



Exploring Spirituality:

How Can I Be More
Compassionate and Centered?

iFOLLOW

Meeting with Jesus

The iFollow Discipleship Series



About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

Curriculum Development: The iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition curriculum development was lead by the **Center for Creative Ministry**. **General Editor:** Monte Sahlin; **Assistant Editor:** Debbonnaire Kovacs; **Directional Advisory:** Brad Forbes, Carole Kilcher, Ceri Myers, Cesar Gonzalez, Clayton Kinney, Curtis Rittenour, Dave Osborne, Dave VanDenburgh, Gerry Chudleigh, Jane Thayer, Jerry Thomas, John Appel, Jose Rojas, Kim Johnson, Nicole Chao, Paul Richardson, Rich DuBose, Shasta Nelson, William Sutton; **Pastoral Advisory:** Claudio Consuegra, Collette Pekar, Dave Hutman, Don Driver, Fredrick Russell, Jerry Nelson, Jesse Wilson, Leslie Bumgardner, Loren Fenton, Rebecca Brillhart; **Unit Authors:** Alberto Valenzuela, Althea Pineda, Corienne Hay, Debbonnaire Kovacs, Ed Dickerson, Gianluca Bruno, Gil Bahnsen, Greg Nelson, Jack Calkins, James Whibberding, Karen Collum, Monte Sahlin, Norma Sahlin, Pam Splawinski, Patty Ntuhuka, Reinder Bruinsma, Ryan Bell; **Additional contribution** by Maria Ovando-Gibson; **Additional editing:** Dave Gemmell, Meredith Carter; **Graphic Design:** Mind Over Media; **Layout:** Paul D. Young; **Web Development:** Narrow Gate Media.

License

iFollow Discipleship Pastor's Edition is produced by the NAD Church Resource Center for use by Seventh-day Adventist Congregations in Bermuda, Candada, and the United States. Churches may freely copy the lessons and PowerPoints for use within their congregations. Any other usage is prohibited without prior written consent from the NAD Church Resource Center. iFollow Discipleship, Copyright 2010, the North American Division Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists. NAD Church Resource Center, 12501 Old Columbia pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904, 301-680-6339.



iFOLLOW

www.ifollowdiscipleship.org

How Can I Be More Compassionate and Centered?

This presentation is designed for people who have not yet come to a point in their spiritual journey where they have decided to become a follower of Jesus.

Learning Objectives

1. Explore the concept of deepening the spiritual life
2. Learn about specific tools to do this called “spiritual disciplines”
3. Develop some spiritual disciplines that enlarge the heart

Content Outline

- A. Growing a Bigger Heart
- B. Tools for the Heart
- C. Basic Spiritual Disciplines
 1. Prayer and meditation
 2. Scripture reading and meditation
 3. Fasting
 4. Other disciplines

Background Material for the Presenter

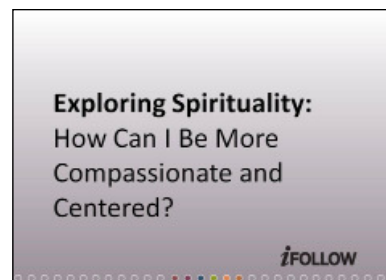
Thich Nhat Hahn is an expatriate Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk, teacher, author, poet and peace activist. He joined a Zen monastery at the age of 16, studied Buddhism as a novice, and was fully ordained as a monk in 1949. In the early 1960s, he founded the School of Youth for Social Services in Saigon, a grassroots relief organization that rebuilt bombed villages, set up schools and medical centers, and resettled families left homeless during the Vietnam War.

He traveled to the U.S. a number of times to study at Princeton University and later lecture at Cornell University and teach at Columbia University. His main goal for those

iFollow
Discipleship
Series:
Meeting with
Jesus
Action Plan
& Presenter
Notes

Exploring
Spirituality:
How Can I Be
More Com-
passionate
and
Centered?

1



trips, however, was to urge the U.S. government to withdraw from Vietnam. He urged Martin Luther King, Jr., to oppose the Vietnam War publicly, and spoke with many people and groups about peace. In a January 25, 1967, letter to the Nobel Institute in Norway, King nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize. Nhat Hanh later led the Buddhist delegation to the Paris Peace Talks.

