

Spiritual Formation Plan

You've all been to the stadium and seen the athletes race. Everyone runs, one wins. Run to win. All good athletes train hard. They do it for a gold medal that tarnishes and fades. You're after one that's gold eternally. I don't know about you, but I'm running hard for the finish line. I'm giving it everything I got. No sloppy living for me! I'm staying alert and in top condition. I'm not going to get caught napping, telling everyone else all about it and then missing out myself. (---1 Corinthians 9: 24-27 – *The Message*)

God is not interested in your spiritual life; God is interested in your life.
John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*

The Kingdom of God comes certainly by grace, but not through passivity.
Dallas Willard

The Four P's

Prayer—what prayer “suits” my personality? Jesus Prayer→ Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a sinner. (Irma Zaleski, *Living the Jesus Prayer*; Anon. *The Way of the Pilgrim*) Lord's Prayer→coming to grips with me. Pray three times a day: morning, noon, night.

Presence—in the company of heaven before the throne of grace. How do you prepare for Sunday's liturgy? For being part of the Body of Christ? How do you leave from the community's praise, intercession, repentance? What is the mystery in worship for you? How does your presence / absence affect the rest of us?

People—acts of compassion. The Mother Theresa Principle: go and hang around people not like you; do something for someone who never in a million years could ever pay you back—then see what happens to you. It is with and for people that we grow in our practice of the Big Five: Forgiveness, Reconciliation, Love, Hospitality, and Generosity.

Pledge—treasure sharing: stewardship of time, energy, financial resources. The four gifts of HLC→ brains, money, connections, influence: what do you have? How do you share?

The Playbook, the Field Guide, the Manual for Mission—The Bible

Reading the Bible daily is the only clear way to hear about the life of Jesus becoming real in our lives. It is important to begin reading the Bible in a disciplined way, i.e. staying anchored in our reading by focusing on the story of Jesus as written in the four Gospels. Read Mark's story of Jesus until you become saturated by it. Read for five minutes every day—it may be only a few verses, but read them in sequence, from 1:1—16:8.

A second reading assignment would be Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5—7. Again, read a little at a time, a day at a time.

Self Care

Exercise; Diet; Sleep; Sabbath' → absolute importance of “free time.” (What do you think about when you don't have anything to think about?)

Get a Guide: Spiritual Mentor; Coach; Confessor

There are no loner athletes—likewise, there is no lone ranger Christian. Jesus had a small group, led a small group and constantly depended on the strength and guidance of his heavenly Father. Why would we think we could be different? It is essential in every stage of soul formation to have a guide to help. Look for someone who exhibits the Big Five (forgiveness, reconciliation, love, hospitality, generosity) Seek that person out; ask about how he/she deals with life gracefully. This person should be one of contagious joy. Avoid moody and sad sack people.

Discussions with this person should center on the readings in Scripture, Mark and the Sermon on the Mount; as well as prayer and your encounters with God's amazing grace in your daily life. This is also the conversation partner to speak about your resentments and relinquishing them. This used to be called confession, repentance, absolution.

Duration

Discipleship is a life time endeavor, one day at a time. Keep this simple idea before you: I only have today and will seek God in this time. To begin, try this spiritual formation plan for 30 consecutive days and see what happens to you.

Some Interesting Books

Benedicta Ward, ed. *The Desert Fathers.*

Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy; Renovation of the Heart; The Spirit of the Disciplines ; The Great Omission.*

Duane Anderson. *Beyond Belief.* (the prayers of martyrs for the faith)

Irma Zaleski. *Living the Jesus Prayer. Who is God?*

John Ortberg. *The Life You've Always Wanted.*

Mother Theresa. *A Simple Path.*

Stefano Parenti, ed. *Praying with the Orthodox Tradition.*

Rick Warren. *Forty Days of Purpose.*