

DISCIPLINE

Discipline, Latin *disciplina*, or “teaching” or “learning”. In a general sense, a discipline is a particular *rule*, a method, a set pattern of behavior or system of conduct that one adopts with the intended purpose to train, correct, mold, or perfect one’s mental facilities or moral character. In a psychological sense, a discipline is related to *disposition* formation or personality formation.

In Christian spirituality, a discipline is a rule of life or a set pattern of living intended to facilitate spiritual growth and Christian community. Spiritual disciplines are concerned with our lifestyle or our practice of faith and faithful living.

Richard Foster divides the disciplines into three categories:

1. *Inward discipline of meditations, prayer, fasting, and study or spiritual reading.*
2. *Outward disciplines of social mercy, solitude, simplicity, submission to a rule or order.*
3. *Corporate discipline of worship, guidance or spiritual direction, confession, and jubilee or celebration.*

Spiritual disciplines involve more than just psychological change. Their concern is total and complete grace transformed and healing. The goal of the Christian disciple is to be completely conformed to the image and likeness of Christ or, as the apostle Paul describes it, having the mind of Christ within us (Phil. 2:5). One of the chief dangers Christians face is forgetting that this transformation is a gift of God. People can easily fall into the trap of thinking that this transformation is attained through human effort and thus practice spiritual disciplines in terms of human effort. By themselves the spiritual disciplines cannot change us, but they offer a way to participate in the *grace* that is available for spiritual growth. That is why *John Wesley* called them the “means of grace.” They are tools or conduits through which the grace is given that alone can transform the heart. In this sense, spiritual disciplines are relational expressions of our openness to God, of our commitment to the *covenant*, and our belief in the promise of complete transformation (or *sanctification*).

The Covenant And Common Disciplines Of Renovare

In utter dependence upon Jesus Christ as my ever-living Savior, Teacher, Lord, and Friend, I will seek continual renewal through: spiritual exercises, spiritual gifts, and acts of service By God's grace:

I will set aside time regularly for prayer, meditation, and spiritual reading, and will seek to practice the presence of God.

I will strive mightily against sin and will do deeds of love and mercy that lead to righteousness.

I will seek the gifts of the Holy Spirit, nurturing the fruit of the Spirit and experiencing the joy and power of the Spirit.

I will seek to serve others everywhere I can and will work for justice in all human relationships and social structures.

I will study the scriptures regularly and share my faith with others as God leads.

I will joyfully seek to show forth the presence of God in all that I am, in all that I do, in all that I say.¹

¹ The Upper Room Dictionary Of Christian Spiritual Formation, Keith Beasley-Topliffe