Exiled from Vietnam for many years, he was allowed to return for a trip in 2005 and again in 2007. Today his home is Plum Village Monastery in the Dordogne region in the south of France and he travels internationally leading retreats and giving talks as one of the world's foremost advocates of compassion and peaceful living.

If anyone has an excuse to live life with bitterness, resentment and hatred it is Thich Nhat Hahn. He is intimately familiar with the pain of suffering, rejection and intolerance. Yet everyone who meets him and spends time with him describes him as a man of deep, genuine inner peace, contentment and compassion.

Here is a statement he made recently about what it takes to live a life of compassion and deeper centeredness:

“How can we help our hearts to grow every day, to be able to embrace everything? The Buddha gave a very beautiful example. Suppose you have a bowl of water and someone put a handful of salt in the bowl of water; it would be too salty for you to drink. But suppose someone threw a handful of salt into a clear mountain river. The river is deep and wide enough that you can still drink the water without tasting the salt.

“When your heart is small, you suffer a lot. But when your heart becomes bigger, very big, then the same thing does not make you suffer anymore. So the secret is how to help your heart to grow. If your heart is small, you can't accept that person, you can't tolerate him or her with his or her shortcomings. But when your heart is big, you have a lot of understanding and compassion, and then there is no problem, you don't suffer, and you embrace him or her because your heart is so big.”

Notice the comparison in the above illustration. Your life is like either a small bowl of still water or a wide, deep and flowing river. The truth is, we cannot keep the “salt” from entering our lives—pain, crisis, difficulties, distasteful people and things happen—usually beyond our control. But we do have the ability to absorb the “salt” and make our lives livable by how wide and deep our hearts are. We can grow our hearts bigger to the point of being capable of embracing all of life.

So the question is, what does it take to grow a bigger heart? What are the keys to centering ourselves more and more in compassion and peace? Are there tools we can use to help expand our hearts and minds and spirits?

iFollow
Discipleship
Series:
Meeting with
Jesus

Action Plan
& Presenter
Notes

**Exploring
Spirituality:**
How Can I Be
More Com-
passionate
and
Centered?

2

Growing a Bigger Heart

Let's first unpack this metaphor to suggest some dynamics to growing bigger hearts. One, contrast the containers for water: bowl versus river. Both hold water but the bowl is smaller than the river. Its boundaries limit the amount of water it can hold. And therefore, salt affects the taste more easily in the bowl than in the river. It often seems true that the smaller, more narrow a person's view and experience of life, the more critical and judgmental that person is, making it quite difficult to embrace change, diversity or difference.

Two, contrast the movement of the water in the two containers. In a bowl, the water is still. In a river, the water is moving. The result is that "salt" is less invasive, less harmful in the river than in the bowl.

When we see life as a journey, a movement, a developmental process, we have more patience with difficulties and difficult people. We are able to cut some slack for ourselves and for others, recognizing that no one is a finished product. We are all still growing and maturing. We are people "under construction."

Three, moving water in a river can expand the river boundaries because that water has an ever flowing source that keeps the river continually filled and running. Water in a bowl is finite and cannot move the boundaries of the container.

Several principles are implied with this third point from the bowl vs. river metaphor. If we want to grow bigger hearts we must recognize and acknowledge the Source of compassion and peace. The divine source of life flows constantly. God's presence is everywhere. Our task is to be willing to "step" into that flow and join the current of life. The more we submerge ourselves in God's presence, the more we expose ourselves to this divine life, the greater our capacity to live the divine life.

For a river to flow full and free, all impediments and potential obstacles must be removed. The reality is that in life there are various obstructions that minimize the impact of God's presence in our hearts and minds. Just like a human artery gets clogged with plaque which lessens the flow of life-giving blood to the heart and other significant organs, producing a condition called arteriosclerosis or "hardening of the arteries." The effect can sometimes lead to heart attacks and other severe, potentially life-damaging conditions.

Even so the human heart and mind get plugged or blocked, disrupting the full and free flow of the divine power and life-giving presence into our lives. Egotism and self-centeredness, narcissism, ignorance and delusion, unresolved guilt, paralyzing fear, addictions, distractions; all these tend to minimize the true compassion and inner peace that come from the flow of God's Spirit.



iFollow
Discipleship
Series:
Meeting with
Jesus

Action Plan
& Presenter
Notes

**Exploring
Spirituality:**
How Can I Be
More Com-
passionate
and
Centered?

3

So what needs to happen? How does one remove these impediments? Are there specific steps and strategies that effectively unblock our hearts and minds so we can experience God's Life in fullness and wholeness, so we can live with a deep centeredness that remains in a state of peace and contentment regardless of external circumstances?

