

A WORKBOOK ON
LIFE IN CHRIST



Disciplines of the Spirit



Maxie Dunnam

Author of With Jesus in the Upper Room

Disciplines of the Spirit

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INTRODUCTION

Paul’s understanding of the Christian life revolved around two basic concepts: (1) justification by grace through faith; and (2) a person in Christ. We become Christian by being justified by grace through faith. That begins the dynamic of our lives in Christ.

“In Christ,” “in union with Christ,” and “Christ in you” are the recurring phrases in Paul’s vocabulary. Variations of that phrase occur no less than 172 times in the New Testament. His definition of a Christian is a person in Christ. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17).

New Testament scholar James S. Stewart titled his monumental study of Paul, *A Man in Christ*. He contended that this concept of the indwelling Christ is the key that unlocks the secrets of Paul’s soul. He concluded, “Everything that religion meant for Paul is focused for us in such great words as these: ‘I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me’ (Gal. 2:20). ‘There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus’ (Rom. 8:11) ‘He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit’ (1 Cor. 6:17).”¹

We know the story of Paul’s Damascus Road experience: dramatically being struck down by a blinding light and hearing the voice of Christ. But interestingly, we don’t hear that story from Paul. Luke describes that experience in The Acts of the Apostles. Paul talks, rather, about the meaning of that experience and almost sings about it in exulting joy: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20 NIV).

This core theme of Paul—life in Christ—is the subject of this workbook. I have used my workbook style to explore the issue. The very title, *Disciplines of the Spirit: A Workbook on Life in Christ*, suggests that it may require more than expressing and elaborating on ideas. Special attention is given to particular disciplines Christians call means of grace, because they are especially experienced as channels through which God’s grace is conveyed to us.

They are disciplines of the Spirit, as Wesley described them: “outward signs, words and actions ordained by God, and appointed to the end to be ordinary channels whereby he might convey to man preventing, justifying or sanctifying grace.”²

I urge you to stay aware that the workbook format is important to appropriating meaning of the content, and our growth in our lives in Christ. It is designed for individual and group use. Let’s look at the process. It is simple but important.

I have learned from my long years of teaching and ministry with small groups that a six- to eight-week period for a group study is the most manageable and effective. Also, people can best appropriate content and truth in small doses. That is the reason for organizing the material in segments to be read daily.

The plan for using the workbook calls for a seven-week commitment. You are asked to give at least thirty to forty-five minutes each day to reflect on some dimension of spiritual disciplines and the means of grace. For most persons, engagement with the workbook will probably come at the beginning of the day. However, if it is not possible for you to give the time at the beginning of the day, do it whenever the time is available, but do it regularly.

This is not only an intellectual pursuit; it is also a spiritual journey, the purpose of which is to incorporate the content into your daily life. This journey is personal, but my hope is that you will share it with some fellow pilgrims who will meet together once each week during the seven weeks of the study. The workbook is arranged into seven major divisions, each designed to guide you for one week. These divisions contain seven sections, one for each day of the week. Each day of the week will have three major aspects: (1) reading, (2) reflecting and recording ideas and thoughts about the material and your own understanding and experience, (3) some practical suggestions for incorporating ideas from the reading material into your daily life.

The content for each day will not be too much to read, but it will be enough to challenge thought and action. The degree of meaning you receive from this workbook depends largely on your faithfulness in reflecting and recording. On some days there may be more suggestions than you can deal with in the time you have available. Do what is most meaningful for you, and do not feel guilty about the rest.

Always remember that this pilgrimage is personal. What you write in your workbook is your private property. You may not wish to share it with anyone. For this reason, no two people should attempt to share the same workbook. The importance of what you write is not what it may mean to someone else but what it means to you. Writing, even if only brief notes or single-word reminders, helps us clarify our feelings and thinking.

The significance of the reflecting-and-recording dimension will grow as you move along. Even beyond the seven weeks, you will find meaning in looking back to what you wrote on a particular day in response to a particular situation.

