

Education and Growing in Faith

There is something of an 'urban legend' around that it was common for first century Jews to say 'may you be covered in the dust of your rabbi' as a kind of blessing to those seeking to follow the discipline of a spiritual teacher. This saying has been discredited, but the image still has a resonance – giving a sense of being so close to the one you follow that one is sprayed by the dust in their wake.



Whether the saying is accurate or not, it is not a bad image to remind us that the calling of Jesus was 'Follow me'. And that Jesus in his life and ministry was very much like a Rabbi who sought to teach in story and image, to encourage his followers to both emulate him and to listen to him in order that they might grow in faith and have the spiritual strength and the heart and mind to transform the world in partnership with God.

Being a disciple

Discipline is an unpopular word, but it is derived from the same root as disciple. It suggests the Christian path requires some effort! It has been the tradition of the Church through the ages to talk in terms of 'Spiritual Disciplines' – there is no exhaustive list of these disciplines but they are grouped into two types, Disciplines of Abstinence and Disciplines of Engagement, these may include

Disciplines of Abstinence

These are ways of denying ourselves something we want or need in order to make space to focus on and connect with God.

Solitude: Refraining from interacting with other people in order to be alone with God and be found by him.

(Solitude is completed by silence.)

Silence: Not speaking in a quiet place in order to quiet our minds and whole self and attend to God's presence. Also, not speaking so that we can listen to others and bless them.

Fasting: Going without food (or something else) for a period of intense prayer — the fast may be complete or partial.

Sabbath: Doing no work to rest in God's person and provision; praying and playing with God and others.

Secrecy: Not making our good deeds or qualities known to let God or others receive attention and to find our sufficiency in God alone.

Submission: Not asserting ourselves in order to come under the authority, wisdom, and power of Jesus Christ as our Lord, King, and Master. (Can include submitting to a person as unto Christ.)

Disciplines of Engagement

These are ways of connecting with God and other people, conversing honestly with them in order to love and be loved.

Bible Reading: Trusting the Holy Spirit-inspired words of Scripture as our guide, wisdom, and strength for life.

Worship: Praising God's greatness, goodness, and beauty in words, music, ritual, or silence.

Prayer: Conversing with God about what we're experiencing and doing together.

Soul Friendship: Engaging fellow disciples of Jesus in prayerful conversation or other spiritual practices.

Personal Reflection: Paying attention to our inner self in order to grow in love for God, others, and self.

Service: Humbly serving God by overflowing with his love and compassion to others, especially those in need.

Bill Gaultiere, <http://www.soulshpherd.org/2012/07/spiritual-disciplines-list/>

Also recommended to read on this, a light introduction: 'The Life you've always wanted' by John Ortberg

We are called to grow in faith, not be standing still. When we talk of a growing Church we talk of growing in faith and action, flourishing as a Spiritual Community rather than just in terms of numerical or financial growth.

Whole person engagement



The summary of the Law found in the Synoptic Gospels echoes the Old Testament 'Shema' - Deuteronomy 6:4-9 – it tells us to love God with heart, soul, strength and mind, to love neighbour and to love self (apologies for the US spelling in the artwork). Often there has been an imbalance in these with some churches based only on 'a reasonable faith', some engaged purely in 'mystical' experience, some with emotional engagement, some only acts of service. The Scriptural picture of a Church is a place where all of these ways of growing, engaging and learning are valued and offered.

My hope is that St John the Divine is growing and will continue to grow as a Spiritual Community and that spiritual strength will enable us to serve those around us, and will take us beyond the walls of our Church and out to the world beyond as people of faith with a light and a life to share. That means I see St John's growing as

- A learning community
- A praying community
- A serving community
- A worshipping community
- A loving community
- A faithful community
- A missional community



In order to continue to grow as such we need to be 'intentional' about our learning. And to consider what it means to be a spiritual community, to ask where we are in need of learning and experience that can help each member flourish wherever she or he is. To grow in faith, hope and love.

Which leaves the questions provided for this session.

- How did we come to where we are now?
 - What places, things, people etc contributed to your journey?
- and
- How have they affected your personal journey?

And two which we can take away

What feeds /nurtures your soul?

What other things should we be doing to grow our faith?