Tools for the Heart

There's an ancient saying, "What you sow you will reap." It's all about cause and effect. The analogy is from agriculture. The farmer operates by this principle. He plants the grain. He provides the right conditions for the growing of the grain seeds. He cultivates the ground, plants the seeds, waters the plants, fertilizes as necessary, and then the natural forces of the earth take over and up comes the grain. And in the end, he harvests the plants.

The farmer never enjoys a harvest without first sowing the seeds. And if he sows rice seeds, he gets a rice harvest. If he sows wheat, he gets wheat. He never sows corn and harvests apple trees. What he sows, he reaps.

That's a profound principle when it comes to spiritual growth and development. We have to take responsibility for sowing the seeds of the qualities we want to see grow and be harvested. If we want more love, we have to "plant" love. If we want peace, we must "plant" peace. As Gandhi famously said, "Be the change you want to see in the world." And then we have to cultivate the conditions most conducive to growing what we truly want to experience and manifest.

Here's the way one New Testament passage describes this reality: "People harvest only what they plant. If they plant to satisfy their egos and self-centeredness, their egos will bring them ruin. But if they plant to please the Spirit, they will experience the divine eternal life from the Spirit. We must not become tired of doing good. We will receive our harvest of the divine eternal life at the right time if we do not give up." (Galatians 6:7, NCV)

Notice this is about our willingness to "step into" the flow of the divine Spirit and Life. If we want to experience the realities of God we need to place ourselves in that environment, in those activities and places that nurture the qualities of God. We grow our hearts bigger by placing our hearts in God. It's the law of agriculture and spirituality: you reap what you sow.

And even as the farmer uses specialized tools to do his work more effectively, we also have tools that grow our hearts, tools that when used place our hearts in God's Flow of Life. Let's look at a few.

Desire: Jesus described a significant tool for the heart: "Whatever is in your heart determines what you say." (Luke 6:45, NLT) What is the tool? Desire. Passion. Longing. He



said it another way, too: “Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will also be.” (Matthew 6:21, NLT)

The point is, the object of our desire, passion and longing (what we truly treasure and value) radically impacts our experience of life. So a very effective spiritual tool is to evaluate our desires. What do you long for often? Where is your deepest passion invested? What would you say your desires during the course of any given day say about you as a person? What you want out of life, what you truly value and think is important?

We are wired to follow after our passion, desires and longings. That’s the power of the heart. So if you want a life characterized by depth, compassion, joy, peace—if you want more of these divine qualities in your life—than spend time desiring them. Place your focus on those qualities every day. Think about them. Read stories about people who manifest them. Talk about them. Allow your heart to feel them.

Here’s an interesting idea next time you have the remote control in your hand. If you’re watching a movie and you come to a scene that stimulates in your heart the qualities you desire, rewind that scene and play it again. Watch it carefully. Allow yourself to feel the desire, longing, passion for the divine qualities being manifested. Rewind it again and play it. Watch it. Feel it. Reflect on it. Talk about it with your partner or friend watching with you. Consider doing this throughout the whole movie, spending time focusing on the divine qualities being shown.

The point is, we must redirect our desires, passions, and longings to those qualities we truly want manifested in our lives, those divine characteristics that deepen and grow our hearts. So we have to practice feeling them, exposing ourselves to them, letting our hearts grow into them over and over again.

Perhaps this is why Jesus made the statement, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.” (Matthew 5:6) Passion, desire and longing are being affirmed and blessed here. But not just any kind of desire. Jesus says the desire and passion for justice and right are what will be filled and blessed. He specifies the object of desire because he knows that we are wired to follow after what we long for. So make sure you’re longing for the best and the most good in life.

Thoughts: There’s an ancient proverb that says, “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.” (Proverbs 23:7, KJV) It’s amazing how powerful our thoughts really are. They actually shape our reality. What we often say about ourselves creates the narrative of our lives.

Have you ever sat down and written out all the limiting beliefs you tend to say to yourself from time to time, those self statements that keep you from trying things or moving forward in your life or keep you paralyzed from action? This is a profound spiritual tool for your heart.



