I. The Spiritual Disciplines: Door to Liberation
   A. Superficiality is the curse of our age.
   B. The classical Disciplines of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into the depths.
      i. Those who hear the call are faced with two difficulties
         1. Philosophic: materialistic age has become so pervasive that it has given people grave doubts about their ability to pierce beyond the physical world.
         2. We simply do not know how to go about exploring the inward life.
            a. Today there is an abysmal ignorance of the most simple and practical

II. The Slavery of Ingrained Habits
   A. Be careful of “Will Worship.”
   B. Be careful of believing we can do nothing. Live life of faith in us.

III. As we begin: how to avoid several pitfalls (eight)
   A. 1st pitfall: Temptation to turn the Disciplines into law.
   B. 2nd pitfall: The failure to understand the social implications of the Disciplines.
   C. 3rd pitfall: The tendency to view the Disciplines as virtuous in themselves.
   D. 4th pitfall: The tendency to center on the Disciplines rather than on Christ.
   E. 5th pitfall: The tendency to isolate and elevate one Discipline to the exclusion or neglect of the others.
   F. 6th pitfall: The tendency to think that the twelve Disciplines mentioned in Celebration somehow exhaust the expressions of God’s grace.
   G. 7th pitfall: The temptation to study the Disciplines without experiencing them.
   H. 8th pitfall. The temptation to see the disciplines as a means to an end rather than as an expression of what, by grace, is already in us. (The Lutheran Corrective to Foster’s work)

IV. Tools for the journey
   A. Richard J. Foster’s book, *CELEBRATION OF DISCIPLINE: The Path to Spiritual Growth*
   B. A journal: one you have in progress or one you begin
      i. Journaling-marking the path
Daily Scripture Readings:
Sunday: The longing to go deeper / Psalm 42
Monday: The slavery of ingrained habits / Psalm 51
Tuesday: The slavery of ingrained habits / Romans 7:13-25
Wednesday: The bankruptcy of outward righteousness / Philippians 3:1-16
Thursday: Sin in the bodily members / Proverbs 6:16-19
Friday: Sin in the bodily members / Romans 6:5-14
Saturday: The victory of Spiritual Discipline / Ephesians 6:10-20

Study/Discussion/Journaling Questions
1. Foster says that “superficiality is the curse of our age.” If you tend to agree, list several indicators in American culture that illustrate this. If you tend to disagree, list several indicators in American society that support your conviction. What current influences might cause Christian people of this century to be more superficial than believers of other times?

2. The purpose of the Spiritual Disciplines for Foster is that they are God’s way of putting us where God can work within us and transform us. The Disciplines can only get us to the place where something can be done. The Spiritual Disciplines open the door. The purpose according to Roth (Lutheran Tradition): God is—by the power of the Spirit—of Christ within us—already transforming us by Grace and the Disciplines are expressions of the faithful life? Nothing we do can act to “open the door” to God’s grace. Can you see the difference?

3. Consider carefully Heini Arnold’s statement, “We want to make it quite clear that we cannot free and purify our own heart by exerting our own will.” How does Arnold’s statement compare with your own experience?

4. Spiritual Disciplines are not, in Lutheran thinking, “means of grace” (as Foster says they are) but rather what the Grace filled life “looks like” when being expressed. Disciplines do not, in and of themselves, move us closer to God. That being so, why would one want to practice the disciplines?

5. As you read this book, consider what you feel are its most “helpful” and “dangerous” elements. What concepts might act as barriers to our discerning God’s grace in our lives?
THE INWARD DISCIPLINES
The Discipline of Meditation

I. Meditation
   a. Purpose of Meditation is to enable us to hear God more clearly.
   b. Meditation is a more “passive” Discipline.
   c. Meditation—the kind of hearing that Abraham, Moses and Elijah knew
   d. Example of Guided Biblical Meditation
      i. “What may I do for you?”
      ii. Foster makes plea for memorization of scripture

