

TAKING TIME APART

*Spiritual Disciplines
& the Academic Life*



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This guide is produced by the InterVarsity’s Faculty Ministry Leadership Team for educational and training uses with InterVarsity campus staff members and others interested in joining with InterVarsity in ministry with and to Christian faculty.

For further information contact us at faculty@intervarsity.org.

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INTRODUCTION

This guide, which is focused on spiritual formation, is the first in a series that will explicate the main components of InterVarsity's vision for faculty ministry. Spiritual formation is at the core of our discipleship to Christ. The practice of spiritual disciplines enriches our understanding of God, deepens our obedience, and increases our longing for God. "When we despair of gaining inner transformation through human powers of will and determination, we are open to a wonderful new realization: inner righteousness is a gift from God to be graciously received."¹ This gift comes as we intentionally seek God's kingdom and his righteousness.

Many faculty members deeply desire to follow Christ in the academic world. While their daily practices and pressures may differ depending on the types of schools at which they serve, their fundamental spiritual needs are very much the same. The pressures placed upon faculty (either externally or self-imposed) often lead to a daily pace that crowds out time for the practice of spiritual disciplines. Our hope is that this guide will be a resource for taking time apart either daily or for a more extended time on a regular basis.

The guide begins with an essay on the Lordship of Christ over all things. The "Readings for Reflection" provide an opportunity to slow down and ponder a well-expressed thought about following Christ in daily life. The Bible studies take us into the Scriptures to get a greater glimpse of the Lordship of Christ. Consider reading the passages twice, and take time to write down your responses. We have also included a spiritual discipline practice that focuses on seeking, reflecting, and giving thanks. We close with six prayers for the campus and a hymn. Consider using these disciplines with a colleague, student, or small group.

The good news is that as we respond to God's grace by seeking him through the practice of spiritual disciplines we begin to see him more fully. As this happens, our trust in his Lordship over all things increases, and we are better able to ponder his reign over the realm in which we move daily, the world of ideas.

May this guide beckon you to establish a regular rhythm of seeking and finding God.

Peace,
The InterVarsity Faculty Ministry Leadership Team

¹ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco: Harper, 1978), 6.

TAKING TIME APART

An Essay on Spiritual Disciplines & the Academic Life

For many faculty, it is not easy to bring together academic and spiritual pursuits. It is more common to espouse trust in Jesus to guide personal decision making than to think that he has much to contribute to our professional accomplishments in research and teaching. We are familiar with Jesus providing us with compassion, patience, courage, and mercy, but what about knowledge, creative ideas, insight, or clarity?

In his essay *Learning in Wartime*, C. S. Lewis provides an image of the Christian's pursuit of God in the realm of knowledge and ideas:

An appetite for knowledge and beauty exists in the human mind and God makes no appetite in vain. We can therefore pursue knowledge as such, and beauty as such, in the sure confidence that by doing so we are either advancing to the vision of God ourselves or indirectly helping others to do so.

In this 1934 essay, Lewis offers an illustration of the Christian intellectual tradition in practice. Satisfying our human appetite for beauty and knowledge can show us something of the Lord Jesus, who is the core of every thing and every idea ("in him all things hold together," Colossians 1:17). In this way, our intellectual pursuit of knowledge and beauty through research, reading, teaching, reflecting, and learning are aspects of our discipleship to Jesus Christ. This is not always obvious; for many Christian faculty, these practices are often overlooked as part of their identity in Christ.

At the same time, it is equally true that discipleship to Jesus Christ involves more than getting our thinking straight. It requires the intentional practice of spiritual disciplines such as prayer, solitude, silence, service, reflective writing, submission, generosity, confession, fasting, Scripture study, worship, frugality, chastity, and Sabbath-keeping.

The good news is that when intellectual practices and spiritual discipline practices fill our days, we further discover that Jesus Christ is Lord of everything, including our areas of scholarly knowledge and professional expertise. The intellectual disciplines and the spiritual disciplines complement each other. As we follow him more fully, we become more like him; he renews our minds and develops our thinking in all areas of life.

When we take time each day to renew our faith, we do not automatically have good days, but we are better for the day. Daily renewals of faith are often enhanced when weekly and/or monthly extended times apart are practiced as well. Seeking God becomes our lifestyle. One of the beauties

of practicing spiritual disciplines daily is that they create not only a place for God, but a desire for God. We become more like the psalmist in Psalm 42, asking “When can I go and be with God?” not “Should I go and be with God?” or “What would it be like if I were with God?” The psalmist has experienced the presence of God and knows just how good it is.

With daily practice of the disciplines, we are inspired to focus on the present and therefore become more patient and less hurried or worried, more accepting and therefore more content, and more focused on others and thus better able to respond with hospitality. Living in the present is not easy for us. It is hard to say “This is the work put before me today.” It is harder still to actually do it. Nonetheless, it is our daily work which can be a present act of worship, where we can look at truth one more time and marvel at the wonders of God. Staying with Lewis’ *Learning in Wartime*, we are reminded that:

“...the relevance of our work may not be intended for us but for our betters... for men who come after and find the spiritual significance of what we dug out in blind and humble obedience to our vocation...the present is the only time when any duty can be done and any grace received.”