Sharing with Others

There is a sense in which this workbook can be a spiritual guide, for you can use it as a private venture without participating in a group. The value of the workbook will be enhanced, however, if you share the adventure with eight to twelve others. In this way, you will profit from the growing insights of others, and they will profit from yours.

The text includes a guide for group sharing at the end of each week. If this is a group venture, everyone should begin their personal involvement with the book on the same day, so that when you come together to share as a group, all will have been dealing with the same material and will be at the same place in the text. It will be helpful to have an initial get-acquainted group meeting to begin the adventure.

Group sessions for this workbook are designed to last ninety minutes (with the exception of the initial meeting). Those sharing in the group should covenant to attend all sessions unless an emergency prevents attendance. There will be seven weekly sessions in addition to this first get-acquainted time.

Group Leader's Tasks

One person may provide the leadership for the entire seven weeks, or leaders may be assigned from week to week. The leader's tasks are:

1. Read the directions and determine ahead of time how to handle the session. It may not be possible to use all the suggestions for sharing and praying together. Feel free to select those you think will be most meaningful and those for which you have adequate time.
2. Model a style of openness, honesty, and warmth. A leader does not ask anyone to share what he or she is not willing to share. Usually, as leader, be the first to share, especially as it relates to personal experiences.
3. Moderate the discussion.
4. Encourage reluctant members to participate and try to prevent a few group members from doing all the talking.
5. Keep the sharing centered in personal experience rather than academic debate.
6. Honor the time schedule. If it appears necessary to go longer than ninety minutes, the leader should get consensus for continuing another twenty or thirty minutes.
7. See that the meeting time and place are known by all, especially if meetings are held in different homes.
8. Make sure that the necessary materials for meetings are available and that the meeting room is arranged ahead of time.

It is a good idea to hold weekly meetings in the homes of the participants. (Hosts or hostesses may make sure there are as few interruptions as possible from children, telephones, pets, and so forth.) If the meetings are held in a church, plan to be in an informal setting. Participants are asked to dress casually, to be comfortable and relaxed. If refreshments are planned, serve them after the formal meeting. In this way, those who wish to stay longer for informal discussion may do so, while those who need to keep to the time schedule will be free to leave, having had the full value of the meeting time.

Suggestions for Initial Get-Acquainted Meeting

Since the initial meeting is for the purpose of getting acquainted and beginning the shared pilgrimage, here is a way to get started. (If name tags are needed, provide them.)

1. Have each person in the group give his or her full name and the name by which each wishes to be called. Do away with titles. Address all persons by their first name or nickname. (Each person should make a list of the names somewhere in his/her workbook.)
2. Let each person in the group share one of the happiest, most exciting, or most meaningful experiences he/she has had during the past three or four weeks. After all persons have shared in this way, let the entire group sing the doxology (“Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow”) or a chorus of praise.
3. After this experience of happy sharing, ask each person who will to share his/her expectations of this workbook study. Why did he or she become a part of it? What does each expect to gain from it? What are the reservations?
4. The leader should now review the introduction to the workbook and ask if there are questions about directions and procedures (this means that the leader should have read the introduction prior to the meeting). If persons have not received copies of the workbook, the books should be handed out now. Remember that every person must have his/her own workbook.
5. Day One in the workbook is the day following this initial meeting, and the next meeting should be held on Day Seven of the First Week. If the group must choose another weekly meeting time other than seven days from this initial session, the reading assignment should be brought in harmony with that so that the weekly meetings are always on Day Seven, and Day One is always the day following a weekly meeting.
6. Nothing binds a group together more than praying for one another. The leader should encourage each participant to write the names of each person in the group in his/her workbook and commit to praying for them by name daily during these seven weeks.

After checking to see that everyone knows the time and place of the next meeting, the leader may close with prayer, thanking God for each person in the group, for the opportunity for growth, and for the possibility of growing in our lives in Christ.