Daily Scripture Readings
Sunday: The Glory of Meditation / Exodus 24:15-18
Monday: The friendship of meditation / Exodus 33:11
Tuesday: The terror of meditation / Exodus 20:18-19
Wednesday: The object of meditation / Psalm 1:1-3
Thursday: The comfort of meditation / 1 Kings 19:9-18
Friday: The insights of meditation / Acts 10:9-20

Study/Discussion/Journaling Questions
1. What are some of your first reactions to the idea of meditation? What is your background experience in this area?
2. What is the basic difference between eastern meditation and Christian meditation?
3. What things make your life crowded? Do you think you have a desire to hear the Lord’s voice in the midst of all the clutter?
4. Experience the following words of Frederick W. Faber for fifteen minutes. Record what you learn from the experience.
   Only to sit and think of God,
   Oh what a joy it is!
   To think the thought, to breathe the Name
   Earth has no higher bliss.
5. What threatens you most about meditation?
6. What threatens you most about meditation?
7. What is the value of thinking through the specifics of time, place, and position prior to the meditation experience?

8. What are the dangers in concentrating on time, place, and position in the meditation experience?

NOTES:
The Discipline of Fasting

I. The central idea of fasting is the voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity.

II. The Bible deals with fasting in regard to food, but Foster also applies it to others aspects of contemporary culture.
   a. A need to fast from people
   b. A need to fast from media at times
   c. A need to fast from the telephone (other electronic devices)
   d. A need to fast from “billboards.” Replace “More, more, more” with “less, less, less.”
   e. A need to fast from our gluttonous consumer culture that we find so comfortable
   f. Fasting is a Spiritual Discipline ordained by God for the good of the Christian Fellowship. May God open our hearts.

Daily Scripture Readings

Monday: God’s chosen fast / Isaiah 58:1-7
Tuesday: A partial fast / Daniel 10:1-4
Wednesday: A normal fast / Nehemiah 1:4-11
Thursday: An absolute fast / Esther 4:12-17
Friday: The inauguration of the gentile mission / Acts 13:1-3

Study/Discussion/Journaling Questions

1. Check your first reaction to the thought of fasting:
   a. ____ ugh
   b. ____ hmmm
   c. ____ wow!
   d. ____ ok
   e. ____ freedom
   f. ____ you have to be kidding

2. How does Christian fasting differ from the hunger strike and
3. What is the primary purpose of fasting?
4. How can fasting reveal what controls your life?
5. What is most difficult about fasting for you?
6. Fast for two meals (twenty-four hours) and give the time saved to God. Record anything you learn from the experience.
7. Try fasting for the media for one week and see what you learn about yourself during this time.
8. In his day, John Wesley required that every minister ordained in the Methodist Church regularly fast two days a week. Think and write about the implications that such a requirement might have in our day.
The Discipline of Study

I.

Daily Scripture Readings

Sunday:  The call to study / Proverbs 1:1-9, 23:12-23
Monday:  The source of truth / James 1:5, Hebrews 4:11-13, 2 Timothy 3:16-17
Tuesday:  What to study / Philippians 4:8-9, Colossians 3:1-17
Wednesday:  The value of study / Luke 10:38-42
Thursday:  Active study / Ezra 7:10, James 1:19-25
Friday:  Study in the evangelistic enterprise / Acts 17:1-3, 17:10-12, 19:8-10
Saturday:  The study of a nonverbal book / Proverbs 24:30-34

Study/Discussion/Journaling Questions

1. What does study do that other Disciplines do not?
2. The four steps into study that Foster gives are repetition, concentration, comprehension, and reflection. Which of these four steps do you feel is the most important in giving expression to the faith that is within us?
3. Outside the Bible, what book has had the most profound impact upon your life? Why?
4. In this chapter Foster writes, “In study we are not seeking spiritual ecstasy; in fact, ecstasy can be a hindrance.” How could spiritual ecstasy be a hindrance?
5. List three things that you could do this next week in order to follow the dictum of Socrates: “know thyself.”
6. Why does study produce joy?
7. Consider purchasing or borrowing a serious book on the spiritual life to read in the coming weeks.

