice more clearly through solitude...

Alone time with God helps provide room for silence, waiting on God, and hearing the sometimes still, small voice of his Spirit.

The Disciplined Christian is grieved by sin through confession...

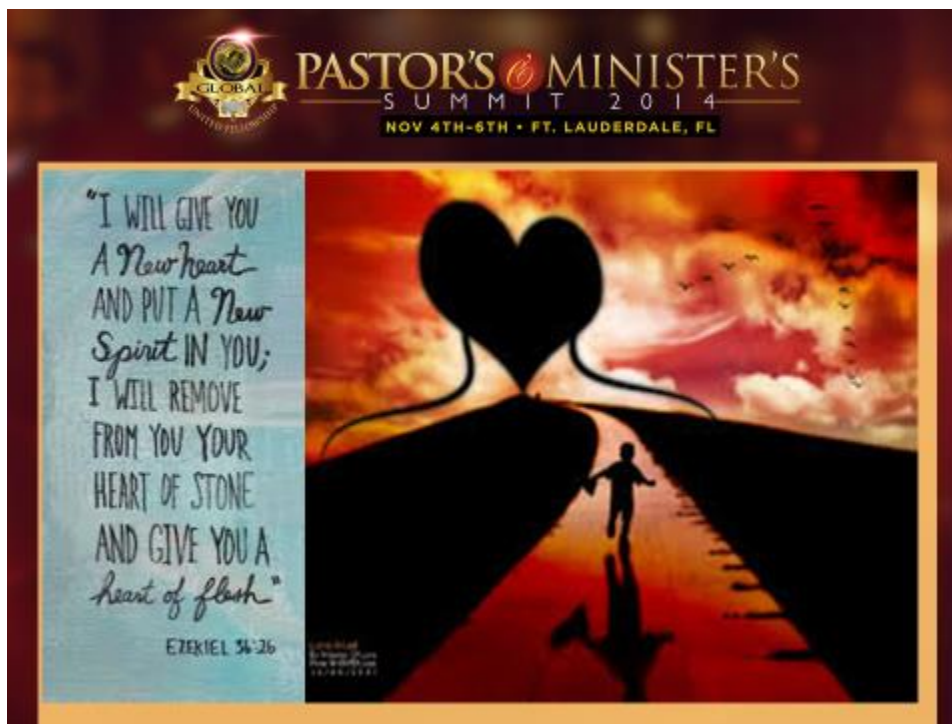
Personal and corporate confession provide a way to confront, admit, be convicted of, and deal with sin in the context of a supportive community and ministers of grace.

The Disciplined Christian puts God in the highest place through worship...

The believer joins with others in praise and thanksgiving, placing Jesus in the supreme place of honor in his or her life.

CONCLUSION

These 12 spiritual disciplines help to combat the sinful nature and our naturalistic world view. They can bring the believer into a mental, emotional, and spiritual state of higher awareness of God, his nature, and his kingdom. These tools are one way for individuals and communities to begin to bring their focus back to the Holy One and seek his will.



Meditation.

Practice in the Church

The Power of Habit by Rick Warren

"If you want to have Christ-

like character, then you just develop the habits that Christ had," one of

Saddleback's course manuals reads. "All of us are simply a bundle of habits. ... Our goal is to help you replace some bad habits with some good habits that will help you grow in Christ's likeness." Every Saddleback member is asked to sign a "**maturity covenant card**" promising to adhere to three habits: daily quiet time for reflection and prayer, tithing 10 percent of their income, and membership in a small group. Giving everyone new habits has become a focus of the church.

"Once we do that, the responsibility for spiritual growth is no longer with me, it's with you. We've given you a recipe," Warren told me. "We don't have to guide you, because you're guiding yourself. These habits become a new self-identity, and, at that point, we just need to support you and get out of your way."

Warren's insight was that he could expand his church the same way Martin Luther King grew the Montgomery bus boycott: by relying on the combination of strong and weak ties. Transforming his church into a movement, however—scaling it across 20,000 parishioners and thousands of other pastors—required something more, something that made it self-perpetuating. Warren needed to teach people habits that caused them to live faithfully not because of their ties, but because it's who they are.

This is the third aspect of how social habits drive movements: For an idea to grow beyond a community, it must become self-propelling. And the surest way to achieve that is to give people new habits that help them figure out where to go on their own.