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Disciplines of the Spirit

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Week One

Going on to Salvation

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Salvation Is More Than a One-Time Event

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

—Eph. 4:14–16

This study’s primary focus is on the spiritual disciplines and the means of grace, the purposes of which are spiritual growth. So we begin with looking at the nature of salvation. Too many see salvation as a one-time event—that moment we acknowledge ourselves as sinners, confess our sin, repent, and accept Christ as our Savior. That, however, is the beginning experience; we do not suddenly emerge as full-grown Christians. We call experiencing spiritual maturity in its fullness “going on to salvation.”

John Wesley had a clear picture of what he called the “way of salvation.” Though he seldom used the word *conversion*, he placed a strong emphasis on justification. Many Christian thinkers do not do so, but Wesley distinguished regeneration and the new birth from justification. He began his sermon “The New Birth”:

If any doctrines within the whole compass of Christianity may be properly termed fundamental, they are doubtless these two—the doctrine of justification, and that of the new birth: the former relating to that great work which God does *for* us, in forgiving our sins; the latter, to the great work which God does *in* us, in renewing our fallen nature.¹

Though distinctive, the doctrines of justification and new birth belong together. God acts for us to forgive us, and at the same time begins the restoration of the divine image within us. This is the reason the new birth is such a powerful image. As our physical birth is the momentous beginning of our physical life on earth, our new life in Christ is the beginning of our soul's life for spiritual growth. We are, by God's grace, redeemed from sin and justified in relation to him; we are born of the Spirit.

Wesley defined the nature of the new birth in this fashion:

It is that great change which God works in the soul when he brings it into life; when he raises it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. It is the change wrought in the whole soul by the almighty Spirit of God when it is “created anew in Christ Jesus”; when it is “renewed after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness”; when the love of the world is changed into the love of God; pride into humility; passion into meekness; hatred, envy, malice, into a sincere, tender, disinterested love for all mankind.²

Even here, in the description of these elements of salvation—justification and new birth—there is the dynamic of growth, *going on to salvation*. We may be justified by grace through faith (see Romans 3:24; Ephesians 2:8) and be converted to Christ in the miracle of a moment, but the making of a saint, Christian maturity, is the task of a lifetime. That's the reason spiritual disciplines and the means of grace are essential. As Jesus talked about being “born again” (John 3:3), Paul, in his epistle to the Ephesians, calls us to no longer be infants, but to “grow up . . . into Christ” (Eph. 4:15 RSV).

Reflecting and Recording

Spend some time reflecting on your spiritual journey. Can you recall a time when you definitely claimed the Christian faith and named yourself a Christian? Write a few notes about that experience, perhaps some dates, feelings, occasions, and persons who may have been involved.

During the Day

Choose someone with whom you are comfortable sharing, tell them about this study you are beginning, and discuss what you have thought and recorded about your spiritual journey.

DAY TWO

Salvation Began at the Beginning

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me.”

—John 6:44-45

Salvation began at the beginning. The Nicene Creed, the creed most used by Christians, states this as it talks about God coming to us in Jesus Christ:

For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven;
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,
and was made human.

God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, loves us so much that he comes to us in Jesus Christ. We are saved by his grace. This grace is incomprehensible; in fact, theologian Karl Barth pointedly remarked in his book *The Epistle to the Romans*: “Only when grace is recognized as incomprehensible is it grace.”³ Even so, we experience grace expressed in different ways, and we have different ways of talking about it.

In his sermon “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” John Wesley summarized the goal of genuine Christian religion: “The end is, in one word, salvation.” In its broadest sense, Wesley understood salvation as the entire redeeming work of God in a human life, “from

the first dawning of grace in the soul, till it is consummated in glory.” He includes within his concept of salvation “all the drawings of the Father”—which he terms “preventing grace”—in the heart of a person as yet uncommitted to God.⁴

God’s grace works in us even before justifying grace and the new birth. We call this *prevenient grace*, a term describing God’s first attempts to reach us, call us, and save us. Jesus said, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day” (John 6:44). God always makes the first move toward us.