NOTES:
THE OUTWARD DISCIPLINES
The Discipline of Simplicity

Daily Scripture Readings

Sunday: Simplicity as singleness of heart / Matthew 6:19-24
Monday: Simplicity as trust / Matthew 6:25-34
Tuesday: Simplicity as obedience / Genesis 15
Wednesday: The generosity of simplicity / Leviticus 25:8-12
Thursday: Simplicity in speech / Matthew 5:33-37, James 5:12
Friday: Simplicity and justice / Amos 5:11-15, 24, Luke 4:16-21
Saturday: The freedom from covetousness / Luke 12:13-34

Study/Discussion/Journaling Questions

1. What are the two aspects of simplicity and why are both essential?
2. What does Foster set forth as the focal point for an understanding of Christian simplicity?
3. What are the three inward attitudes of simplicity? Of the three, which do you find the most difficult for you personally?
4. What is the greatest danger in setting forth an outward discipline? Why must we take the risk?
5. Which of the ten controlling principles for outward simplicity is the most helpful to you? Are there any you feel are unrealistic?

First: buy things for their usefulness rather than their status
Second: reject anything that is producing an addiction in you.
Third: develop a habit of giving things away
Fourth: refuse to be propagandized by the custodians of modern gadgetry.
Fifth: learn to enjoy things without owning them.
Sixth: develop a deeper appreciation for the creation.
Seventh: look with a healthy skepticism at all “buy now, pay later” schemes.

Eight: obey Jesus’ instructions about plain, honest speech.

Ninth: reject anything that breeds the oppression of others.

Tenth: shun anything that distracts you from seeking first the kingdom of God.

6. What is producing an addiction in you?

7. Wrestle with the implications of the ninth principle. (Reject anything that will breed the oppression of others.)

8. List one thing that you could do this next week to simplify your life. Do it.

NOTES:
The Discipline of Solitude

Daily Scripture Readings

Monday: Prayer and solitude / Matthew 6:5-6, Luke 5:16
Tuesday: The insights of solitude / Psalm 8.
Wednesday: “The dark night of the soul” / Jeremiah 20:7-18
Thursday: The solitude of the garden / Matthew 26:36-46
Friday: The solitude of the cross / Matthew 27:32-50
Saturday: The compassion that comes from solitude / Matthew 9:35-38, 23:37

Study/Discussion/Journaling Questions

1. What is the difference between loneliness and solitude? Which do you experience more?
2. Why do we need both solitude and community in order to function spiritually?
3. Why do you think that solitude and silence are closely connected?
4. Have you ever experienced a “dark night of the soul?”
5. Foster mentions five possible steps into solitude. Which one would you find most helpful at this point in your life?
   a. take advantage of the “little solitudes” that fill our day
   b. develop a “quiet place” designed for silence and solitude
   c. discipline ourselves so that our words are few and full
   d. Try to live one entire day without words
   e. Four times a year withdraw for three to four hours for the purpose of reorienting your life’s goals
6. What keeps you from solitude?
7. What experience in solitude would you like to have two years from now that you do not presently possess? Would you be willing this week to plan it into your schedule for sometime in the next twenty-four months?
NOTES:

The Discipline of Service

Daily Scripture Readings:

Sunday: The call to service / Matthew 20:20-28
Monday: The sign of service / John 13:1-17
Tuesday: The commitment of service / Exodus 21:2, 21:5-6, 1 Corinthians 9:19
Wednesday: The attitude of service / Colossians 3:23-25
Thursday: Service in the Christian fellowship / Romans 12:9-13
Friday: The ministry of small things / Matthew 25:31-39
Saturday: Service exemplified / Luke 10:29-37