Develop a chart called, “My Beliefs and My Stakes.” (See Handout 2.) In the first column, describe carefully your limiting beliefs. List each one of them with as much detail as you want. What is the statement you tell yourself that keeps you from doing something important in your life? What is a negative belief you have about yourself? Write it down in the first column.

In the middle column write the corresponding empowering belief. Turn the limiting belief around and make it positive. Make sure you are describing the correspondingly accurate, matching, motivating belief, the true flip side of the coin. For example, if your limiting belief is, “No one wants to hear what I have to say,” your empowering belief might be, “What I have to say is valuable and important and worth listening to.”

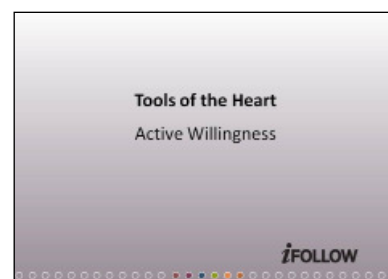
You will be amazed at how strengthening it is to articulate your empowering belief. Stating it will actually make you feel strong. In fact, affirming, positive statements and thoughts that are true have been scientifically proven to strengthen our body muscles. So state these new empowering beliefs out loud regularly. Make these self-statements, the new thoughts and beliefs about yourself. Make them your new default!

But just new thoughts aren’t enough. In the third column, write down two or three actions you will take that drive the stake of your new empowering belief into the ground, proving to yourself that you’re serious about living out this new belief. Strong living is all about thinking clearly and acting strongly. When our thoughts and actions come into alignment, we are living in integrity and we develop a much higher level of trust in ourselves – and so do others as they react to us. So make sure you fill in this third column boldly, creatively, and intentionally.

There’s a saying in the New Testament that, “God did not give us a spirit of fear and timidity but a spirit of power and love and self control.” (2 Timothy 1:7, NCV) The Greek word for “power” here is *dunamis* from which we get our word “dynamite.” The divine spirit is dynamite power in our lives. It is the opposite of fear, timidity and intimidation. It’s a power that revolves around boldness and courage. God doesn’t want us to disintegrate into our limitations. God wants our lives to explode with creative energy and synergy in connection with Him, the resurrection power that creates life out of death, radical transformation and newness.

And when this divine *dunamis* is coupled with divine love and redirected energy (“self control,” the word used for the bit in the horse’s mouth that directs the horse’s flow and energy to where the rider desires; in this case it’s referring to redirecting human energy to correspond to the divine Energy), all things are possible. New life emerges. Confidence and courage spring into reality.

Active Willingness: If you are like most people, you’ve discovered that it’s not enough to simply desire the divine life, nor is it enough to simply change your thinking about



yourself and about the divine life. Your heart cannot grow effectively bigger, your spirituality cannot grow deeper, unless you choose to act out the divine life. There must be **active** willingness. Action brings life to our desires and thoughts. And in an ever-strengthening cycle, it reinforces them. Without a corresponding change of behavior, our desires and thoughts remain inside us and ultimately fizzle out. So this, too, is a profound tool for the soul and heart.

Here's how Jesus put it: "I will show you what it's like when someone comes to me, listens to my teaching, and then obeys me. It is like a person who builds a house on a strong foundation laid upon the underlying rock. When the floodwaters rise and break against the house, it stands firm because it is well built. But anyone who listens and doesn't obey is like a person who builds a house without a foundation. When the floods sweep down against that house, it will crumble into a heap of ruins." (Luke 6:47-49, NLT)

Acting in harmony with the divine life, choosing to walk through life within the Energy and Spirit of God, manifesting the qualities of a godly life, help build the strong foundation that stands firm. It's one thing to say what we think is important. It's another thing to live it out. The truth is, we are most strong and fulfilled when we're living in alignment with our beliefs and values.

So what are some behaviors you can practice acting out that will strengthen and build your desire and thoughts of the divine life? What are actions you can take to deepen your compassion and help you live a more centered, peaceful life? Fortunately, you don't have to guess. There have been spiritual practices used as regular disciplines to engage the spirit, heart and body more deeply for centuries by people serious about shaping the divine life within their lives.

Spiritual Disciplines

Someone once said that spiritual transformation is not a matter of trying harder, but of training smarter (more wisely). In other words, we become more compassionate and centered, not by putting in more and more blood, sweat and tears, but by becoming more intentional and strategic in the activities we engage in. These activities that build the spiritual life, that facilitate life transformation in regards to the divine life, are called spiritual disciplines and have been practiced for centuries by people who take godliness seriously.