Grace is undeserved love; the unmerited favor God bestows. The word *prevenient* is a combination of two Latin root words: *prae*, meaning “before,” and *venire*, “to come.” Prevenient means that which comes first or in advance. So, prevenient grace is that first move God makes in our direction.

Prevenient grace may be that first slight twinge of conscience, or the vague discontent or growing questioning about our lifestyle, or concern about our relationship with God. Grace is God calling our name.

Later, we will discuss Scripture as one of the primary means of grace. One of the ways I make this means effective in my life is to read the Bible in different translations. Consider the following passage, which is an illuminating expression of prevenient grace:

For I am not ashamed of the Gospel. I see it as the very power of God working for the salvation of everyone who believes it, both Jew and Greek. I see in it God’s plan for imparting righteousness to men, a process begun and continued by their faith. For, as the scripture says: “The just shall live by faith.” (Rom. 1:16–17 PHILLIPS)

Many translations of Romans 1:16 have Paul stating simply that the gospel is “the power of God *for* salvation.” Note how Phillips translates it, “the power of God *working for* the salvation of everyone who believes.” C. K. Barrett, an outstanding British New Testament scholar, has what I believe is a more meaningful translation: “For I am not ashamed of

the Gospel, since it is the operation of God's power *working towards salvation*, effective for everyone who has faith—Jews first, and then the Gentiles too.”⁵

This is a powerful expression of prevenient grace: “God's power *working towards salvation*, effective for everyone who has faith.” Even before God's grace works for our justification and new birth, his grace is working to bring us to that point where we acknowledge our sin and begin to realize we *need* to be saved from our sin.

Note in the Phillips and Barrett translations that salvation is presented as a *process*—not a dynamic of fixed steps, but that of one thing happening before another can work. What is important to recognize is that God is taking the initiative, always offering his loving power for our full salvation.

The gospel itself is the “operation of God's power *working towards salvation*,” as Barrett translates Paul. This is not merely an announcement, or a proclamation, that salvation will come at some time in the future. God's power is at work *now*; God is taking the initiative. This working of God is not dependent upon any human activity or condition; it is not because we have chosen, but because God wills and longs for our salvation.

God acted once and for all to provide a means for our salvation, offering his Son Jesus as his sacrificial gift of love. Through the Holy Spirit, he acts in an ongoing way to bring us to the point where we will accept his gift.

Reflecting and Recording

Yesterday you were asked to reflect on your Christian journey as you came into the Christian faith. In that reflection, were there occasions, situations, or persons that you would now consider dynamics of what we are calling prevenient *grace* (God going before you, bringing you to a point of decision and commitment)? Make a note of those things.

During the Day

If you thought of persons who played a role in your coming into the Christian faith, find a way to tell them thank you today.

Make a decision that throughout the day (perhaps while waiting at a traffic light or for an appointment, or when saying a blessing over a meal), you will bring this thought to mind: the gospel itself is the “operation of God’s power working *towards* [my] salvation.”

DAY THREE

Assurance

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

—Rom. 8:12–17

Most people in the Methodist/Wesleyan tradition of the Christian faith know at least the broad outline of the life of our founder, John Wesley. Having been nurtured by his mother, Susanna, and his father, Samuel (a priest in the Church of England), John had a conversion to the ideal of holy living in 1725, while a student at Oxford University. There are few examples in history of a more disciplined religious person: he rose at 4:00 a.m., read the New Testament in Greek for an hour, and then prayed for an hour with his brother Charles and others who had joined him in what was derisively called the Holy Club. He spent time visiting prisons and gave to the poor all of his money except that which was absolutely necessary for his own living. He was almost neurotically preoccupied with the right use of his time.