Study/Discussion/Journaling Questions

1. If the towel is the sign of service, how can that sign be manifested in twenty-first-century culture?
2. Did you find the discussion of self-righteous service, as contrasted from true service, to be:
   a. ____right on
   b. ____terribly idealistic
   c. ____naive
   d. ____faithful to scripture, but impractical today
   e. ____strange
3. Reflect on or debate the notion that love is a “reasoned concern for the well-being of all,” and consider the implications of this notion with reference to service.
4. In the book Foster mentions that service works humility into our lives. What in the world do you think humility means? That is, what does humility look like?
5. Is the reason humility is “slippery” because as soon as you are humble you feel pride in your having been humble?
6. During this next week, see if you can find one way each day to exercise the service of common courtesy.
7. When should you say no to the demands that people place upon your time and attention?
8. Pray this prayer sometime this month: “Lord, Jesus, I would so appreciate it if you would bring me someone today whom I can serve.”

THE CORPORATE DISCIPLINES

The Discipline of Confession

I. Confession is a corporate Discipline, because sin both offends God and creates a wound in the Christian fellowship.

II. It is God who does the forgiving, but often God chooses human beings as the channel of His forgiving grace.

III. In experiencing forgiveness, it is important to understand what it is not. Four things are often mistaken for forgiveness.
   a. That forgiveness means pretending an injury doesn’t really matter.
   b. That forgiveness means ceasing to hurt.
   c. That forgiveness means forgetting.
   d. That forgiveness means pretending that the relationship is just the same as it was before the offence.

Daily Scripture Readings
Sunday: The need for confession and forgiveness / Isaiah 59:1-9, Romans 3:10-18
Monday: The promise of forgiveness / Jeremiah 31:34, Matthew 26:28, Ephesians 1:7
Tuesday: The assurance of forgiveness / 1 John 1:5-10
Wednesday: Jesus Christ, our Adequate Savior, Mediator, and Advocate / 2 Timothy 1:8-10, 1 Timothy 2:5, 1 John 2:1
Thursday: A parable of confession / Luke 15:11-24
Friday: Authority and forgiveness / Matthew 16:19, 18:18, John 20:23
Saturday: The ministry of the Christian Fellowship / James 5:13-16

Study/Discussion/Journaling Questions
1. In your own words, try to describe the theology that lies behind the Discipline of confession.

2. What are the three advantages to formalized confession? Are there disadvantages?

3. Foster mentions three things that are necessary for a good confession. Which of the three do you find most difficult to experience? (1. Examination of conscience 2. Sorrow 3. Determination to avoid sin)

4. What does the idea of living “under the Cross” mean in reference to confession?

5. Does absolution indicate the forgiveness of sins or does it effect it?

6. St. Augustine calls the sacraments of baptism and communion the *verba visibilia* (visible words) of our forgiveness, and John Stott notes, “Baptism, being unique and unrepeatable, is the sacrament of our once-for-all justification: Holy Communion, being repeatedly enjoyed, is the sacrament of our daily forgiveness. By them we are assured, audibly and visibly, of our acceptance and forgiveness.” What is your reaction to this idea?

7. Sometime this week spend fifteen minutes in silence before God and invite Him to reveal anything within you that needs to be confessed.

NOTES:
The Discipline of Worship

Daily Scripture Readings

Sunday: Worship in spirit and truth / John 4:19-24
Monday: Communion: the essence of worship / John 6:52-58
     John 6:63
Tuesday: The life of worship / Ephesians 5:18-20, Colossians
     3:16-17
Wednesday: The Lord high and lifted up / Isaiah 6:1-8
Thursday: Sing to the Lord / Psalm 96
Friday: Worship of all creation / Psalm 148
Saturday: Worthy is the Lamb / Revelation 5:6-14

Study/Discussion/Journaling Questions

1. In the book Foster says that “God is actively seeking worshipers.” Have you had any sense of God as the “Hound of Heaven” seeking you out and drawing you into fellowship and communion with Him?
2. Which forms of worship you have experienced have been especially meaningful to you? Do you have any sense of why these particular forms have been more meaningful than others?
3. Can you think of any worship forms that should be universally binding upon all cultures of Christians at all times?
4. What advantages or disadvantages do you see in the adherence to the Western Liturgy used in churches like the Lutheran, Episcopal, or Roman Catholic churches as compared to the more informal worship forms used in churches like the Southern Baptist or community churches?
5. If we truly believe that Christ is alive and present among His people in all His offices, what practical difference would that make in our approach to worship?
6. Foster writes, “Just as worship begins in Holy Expectancy it
ends in Holy Obedience.” What does that mean for you this next week?

