

from Jesus how to live their whole lives in the kingdom of God as he would live their lives if he were they. Such people are serious about this.

Thus they are prepared to experiment and learn from their failures until, under their constant teacher, they find that disciplines truly are full of grace and strength.

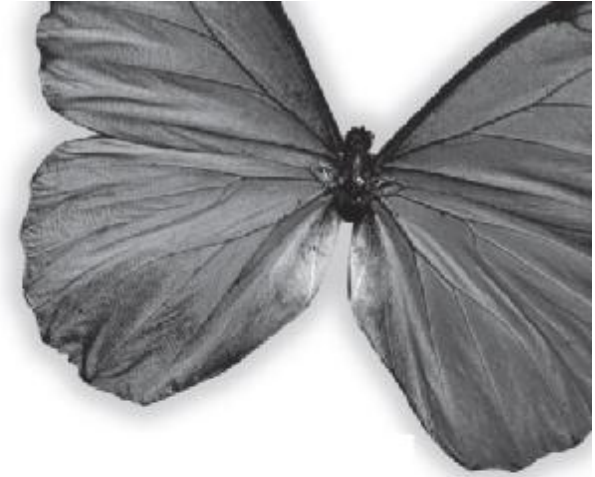
Fasting becomes feasting on God, meditation on scripture becomes celebration. Religion is no longer an additional burden to be carried in an already overburdened life, but is replaced by a joyous confidence that God is present and prevailing in every situation of life and death.

*A Summary of Dallas Willard, "Live Life to the Full"*



James Bryan Smith lays out four components of change: the mind (personal narratives), disciplines, community and the Holy Spirit. The change agent is the Holy Spirit. Smith writes,

“The Spirit leads us to Jesus, reveals the Father, exposes falsehood, offers correction, and gives us the needed encouragement that make growth and transformation possible. The Spirit helps us change our personal narratives by leading us into truth, enlightens us as we practice the disciplines, and binds us together in community.... But we must participate in this process. By serious reading and reflection, by practicing the spiritual exercises and by entering into community, we create the condition in which the Spirit can transform our character.”



## the good and beautiful LIFE

Growing in Grace

***"Beware that you are not carried away with the error of the lawless and lose your own stability. Instead, grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (II Peter 3:17-18)***

Is there a path of steady growth in the power of God for the one who has placed their confidence in Jesus? Should we assume that it is God's intention our lives would be increasingly pervaded by the action of his hand, until "all we do in word or deed" would be done "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:11) Is this something we can arrange for, so that the command to grow in grace makes sense?

We are told repeatedly by Paul to put off the old person and to put on the new. How does one do that?

First, one must *intend* to do it, and then one must sensibly implement the *means*. Putting on the new person, growing in grace, is something we must do. Appropriate action is the key. True, as Jesus said, "Without me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) But it is also true that if we do nothing it will be without him.

The path of spiritual growth in the riches of Christ is not a passive one. *Grace is not opposed to effort. It is opposed to earning.* Effort is action. Earning is attitude. You have never seen people more active than those who have been set on fire by the grace of God. Paul, who perhaps understood grace better than any other mere human being, looked back at what had happened to him and said: "By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me." (I Cor. 15:10)

As to "means of grace" placed in our hands, well-directed action is the key. The disciplines of the spiritual life are practices that enable us to increase in grace.

Grace is "unmerited favor." But the form it takes is the action of God in our lives and with our actions. If we wish to know more of this and see the deliverance it works in and around us, we must do the things that will bring it to pass. These things are spiritual disciplines or the disciplines for the spiritual life.

A discipline in any area is something in my power that I do to enable me to do what I cannot do by direct effort. This is the nature of discipline, and there is simply no area of human attainment--from playing a musical instrument, to sports, to speaking a language or being friendly--that does not require discipline.

The need for discipline does not change when we come to all that is involved in walking in the holiness and power of Christ. Would we do the things that Jesus himself did and taught? Then there is a way. It is the way of disciplined grace: discipline under grace and grace in the midst of discipline.

What are some of these disciplines? A primary one is solitude, which must go hand in hand with silence to be complete. In solitude I arrange to be alone, out of human contact, for lengthy periods of time. This allows my inner compass to stop whirling in response to the demands of others. The

elasticity and wholeness of my soul is restored as I grow "still and know that God is God." (Ps. 46:10)

Study and worship, fasting and sacrifice (of time, energy, money), journaling and prayer, confession and service are also among the disciplines. Some disciplines may be freely chosen. But often our circumstances will impose activities on us which, if taken as such, can be marvelous disciplines enabling us to receive extraordinary grace. "Tribulation works patience" is only one illustration of this principle.

#### Disciplines of Abstinence

Solitude  
Silence  
Fasting  
Frugality  
Chastity  
Secrecy  
Sacrifice

#### Disciplines of Engagement

Study  
Worship  
Celebration  
Service  
Prayer  
Fellowship  
Confession  
Submission

But there is no such thing as a complete list of spiritual disciplines, chosen or imposed. Many different activities might be entered into with the aim of finding the manifest grace of God which enables us to do what we cannot do--and be what we cannot be--by direct effort.

And of course "what we cannot do by direct effort" covers all that Jesus taught us. We cannot keep his teachings on our own. He never intended it. But by whole life training in the well-known disciplines of the spiritual life we can become inwardly the kinds of persons who naturally (supernaturally of course) do what he said and did. That is how the gift of a holy and powerful life comes to us.

Now disciplines are not law, they are wisdom. We have to learn how to do them, and we always fail at the outset. But to fail here is not to sin. The sin would be in not adopting and following up on a wise program of disciplines under grace. For then we are not really intending to do what Jesus said. We are planning to fail.

Disciplines are for disciples--apprentices--of Jesus, not for dabblers or mere consumers of religious services. They are for people who intend to learn