John Wesley was a man desperately seeking both salvation and assurance of his salvation. He was tirelessly bent upon achieving that, and drove himself as a merciless taskmaster in all the spiritual disciplines and services that could be imagined. He even went to the American colonies as a missionary to Indigenous Peoples. Having failed in that endeavor, John returned home from Georgia, downcast in mind, despondent in spirit, pierced to his heart with the futility of all his efforts and the emptiness of his soul.

It was in that despondent mood that he went to a prayer meeting on Aldersgate Street, London, on May 24, 1738. A layperson read Martin Luther's preface to the epistle to the Romans, and Wesley described later what happened in his own life: "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death."⁶

Salvation is at the center of Methodist theology, and Wesley's understanding is often discussed with four claims: (1) all people need to be saved from sin, (2) all people may be saved from sin, (3) all people may know they are saved from sin, and (4) all people may be saved to the uttermost.⁷

Aldersgate was the watershed experience that gave Wesley assurance of his salvation. No wonder this became one of the "Four Alls" of Wesley's understanding of salvation: all can *know they are saved*.

The apostle Paul might say that Wesley "did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but . . . the spirit of sonship"—the sonship that would enable him to "cry, 'Abba! Father!'" (Rom. 8:15 RSV).

Reflecting and Recording

Assurance is the privilege of all Christians, though not all Christians claim it. Spend a few minutes reflecting on whether you are claiming that gift.

The witness of assurance is continually verified in different ways. Consider these ways and put a check by those present in your life:

- ___ 1. I know that I have repented of my sins, and will continue to repent daily.
- ___ 2. I am aware of change in my life, and the awareness of assurance grows within me as I see changes continually happening.
- ___ 3. I am aware of a new character being produced in me, as the fruits of the Spirit are growing in my life.
- ___ 4. I find joy in the service of God.

During the Day

If you did not check all of the verifications of assurance listed, what can you do now and as you move through the day to act on them?

Work Out in Fact What Is True in Principle

Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

—Rom. 6:3–4

The process of saint-making, Christian maturity, is to work out in fact what is already true in principle. Through justifying grace, in the position of our relationship to God in Jesus Christ, we are new persons. Now our condition, the actual life we live, must be brought into harmony with our new position.

You may have already questioned my use of the word *saint*. That word means different things to different people. In a general way, Paul called the Christians to whom he was writing in some of his New Testament letters “saints” (in Ephesus, in Philippi, in Colossae).

Paul contended that we are to become new creatures in Christ Jesus. In fact, that’s the way he defined a Christian to the Romans: “just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” He expressed it this way to the Corinthians: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Cor. 5:17). The aim of the Christian life is nothing less than to be new creatures in Christ Jesus. Discipline and using the means of grace are to shape us fully as new creatures in Christ Jesus. I use the word *saint* in that fashion.

Most preaching and teaching too often puts the emphasis on our coming into the Christian life—in confessing, repenting, trusting Christ as Savior, and receiving his forgiveness. The theological or biblical term for God’s work in this dynamic is *justification*. When we think and talk about salvation, this is often where we center. This is limited thinking. As already stated, Wesley used the term *salvation* in a broader and deeper way, referring to the entire saving activity of God in human lives: “By salvation I mean, not barely . . . deliverance from hell, or going to heaven, but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its . . . original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our soul after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth.”⁸

Salvation is not to be understood as something coming in the future. God takes the initiative and is working now. This working of God is not dependent upon any human activity or condition; it is not because we have chosen, but because God wills and longs for our salvation. Through the Holy Spirit, he acts in an ongoing way to bring us to the point where we will accept his gift. Having the Holy Spirit continues his work, empowering us to move on to full salvation. So, we’re not only talking about prevenient and justifying grace, but also *sanctifying* grace, which we will address tomorrow.