The Discipline of Guidance

Daily Scripture Readings

Sunday: The polestar of faith / Hebrews 11
Monday: The guidance of divine Providence / Genesis 24:1-21
Tuesday: The guidance of justice and obedience / Isaiah 1:17-20
Wednesday: Led into all truth / Proverbs 3:5-6, John 14:6, 16:13, Acts 10:1-35
Thursday: Closed doors, open doors / Acts 16:6-10, 2 Corinthians 2:12
Friday: Listening or resisting? / Acts 21:8-14
Saturday: The family likeness / Romans 8:14, 28-30

Study/Discussion/Journaling Questions

1. Is the idea of guidance as a corporate Discipline new or strange to you?
2. What are some of the dangers of corporate guidance?
3. What do you understand the idea of a “spiritual director” to mean? Are there dangers to the idea? Are there advantages to the idea?
4. How should the idea of guidance influence the ways in which we carry on business in our churches? If we believed in guidance, how might it change our present church polity?
5. If living in guidance comes about mainly through responding to God’s invitation to enter into friendship with Him so that we know and desire His ways, what should you drop from your life and what should you add to your life to reflect that friendship?

NOTES:
Growing Together

The exercises below are taken from *Celebrating the Disciplines: A Journal Workbook to Accompany Celebration of Discipline* by Richard J. Foster and Kathryn A. Yanni (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992). You should read the corresponding chapter of *Celebration of Discipline* prior to doing the exercises.

Chapter 1, The Spiritual Disciplines: The Disciplines are means of expressing the Christ dwelling in you, not exercises in self-improvement. As you begin your journey through the Spiritual Disciplines, affirm God’s presence with you and ask him to refresh your perspective on why it is important to practice the Disciplines.

Chapter 2, The Discipline of Meditation: Identify a particular place that provides a setting of beauty and spend thirty minutes there, contemplating all the ways in which you can see God’s gifts in it. Or, simply be silent and listen for what God may have to communicate to you. If you desire to, take along a notebook/journal and write down your thoughts.

Chapter 3, The Discipline of Prayer: This chapter primarily focuses on the prayer of *intercession*—asking God to supply the needs of others. Set aside five to ten minutes each day to practice listening for guidance as a prelude to intercessory prayer.

Chapter 4, The Discipline of Fasting: Fast from something that does not involve food—for example, the entertainment media, passing judgment on yourself or others, people (to experience solitude), impulsive speech, printed media.

Chapter 5, The Discipline of Study: Choose a brief selection from a book and practice the four steps of repetition, concentration, comprehension, and reflection. Ask yourself, “Do I read to be changed by the truth or to avoid doing the truth?”

Chapter 6, The Discipline of Simplicity: Monitor your attitudes and behavior regarding material possessions as you encounter them in your daily activities this week. Write down your observations in your journal.

Chapter 7, The Discipline of Solitude: Look for “little solitutes” among the ordinary experiences of your week. Write down in journal entries when and where you found opportunities, how you spent them, and what difference they made in
your day or week.

**Chapter 8, The Discipline of Submission:** Make a list of opportunities you have in the course of daily living to give up your own rights for the good of others, and choose one opportunity on which to act this week. Afterward, reflect on how this practice of submission helped free you from the need or desire to have things go the way you want.

**Chapter 9, The Discipline of Service:** Look for an opportunity to bear another’s burdens this week—for example, help. . . a child who is experiencing some personal disappointment. . . a friend or loved one whose anxieties could he lightened by your attentive care . . . a lonely person who needs a visit. . . someone who could use a helping hand.