That's why the most prolific writer in the New Testament, Paul, encouraged one of his young protégés (Timothy) to "train yourself in godliness." He said, "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever."

Paul is using an athletic metaphor to talk about the spiritual life. He knows that athletes, to compete well, don't simply try harder at their sport. They train – they undergo strategic, thoughtful, coached-based training that lasts months and years before the competi-

iFollow
Discipleship
Series:
Meeting with
Jesus
Action Plan
& Presenter
Notes

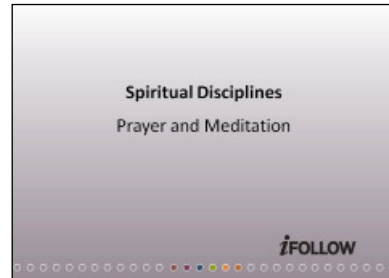
Exploring
Spirituality:
How Can I Be
More Com-
passionate
and
Centered?

7

tive event.

So what are some of those strategic disciplines that empower our spiritual lives and shape our hearts to be more like the divine heart?

Prayer and Meditation: Setting aside intentional time to stop the hustle and bustle of daily activity and move into a quiet, reflective space is crucial to spiritual depth and centering. Prayer is several things: quietness; meditation in which our thoughts and minds are centered on God; reflection on God; listening to the divine spirit that speaks to our hearts and souls; and speaking to God, sharing the depth of our feelings, thoughts, and experiences with God, expressing ourselves to God.



This kind of deliberate, intentional prayer is a significant centering experience. Prayer helps to block out the loud voices and noises that surround us all day long. It facilitates our silence before God so we can hear God's voice speak to us, prompting us, tugging at our hearts. It centers us in the very love and compassion of God's heart. It helps to remind us who we are and to whom we belong.

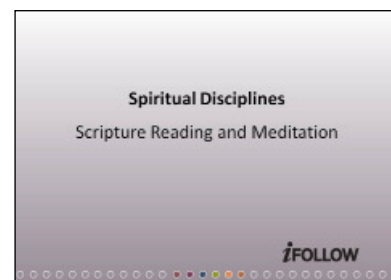
For prayer to be a meaningful and effective discipline, it needs to be scheduled – a specific time and place should be set aside with as few distractions as possible. And it should be regular.

In addition, sometimes spontaneous moments of silence and focused prayer can be engaged in during any point of the day. This practice can also help to concentrate your heart and mind and soul on God and take you to a more centered place.

And there are also extended times of focused prayer that can be helpful to your spiritual depth and transformation: Retreat settings lasting a day or more during which you focus your heart, mind and spirit on God.

One spiritual giant once said, “Even as the moon influences the tides of the sea, even so does prayer influence the tides of godliness.” (C. H. Spurgeon)

Scripture Reading and Meditation: Paul, one of the writers of the New Testament, stated this profound spiritual reality: By beholding we become changed. (2 Corinthians 3:18) It is, in fact, rooted in a significant psychological truth: we become what we think. And in his context, he was talking about beholding the glory of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. His point was that as a person spends time looking at the stories of God as revealed by Jesus' life—the word “beholding” literally means “contemplating upon, reflecting on, thinking about”—that person is changed more and more into the likeness of God. “From



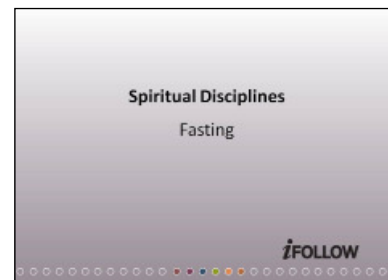
one degree of glory to another,” he wrote.

Scripture reading and meditation have always been one of the central spiritual disciplines for transformation. It involves setting aside specific time to open sacred scripture and read it, allowing it to sink into the heart and soul, to affect the mind with its words, thoughts, concepts, stories, lessons.

Here are some helpful questions to ask when reading: What does this story, text, thought say to me right now? What is God trying to communicate to me? In what way(s) am I like the person being described in this story or section? What would it feel like to be this person in that place, at that time, and how would I respond in that person’s situation/circumstance? Where am I hearing God’s voice speaking to me in this passage/section/story? What am I learning right now?