Reflecting and Recording

Spend a few minutes reflecting on Paul’s claim: “just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (Rom. 6:4). If you have claimed his salvation by grace through faith, thus becoming a Christian, in what way are you living a new life?

During the Day

Paul expressed the fact that Christians are new persons in Christ: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Cor. 5:17). Keep that vision in your mind as you move through the day: *I am a new person.*

DAY FIVE

Saved to the Uttermost

Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

—Heb. 6:1–2

Of the Four Alls in the summary of Wesley’s understanding of salvation, the third and fourth are the most distinctive: all people may know they are saved from sin, and all people may be saved to the uttermost. On Day Three, we considered assurance—the fact that we can know we are saved. Today, we consider “saved to the uttermost” (see Hebrews 7:25 KJV). For Wesley, this meant Christian perfection.

In his introductory comment to Wesley’s sermon “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” Albert Outler wrote:

If, for Wesley, salvation was the total restoration of the deformed image of God in us, and if its fullness was the recovery of our negative power not to sin and our positive power to love God supremely, this denotes that furthest reach of grace and its triumphs in this life that Wesley chose to call “Christian Perfection.”⁹

Wesley particularly stressed the idea that “all can be saved to the uttermost,” calling it, “going on to perfection.” He emphasized the transformative work of the Holy Spirit. We can better understand the full impact of that transformation by reflecting on the distinction

between God's action *for* the sinner—pardon and justification—and God's action *in* the pardoned sinner's heart—restoration of the broken image of God and of the human power to avoid and resist intentional sin. Again, Albert Outler expressed it clearly: "We have no part in our justification before God, save the passive act of accepting and trusting the merits of Christ. But we have a crucial part to play in the further business of 'growing up into Christ, into the stature of the perfect man.'"¹⁰

Christian perfection is another term for *sanctification*. "Just as justification and regeneration are thresholds for the Christian life in earnest ('what God does for us'), so also sanctification is 'what God does in us,' to mature and fulfill the human potential according to his primal design."¹¹

As stated on Day Two, through justification and the new birth, we are new persons; now our condition, *the actual life we live*, must be brought into harmony with our new position. In the dynamic process of sanctification—Christian perfection—we practice spiritual disciplines and the means of grace to work out in fact what is true in principle.

Reflecting and Recording

Consider again C. K. Barrett's translation of Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, since it is the operation of God's power *working towards salvation*, effective for everyone who has faith—Jews first, and then the Gentiles too."¹² Reflect on this by honestly asking: How is God's power working toward salvation in my life?

During the Day

As you continue reflecting in this fashion, find someone today with whom to discuss the notion of God working toward salvation in the context of the popular thought that salvation is a finished, one-time event.

We Grow by Discipline

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you. . . .

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!

—Gal. 4:8–11, 19–20

A little girl had been giving her mother a hard time all morning. Finally, her mother said, “Please behave yourself. Don’t you know that every time you misbehave, I get another gray hair in my head?”

“My,” the little girl said, “you sure must have been a bad little girl. Just look at all the gray hairs Grandmother has!”

Apart from the obvious lesson that we parents need to be careful in the way we teach our children, the story is a good introduction to one of the most profound truths of Scripture: “My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!” (Gal. 4:19 RSV).

With sharpness and clarity, Paul stated the passion of his life and his vision for a new humanity. This translation of the verse has an even more poignant feeling: “Oh, my

dear children, I feel the pangs of childbirth all over again till Christ be formed within you” (PHILLIPS).

Paul’s great definition of a Christian was a person “in Christ.” He expressed it over and over again: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17 RSV); “And the secret is simply this: Christ in you! Yes, Christ in you bringing with him the hope of all the glorious things to come” (Col. 1:27 PHILLIPS); and, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1 RSV).

We will return to these images often during the next weeks of our study: “being conformed to the image of Christ” (see Romans 8:29) and “having Christ formed in us” (see Galatians 4:19). We cultivate the presence of Christ and are formed in him by discipline, particularly through the means of grace.

