

## Caution: Avoiding the Trapdoor in Transformation (John 15:1-5)

By Faith sermon series

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**BIG IDEA:** Caution: Don't get the means and ends switched in your process of becoming like Christ.

When practicing spiritual disciplines as part of your spiritual growth process, keep your goal on deepening your intimacy with God so that the focus is on God. The outcomes of this union will be Christ-likeness, deeper devotion and fruitfulness!

**1. God's intention for followers of Jesus is to have their whole personhood and lives, transformed into the likeness of Jesus Himself.** (Galatians 4:19;

Romans 8:28-29)

- God says this life-giving realization of becoming like Christ is possible!
- Although God does the transforming, we must participate in the process of personal and communal spiritual disciplines as ways to do so.
- However, we must be aware of the trapdoor in transformation so that spiritual disciplines remain in their proper role and place.

**2. The trapdoor in transformation is a mis-placed focus in the spiritual disciplines and spiritual growth process. It leads to a gospel of behavior.**

- If our *goal* when entering into spiritual disciplines is *godly character formation*, (becoming like Christ/becoming a fully devoted follower of Christ) then the *focus is on us and our behaviors and attitudes*. This is a gospel of behavior!
- A Gospel of behavior results in an outcome of either spiritual pride when we compare ourselves with others or frustration and discouragement, even possibly giving up when we notice our lack of progress.
- People will try harder when this happens by using the spiritual disciplines more intensely and more regularly. Trying harder works in the world of education, sports and jobs; but it doesn't work when it comes to God.

**3. The goal of our spiritual disciplines needs to be on deepening our love relationship, our intimacy with God. This focuses us on God and promotes a gospel of grace.**

- The *outcome* or the result of this union with God is our becoming like Christ, deeper devotion, and fruitfulness.
- Try as we might, we cannot produce our own spiritual growth. It is a gift from God. However, it doesn't mean we do nothing. Our work is to cultivate an environment to listen and respond to God so that He transform our lives.
- Jesus tells us how to do this...by abiding, remaining in Him! Spiritual disciplines help us. These intentional practices give God time and space to do His work of transformation.
- This God-focus keeps a gospel of grace and leads us to the best gift we can give ourselves, others and God... "our own transforming selves!"

**MY NEXT STEP:** *Jesus invites us into life-union with Him. (John 15:1-5) This means welcoming Him into the core of who we are...good, bad successes and failures. This sacred intimacy of abiding bears incredible fruit. Not easy. Risky. Are you willing to trust God and be intentional in deepening your relationship with Him and others? What is your gut reaction to intimacy with God? What pathway of grace (spiritual discipline) might be an invitation from God?*

## QUESTIONS FOR MY TIME WITH GOD:

1. Ask God to lead you to spiritual disciplines this summer to partner with Him in the spiritual growth process. A good reference for options is Adele Calhoun's [Handbook on the Spiritual Disciplines](#) and Nathan Foster's [The Making of an Ordinary Saint: My Journey from Frustration to Joy with the Spiritual Disciplines](#).
2. If you are in a small group or leadership team, seek God together for communal spiritual practices that would help your group listen to and grow your relationship with God and each other. The examen is a great daily practice to develop your discernment.
3. Prayerfully ask God if spiritual direction is something you might consider this summer. Pamphlets are at the Connections Desk along with a copy of "What is Spiritual Direction".
4. Our church will be making even more decisions when Pastor David returns! Consider the daily examen to increase your discernment. This is also great for families. Debby is available for resources.