Jesus once made the following spiritual observation: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4, KJV) In other words, as much as we need physical food to stay physically alive, so much more do we need spiritual food for our spiritual dimension to have life. Sacred scripture reading and meditation (listening to the voice of God) help provide that necessary “food.”

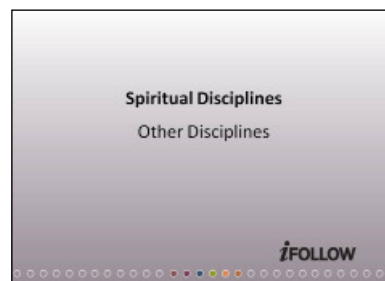
Fasting: In a culture that specializes in over-consumption of every kind, the idea of fasting from anything may carry with it distasteful feelings. Our senses are bombarded every day with messages that tell us we don’t have enough, that we need more (especially the “more” that the advertisers are trying to sell us). Our culture is caught up in consumerism, materialism, hedonism and narcissism, and all the other kinds of “isms” that carry with them having and needing more.



But it’s exactly because of this kind of incessant exposure that fasting takes on spiritual significance. Fasting is the practice of intentionally abstaining from something for a specific period of time and for a specific purpose. There are many different kinds of fasts people have found helpful: food fasts, entertainment fasts (such as fasts from TV and movies or even reading novels), sugar fasts, sexual activity fasts, and the list is endless. The purpose is to give your mind and body a break from something that you typically feel a need for in order to engage in a more intense opportunity for spiritual activities, for spiritual focus.

One of the positive side benefits is the recognition that we are not slaves to our lives. We can not only get along without some things but we can also flourish and grow deeper in some areas of our lives as a result. Fasting helps to restore the belief that we, not our appetites, are in control of our lives. Fasting helps to reinforce the truth that we believe God is the most significant life focus (so we abstain from certain activities to spend time in more specific connection with God). Fasting has been used by almost every major religion as a tool to help purify one’s desires and to increase the experience of contentment.

Other Disciplines: Richard Foster, a contemporary author, has written perhaps the most widely used book on the topic of spiritual disciplines as they relate to deepening the spiritual life, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. In this book he groups spiritual disciplines into three categories: the inward disciplines (meditation, prayer, fasting, study), the outward disciplines (simplicity, solitude, submission, service), and the corporate disciplines (confession, worship, guidance, celebration).



These three categories he refers to as three “movements of the Spirit.” In other words, the disciplines within each movement are tools that provide opportunity for us to experience the divine Spirit flowing with greater ease and power through our lives. These spiritual tools have been used by people to grow bigger hearts, to develop greater compassion in us and a deeper centeredness in the midst of life’s commotion and busyness. When we are willing to make these kinds of disciplines a part of our daily lives, when we are willing to shape the rhythm of our lives around these spiritual activities, we are empowered to shed our superficial habits and “bring the abundance of God into our lives.”

Another profound book that opens up the world of spiritual disciplines is John Ortberg’s *The Life You’ve Always Wanted*. He adds to the list by talking about the practice of “slowing” (learning how to live an unhurried life), the practice of servanthood (learning the art of appropriate smallness in our egos), the practice of confession (living a life beyond regrets), the practice of secrecy (launching ourselves into a life of freedom from self-centeredness and worrying about what everybody thinks of us), and the experience of suffering (learning a life of endurance in spite of obstacles).

Ortberg describes these spiritual tools as offering a road map for true transformation, compelling because it starts not with simply our selves but with the object of our journey, God. The whole purpose is to etch into our inner and outer lives the character of the divine life. So it’s not about trying harder, it’s about training smarter, availing ourselves of time-tested tools to spiritual discovery and growth.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the famous 19th century English poet, wrote:

Earth’s crammed with Heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes.
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.

Only those who truly see God wherever they look and wherever they are and whatever

iFollow
Discipleship
Series:
Meeting with
Jesus

Action Plan
& Presenter
Notes

**Exploring
Spirituality:**
How Can I Be
More Com-
passionate
and
Centered?

10

they're doing are the ones who experience God. Thankfully, we aren't left to our own devices about how to encounter God more meaningfully and completely. We aren't left alone to simply work harder at something we end up finding impossible. We have tools to grow bigger hearts, tools to widen the river of our lives, tools that empower us to embrace all things whether salty or sweet. Why not use them?

