

Cost of Discipline-Ship

Discipleship takes our time and commitment.

by Stephen A. Macchia

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The high cost of our discipleship begins with the cost of discipline-ship—being willing to devote a portion of each day in solitude, silence, and complete surrender. In the midst of the stresses and strains of our lives, the pauses and punctuation marks along the way become even more significant. We don't become healthier disciples of Christ by osmosis—it won't happen by wishful thinking!

Instead, the disciplines of a heart that longs after God's heart are the lifeblood of our calling to remain in Christ. Growing in godliness requires the exercising of the soul that leads to a wholesome agility that can sustain the stresses and strains of a busy life. When we don't have this kind of centeredness in Christ, our active lives become empty of purpose, meaning, and significance. Of course, we don't develop our spiritual strength and agility by looking at a poster or reading about a person with godly muscles—we have to get down on the floor and exercise ourselves.

Philip Yancey, in one of his regular columns in *Christianity Today*, talked about his 50-year spiritual checkup in this way: "When I turned 50 this year, I underwent a complete physical checkup. Doctors poked, prodded, x-rayed, and even cut open parts of my body to assess and repair the damage I had done in half a century. As the new millennium rolled around, I scheduled a spiritual checkup as well. I went on a silent retreat led by a wise spiritual director." In those days of silence and reflection, several issues arose that Yancey wanted to change in order to keep his soul in shape. Here is a sampling of the steps he felt led to take:

- Come to God with your own troubles, as well as the world's.
- Question your doubts as much as your faith.
- Do not attempt this journey alone. Find companions who see you as a pilgrim, even a straggler, and not as a guide.
- Allow the good—natural beauty, your health, encouraging words—to penetrate as deeply as the bad.
- For your own sake, simplify. Eliminate whatever distracts you from God.
- Find something that allows you to feel God's pleasure.
- Always "err," as God does, on the side of freedom, mercy, and compassion.
- Don't be ashamed of the gospel.
- Remember, those Christians who peeve you so much—God chose them too.
- Forgive, daily, those who caused the wounds that keep you from wholeness.

"My spiritual checkup offers one clear advantage over my physical checkup," Yancey continues. "From my doctor, I learned that no matter what I do my body will continue to deteriorate. At best, a good diet and exercise routine will slow that deterioration. Spiritually, however, I can look forward to growth, renewed vigor, and improved health—as long as I continue to listen, and then act on what I hear God saying." That is the key—continue daily

to listen to God, and then be sure to act on what you hear!

It's impossible to ride the coattails of a godly friend or family member into the kingdom of God, nor is it possible to ride the wave of another's spiritual journey. You won't make it to heaven because of the faith of your spouse or parents, nor will you grow in God's grace due to their devotion to Christ. Eventually every disciple pursuing spiritual health and wellbeing will be confronted with this reality. It's the choice of the disciple to select the manner in which the basic disciplines are practiced and incumbent upon that same disciple to act accordingly.

Author Rueben Job writes, "One cannot live on borrowed faith alone. No one can hitchhike on another's spiritual journey. We can have companions along the way, but ultimately each person must live and die by his or her own faith experience. Touched by God's grace, we are never quite the same, even when the absence of God seems stronger than the divine presence. Martin E. Marty has observed that 'the religious person and community cannot dip into the endowment and live off the interest and the principal of a spiritual capital in which they did not invest.'" Daily investments of time with God, practicing the disciplines of the Spirit-filled life, will reap great fruit this side of heaven and for all eternity.

Spiritual Transformation

A life of blessing is a life of discipline and grace—well balanced, properly understood, and gratefully lived in the grace of God. Dallas Willard, speaking at the inaugural Pastors Convention in early 2001, had the following to say about spiritual formation:

Spiritual formation is shaping the inner person in such a way that the words and deeds of Christ naturally flow from us. It is the inward transformation of the self that makes it easy and natural to do the things that Jesus said. Christian spiritual formation is the process. What we call spiritual formation in Christian circles now, is really spiritual transformation. Formation has already happened and that is a major part of the problem. We have already been formed spiritually and we need to be transformed. It is holistic; it applies to all of us. It is not just a matter of changing the center part. It is a matter of the transformation of the self so that now your body is going to be set to do righteousness, as previously it was set to do what was wrong.

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