**Chapter 10, The Discipline of Confession:** Be alert to needs or opportunities to practice the Discipline of confession (whether giving or receiving) without forcing them into expression. In the Corporate Disciplines it is especially important to draw on relationships with others—a spiritual mentor, a fellowship group, close friends, and so on—since these Disciplines cannot be practiced in isolation from other people.

**Chapter 11, The Discipline of Worship:** If you are dissatisfied with your participation in corporate worship at this point in your life, choose a trusted friend or mentor who will listen to your concerns and reflect back to you any helpful comments or questions which will direct you toward appropriate paths for growth in this area.

**Chapter 12, The Discipline of Guidance:** Think of someone with whom you might want to develop an ongoing relationship of mutual spiritual direction. Take him or her out to lunch to get better acquainted.

**Chapter 13, The Discipline of Celebration:** Pick one creative activity to do with family or friends: throw a party for any reason—or for no reason: play a game, indoors or outdoors, playact an event or satirize your usual routine and patterns; and so on.

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I. Summary to date: God’s desire is to bring us into that way of living in which our deepest needs are cared for, our sense of identity as his creatures is clarified, and the inward life becomes whole and unified.
   a. To this end, Jesus Christ lived, died, was resurrected, and ever lives to be our present prophet, priest, and king.
   b. The salvation that is in Christ involves not only the forgiveness of sin and heaven when we die, but the breaking of the ultimate power of sin so that we can now live, attentive to the presence of Christ dwelling in us.
   c. The Good Life of the Kingdom of God breaks into our hearts by the grace of God alone. We are not only saved by grace, but we live by it as well.
   d. To date we have discussed the inward disciplines of Meditation, Fasting, and Study.
   e. Today, we will have opportunity for a fuller discussion of what we have so far learned.

II. Small Group Discussion (Break into small groups, discuss the following questions or as many as you can, and then the leader will reconvene the large group to glean what the salient points of the small groups’ discussion.)

III. Discussion Questions

1. Foster says that “superficiality is the curse of our age.” If you tend to agree, list several indicators in American culture that illustrate this. If you tend to disagree, list several indicators in American society that support your conviction. What current influences might cause Christian people of this century to be more superficial than believers of other times?
2. “The purpose of meditation is to enable us to hear God more clearly. Meditation is listening, sensing, heeding the life and light of Christ.” What are some of your first reactions to the idea of meditation? What is your background experience in this area? Does it help you to know that Luther—in his prayer life—included meditation?

3. “The central idea in fasting is the voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity.” Does Foster’s expansion of fasting (as limited only to food) to include people, media, telephone (other electronic devices), from ‘billboards’/advertising, consumer culture strike you as helpful and advisable given the age and culture in which we live? Or do you think the expansion undermines the importance and focus of fasting from food?

4. The four steps into study that Foster gives are repetition, concentration, comprehension, and reflection. Which of these four steps do you feel is the most important in bringing about the goal of the transformation of the individual?

IV. Reconvene Large Group—move through the questions together gathering insights from the small groups

Leader concludes with this prayer:

Gracious and ever loving God, draw our hearts to you, guide our minds, fill our imaginations, control our wills, so that we may be wholly yours. Use us as you will, always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.
I. Summary (Leader)

II. Break into small groups, discuss the following questions or as many as you can, and then the leader will reconvene the large group to glean what the salient points of the small groups’ discussion.

III. Discussion Questions

1. Foster says that “superficiality is the curse of our age.” If you tend to agree, list several indicators in American culture that illustrate this. If you tend to disagree, list several indicators in American society that support your conviction. What current influences might cause Christian people of this century to be more superficial than believers of other times?

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4. The four steps into study that Foster gives are repetition, concentration, comprehension, and reflection. Which of
these four steps do you feel is the most important in bringing about the goal of the transformation of the individual? Which, for you has been the most difficult? Which do you simply love?

IV. Reconvene the Large Group for wrap-up discussion