Christians do not suddenly emerge mature; we grow. Our “going on to salvation” is our going on in sanctifying grace, going on to sainthood. For this journey to be effective, we must claim the reality that discipline is an absolute necessity for the Christian way. As previously stated, being converted to Christ may be the miracle of a moment, but the making of a saint is the task of a lifetime. Paul talked about that process in different ways: we are to grow up in Christ (see Ephesians 4:15); to become mature in Christ (see Colossians 1:28); and to have the mind of Christ in us (see Philippians 2:5). He used the metaphor of childbirth to express his groaning desire that Christians grow to “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). “Oh, my dear children, I feel the pangs of childbirth all over again till Christ be formed within you” (Gal. 4:19 PHILLIPS).

It is crucial that we think rightly of discipline; it is not an end within itself. Too often within our Christian history, we have considered discipline an end rather than a means, using it as a proof of our sainthood. Albert Day, one of my mentors, spoke clearly about this misunderstanding. In *Discipline and Discovery*, a book he wrote as a manual for The Disciplined Order of Christ in 1947, he cautioned: (1) discipline must not be practiced for its own sake; (2) discipline must not be confused with repression; and (3) discipline must never be conceived as a denial or destruction of your own uniqueness.

The third warning is particularly important since the purpose of this daily workbook is to help the reader grow spiritually, with the emphasis of *growing up in Christ*. The goal

of our life is to be formed in Christ. That does not mean a denial or destruction of your own uniqueness, but your own being taking on the shape of Christ.

Reflecting and Recording

Spend some time examining your own patterns of discipline. Put a check by any of the following that may be descriptive:

- I am a very disciplined person.
- I am sporadic in discipline.
- I am disciplined in some areas.
- I work at it, but it is tough and I'm always struggling.
- I am disciplined in my efforts at Christian growth.
- I know that spiritual discipline is essential, but I am doing little about it.

Write a brief prayer of confession based on this self-examination.

During the Day

Look over those items that you checked. Is there anything you might do today as the beginning of a corrective response?

DAY SEVEN

A Price for Everything

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”

—Matt. 13:44-46

There is an old adage which has God saying, “Take what you wish—take it and pay for it.” It’s good to keep this in mind as we continue reflecting on the necessity of discipline.

There is also truth in the saying that the best things in life are free, but it isn’t absolute truth. Certainly, we can’t buy love, but isn’t there really a price tag on love? How can we appropriate the love of a husband or a wife without paying the price of attention, tenderness, care, and the disciplined giving of our time?

How can we appropriate the beauty of God’s creation? To be sure, it is an extravagant gift on the part of God. But how dull are we to that beauty? How often do we fail to allow that beauty to bathe our souls because we do not have eyes to see? We haven’t taken the time to sit quietly and take in the beauty God is offering us through his creation.

Even those things that we think are free—indeed, those things which are given as gifts—require something from us if we would appropriate them. It is helpful to think of discipline in that way. The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price

make the case. Jesus was underscoring the fact that to enter the kingdom is worth any sacrifice we might have to make. The man who found the treasure hidden in the field sold all that he had in order to raise the money to purchase the field. The man who found the pearl of great price sold all his other pearls, plus everything else that he had, in order to buy the prized pearl.

That's the perspective we need in considering discipline. Yes, at the core of its meaning is self-denial, but it's important to remember that we experience the freedom of joy and celebration only as we are willing to see the kingdom as a pearl of great price for which we are willing to exchange all else. Discipline enables us to exchange lesser values, habits, styles, attitudes, ways of relating, limited understandings, and closed minds for the pearl of great price: a life shaped by and in Christ.