Handouts in this Package

1. Participant Notes
2. My Beliefs and My Stakes Worksheet



iFollow
Discipleship
Series:
Meeting with
Jesus

Action Plan
& Presenter
Notes

**Exploring
Spirituality:**
How Can I Be
More Com-
passionate
and
Centered?

Additional Resources

- Chittister, Joan O.S.B. (1990). *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Foster, Richard J. (1978). *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Johnson, Jan, Keith Matthews and Dallas Willard (2001). *Dallas Willard's Study Guide to The Divine Conspiracy*. New York, NY: HarperOne.
- Jones, Tony (2005). *The Sacred Way*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Kovacs, Debbonnaire (2001). *Gardens of the Soul: Cultivating a Devotional Life with God*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing. (Out of print, but available from the author at debbonnaire.com and probably online among used books.)
- McLaren, Brian D. (2008). *Finding Our Way Again: The Return of the Ancient Practices*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.
- Ortberg, John (1997). *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Smith, James Bryan (1993). *A Spiritual Formation Workbook: Small Group Resources for Nurturing Christian Growth*. New York, NY: HarperOne.
- Whitney, Donald S. (1991). *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing Group.
- Willard, Dallas (1998). *The Divine Conspiracy: Discovering Our Hidden Life in God*. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Willard, Dallas (1990). *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*. New York, NY: HarperOne.
- Willard, Dallas (2002). *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

iFollow
Discipleship
Series:
Meeting with
Jesus

Action Plan
& Presenter
Notes

Exploring
Spirituality:
How Can I Be
More Com-
passionate
and
Centered?

12

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways is your heart a “small bowl of still water”? In what ways is your heart “a wide, deep river?”
2. Have you ever “followed your heart’s desires” and got into trouble? Looking back, do you think you were following your true heart’s desires, or were you led astray by surface wishes?
3. In what ways have you allowed negative or false thoughts have control over you? In what ways have you allowed positive, spiritual thoughts to have control over you? How can you get more of the latter and fewer of the former?
4. Where are you actively willing to work in your life?
5. Do you think “sowing what you reap” is as clear to humans in modern, western cultures as it is/was in agrarian, traditional societies? Why or why not? Be specific.
6. Which spiritual disciplines do you follow regularly? Which do you need to add to your life?

Group Activities

Purpose: To make physical our understanding of the small bowl vs wide river and allow for prayer for God to deepen our lives.

Preparation: It would be best if this activity could be done outside by a stream or river, or even a pond. Second best would be inside by a large fountain. But if these are impossible, a very large bowl, such as a punch bowl will do. Obtain small bowls or cups for each participant. Have them about half full of water and placed on a table. Put salt shakers on the table, too. Print out the quote from Thich Nhat Hahn:

“How can we help our hearts to grow every day, to be able to embrace everything? The Buddha gave a very beautiful example. Suppose you have a bowl of water and someone put a handful of salt in the bowl of water; it would be too salty for you to drink. But suppose someone threw a handful of salt into a clear mountain river. The river is deep and wide enough that you can still drink the water without tasting the salt.

“When your heart is small, you suffer a lot. But when your heart becomes bigger, very big, then the same thing does not make you suffer anymore. So the secret is how to help your heart to grow. If your heart is small, you can’t accept that person, you can’t tolerate him or her with his or her shortcomings. But when your heart is big, you have a lot of understanding and compassion, and then there is no problem, you don’t suffer, and you embrace him or her because your heart is so big.”

Assignment: Have each person take a bowl or cup and sit holding it for a few minutes, contemplating prayerfully the ways in which their lives might be narrow or confined. Then ask them to put salt in their water, to represent the difficult things that they face. Pray together, aloud or silently or with one person praying on behalf of all, that God will widen and deepen their lives and make the difficult things have less painful impact. After prayer, ask each participant to empty his or her bowl into the larger body of water. (If it’s a large bowl, be sure to say that it represents a river or even the ocean, and they can imagine it that way.)

Debrief: Share feelings, thoughts, and reactions.

Time: Allow five minutes for each person to hold their bowl in silence, three minutes more to contemplate after they’ve “seasoned” their water, five minutes or more for prayer, and a few minutes for the emptying process (until everyone is done). Allow another 15 or more for debriefing afterwards.

iFollow
Discipleship
Series:
Meeting with
Jesus
Group
Activities

Exploring
Spirituality:
How Can I Be
More Com-
passionate
and
Centered?