Richard Foster was on target when he titled his now-classic book *Celebration of Discipline*. He said it well:

[We should not] think of the Spiritual Disciplines as some dull drudgery aimed at exterminating laughter from the face of the earth. Joy is the keynote of all the Disciplines. The purpose of the Disciplines is liberation from the stifling slavery to self-interest and fear. When the inner spirit is liberated from all that weighs it down, it can hardly be described as dull drudgery. Singing, dancing, even shouting characterize the Disciplines of the spiritual life.¹³

Reflecting and Recording

Have you had any experience in life that confirms the adage, “Take what you wish—take it and pay for it”?

In what area of your life (nature, love, friendship, God's presence, etc.) have you cultivated discipline in order to have the full value of a gift?

Have joy and discipline been connected in your life? If so, how?

During the Day

Do something today (write a note, make a phone call, see a person, make a gift, etc.) that you have been intending to do, but have not been disciplined enough to do it.

WEEK ONE

Group Sharing

Introduction

Personal sharing is a significant aspect of this study experience, and this guide is simply an effort to facilitate personal sharing. The leader should not be rigid in following these suggestions, but should especially seek to be sensitive to what is going on in the lives of the participants and to focus the group's sharing on those experiences. Ideas are important and we should wrestle with them, but it is important that the group meeting not become a debate about ideas. The emphasis should be on persons—experiences, feelings, and meanings.

As the group comes to the place where all can share honestly and openly what is happening in their lives, the experience will grow more meaningful. This does not mean sharing only the good or positive; also share the struggles, the difficulties, or the negatives. Discipline is not easy, and it would be deceptive to pretend it is; growth requires effort. Don't be afraid to share your questions, reservations, and dry periods, as well as that in which you find meaning.

Sharing Together

If the group did not have an introductory meeting, have each person give his or her full name and the name by which they wish to be called. Write the names in this book to use as a prayer list through this seven-week study.

1. Leader, read the section from the Nicene Creed on Day Two then invite two or three persons to share their journey of coming into the Christian faith as they reflected on Days One and Two.
2. Spend ten to fifteen minutes discussing William Fitzgerald's Four Alls of Wesley's understanding of salvation from Day Three and that assurance is the privilege of all believers.
3. Spend ten to fifteen minutes discussing being "saved to the uttermost" (sanctifying grace). Don't get involved in discussing whether you believe this or not, but focus on what it means for God to be *working toward* salvation in your life.
4. Invite as many persons as are willing to do so to share their spiritual journey, referring back to the notes they made in Reflecting and Recording on Day One: recall a time when you definitely claimed the Christian faith and named yourself a Christian.

Praying Together

Each week the group is asked to pray together. Corporate prayer is one of the great blessings of Christian community. There is power in corporate prayer, and it is important that this dimension be included in our shared pilgrimage.

It is also important that you feel comfortable in this and that no pressure be placed on anyone to pray aloud. Silent corporate prayer may be as vital and meaningful as verbal corporate prayer. God does not need our spoken words to hear our prayers. Silence, where thinking is centered and attention is focused, may provide our deepest periods of prayer.

There is power, however, in a community on a common journey who speak aloud their thoughts and feelings to God in the presence of their fellow pilgrims. Verbal prayers should be offered spontaneously as a person chooses to pray aloud. Don't practice, "Let's go around the circle now, and each one pray."

Suggestions for a time of group prayer will be given each week. The leader should regard these only as suggestions. What is happening in the meeting—the mood, the needs that are expressed, the timing—should determine the direction of the group's prayer. Here are some possibilities as you close your time together:

1. The leader (or someone who has been specifically invited by the leader) will begin the prayer time with a prayer of thanksgiving for bringing this group together, and simply pray that the group will share honestly and offer themselves in loving fellowship.
2. Think back over the sharing that has taken place during the session. What personal needs or concerns have been shared? Any participant who heard a need or concern expressed by another can speak this aloud. After each mention of a need, the leader will invite the group to silently pray for that person and concern.
3. When the focused praying is over, the group can pray the Lord's Prayer together.