14

Handout 1

How Can I Be More Compassionate and Centered?

“How can we help our hearts to grow every day, to be able to embrace everything? The Buddha gave a very beautiful example. Suppose you have a bowl of water and someone put a handful of salt in the bowl of water; it would be too salty for you to drink. But suppose someone threw a handful of salt into a clear mountain river. The river is deep and wide enough that you can still drink the water without tasting the salt.

“When your heart is small, you suffer a lot. But when your heart becomes bigger, very big, then the same thing does not make you suffer anymore. So the secret is how to help your heart to grow. If your heart is small, you can’t accept that person, you can’t tolerate him or her with his or her shortcomings. But when your heart is big, you have a lot of understanding and compassion, and then there is no problem, you don’t suffer, and you embrace him or her because your heart is so big.” (Thich Nhat Hahn)

Lessons about Growing a Bigger Heart

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

**Exploring
Spirituality:**
How Can I Be
More Com-
passionate
and
Centered?

Tools for Growing a Bigger Heart

“People harvest only what they plant. If they plant to satisfy their egos and self-centeredness, their egos will bring them ruin. But if they plant to please the Spirit, they will experience the divine eternal life from the Spirit. We must not become tired of doing good. We will receive our harvest of the divine eternal life at the right time if we do not give up.” (Galatians 6:7, NCV)

Principle: You _____ what you _____.

Tool 1: _____

“Whatever is in your heart determines what you say.” (Luke 6:45, NLT)

“Whatever is in your heart determines what you say.” (Luke 6:45, NLT)

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.”
(Matthew 5:6)

Tool 2: _____

“As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.” (Proverbs 23:7, KJV)

“God did not give us a spirit of fear and timidity but a spirit of power and love and self control.” (2 Timothy 1:7, NCV)

Tool 3: _____

“I will show you what it’s like when someone comes to me, listens to my teaching, and then obeys me. It is like a person who builds a house on a strong foundation laid upon the underlying rock. When the floodwaters rise and break against the house, it stands firm because it is well built. But anyone who listens and doesn’t obey is like a person who builds a house without a foundation. When the floods sweep down against that house, it will crumble into a heap of ruins.” (Luke 6:47-49, NLT)

**Exploring
Spirituality:**
How Can I Be
More Com-
passionate
and
Centered?

Basic Spiritual Disciplines

“Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.” (1 Corinthians 9:25)

Definition of Spiritual Disciplines: _____

Prayer and Meditation

Scripture Reading and Meditation

“By beholding we become changed ...” (2 Corinthians 3:18)

“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4, KJV)

iFollow
Discipleship
Series:
Meeting with
Jesus

HANDOUT

**Exploring
Spirituality:**
How Can I Be
More Com-
passionate
and
Centered?

Fasting

**Exploring
Spirituality:**
How Can I Be
More Com-
passionate
and
Centered?

More Spiritual Disciplines

- Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*
 - Inward Disciplines – meditation, prayer, fasting, study
 - Outward Disciplines – simplicity, solitude, submission, service
 - Corporate Disciplines – confession, worship, guidance, celebration

- John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*
 - The practice of slowing
 - The practice of servanthood
 - The practice of confession
 - The practice of secrecy
 - The experience of suffering

**Exploring
Spirituality:**
How Can I Be
More Com-
passionate
and
Centered?

*“Earth’s crammed with Heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes –
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.”*
(Elizabeth Barrett Browning)

Handout 2

My Beliefs and My Stakes

My Limiting Beliefs	My Empowering Beliefs	My Stakes/Actions
<p>Describe carefully the beliefs that limit your life. List each one with as much detail as possible. What are the statements you tell yourself that keeps you from doing something important in your life? What is a negative belief you have about yourself?</p>	<p>Turn each limiting belief around and make it positive. Make sure you are describing the correspondingly accurate, matching, motivating belief; the true flip side of the coin.</p>	<p>Write two or three actions you will take that drive the stake of your new, empowering belief into the ground, proving to yourself that you are serious about living out this new belief. Make sure you fill this column boldly, creatively and intentionally.</p>

iFollow
Discipleship
Series:
Meeting with
Jesus

HANDOUT

**Exploring
Spirituality:**
How Can I Be
More Com-
passionate
and
Centered?