Throughout the Scriptures from Abraham to Paul, we see exhortations for living in the present and patiently waiting for the future—waiting for a word from God, deliverance from God, a promise to be fulfilled, a journey to be completed, a baby to be born, a prayer to be answered. The fruit of practicing spiritual disciplines shows up in our ordinary lives as we learn to wait on God. We are more able to receive the day and less controlling of situations and others.

Isaiah also tells the Israelites to live and wait in the present:

“In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength but you would have none of it...Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!” –Isaiah 30:15, 18

Waiting is present tense.

Intentional practice of spiritual disciplines also moves us into acceptance. We begin to accept the lives we have been given—not only the trials and suffering, but the whole of our lives. Accepting our lives is fundamental in following Jesus. When the Israelites were in Babylonian exile, God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah in chapter 29 saying:

Build houses and settle down, have children, plant gardens, and eat what they produce. Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have called you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you will prosper.

Essentially, Jeremiah encourages us to accept our present day and pray for the prosperity of the place (in our case, the university) to which we have been called.

Acceptance takes courage—courage to stop trying to orchestrate the ideal life and accept the real life, the abundant life we have in Jesus Christ. For Christian faculty, this may entail accepting one’s talents and the opportunities given to develop those talents, schools attended and schools called to for employment, which often determine one’s sphere of influence in the broader academy. This is difficult in the academy where academic stars and even “good scholarship” are obvious to everyone. We must accept the talents, energy, time, skills, people, schools, and funding God has given us—without secretly longing for someone else’s gifting and calling. Seeking Christ through the practice of spiritual disciplines keeps our calling before us and empowers us to live it in faithfulness.

Lastly, the disciplines encourage us to be “others focused.” While spiritual disciplines can be viewed as self-centered—taking time to better ourselves—in reality we practice the disciplines for the sake of others. We need practice in how to think of others first, seeing their needs and having their best interests at heart. We need to be reminded that when God made his covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12, his promise was not just for Abraham’s sake. Rather, Abraham was blessed to be a blessing. Paul reiterates in II Corinthians 1 that “the God of all comfort comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.”

In the classroom, our practice of spiritual disciplines may lead us to recognize and accept that teaching is not all about content; instead, it includes constantly assessing whether or not our students are understanding the content, whether or not real learning is taking place. *In our research, we may be led to acknowledge someone else’s success, even to rejoice with them, something that does not often happen in the academy.* It is not easy to have compassion for others when they have been given more than us, but practicing spiritual disciplines allows us, in the words of Richard Foster, “the freedom to lay down the terrible burden of always having to have our own way.” As we practice the disciplines, we become slower in making judgments

and consequently more hopeful about others, more able to guide students, and more content with the accomplishments of our colleagues.

Near the end of her book *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, Kate Douglas Wiggin provides a great picture of how being formed into the image of Christ requires intentionality and practice. The narrator takes us into the mind of the old spinster Aunt Miranda, now on her deathbed:

Her mind was perfectly clear now, and, save that she could not move, she was most of the time free from pain, and alert in every nerve to all that was going on within or without the house. "Were the windfall apples being picked for sauce? Were the potatoes thick in the hills? Was the corn tosselin' out? Were they cuttin' the upper fields? Were they keepin' fly-paper laid out everywhere? Were there any ants in the dairy? Was the kindlin' holding out? Had the bank sent the cowpons?" Poor Miranda Sawyer! Hovering on the verge of the great beyond—her body struck and no longer under control of her iron will—no divine visions floated across her tired brain; nothing but petty cares and sordid anxieties. Not all at once can the soul talk with God, be he ever so near. If the heavenly language never has been learned, quick as is the spiritual sense in seizing the facts it needs, then the poor soul must use the words it has lived on and grown into day by day. Poor Miss Miranda!—held fast within the prison walls of her own nature, blind in the presence of revelation because she had never used the spiritual eye, deaf to angelic voice because she had never used the spiritual ear.

Christians are called to the academic world to follow Christ and further discover that he is Lord of all. We do this not only because it is our duty as those called to the learned life or because we have the God-given appetite for knowledge and beauty, but because Jesus is this good. We can ponder his Lordship in the realm of ideas and come to know and love him more fully.

Works Cited

Foster, Richard. *Celebration of Discipline*. Revised ed. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1985.

Lewis, C. S. "Learning in Wartime." *The Weight of Glory*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1949.

Watson, Thomas. *The Art of Divine Contentment*. 2nd edition. Edited by Don Kistler. Soli Deo Gloria Ministries, 2001.

Wiggin, Kate Douglas. *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*. London: Penguin Books, 1903.

"When we begin to ask what conditions of inner renewal are, we receive essentially the same answers from nearly all those whom we have most reason to respect. One major answer is the emphasis upon discipline. In the conduct of one's own life it is soon obvious, as many have learned the hard way, that empty freedom is a snare and a delusion. In following what comes naturally or easily, life simply ends in confusion, and in consequent disaster. Without discipline of time, we spoil the next day the night before, and without the discipline of prayer, we are likely to end by having practically no experience of the divine-human encounter. However compassionate we may be with others, we dare not be soft or indulgent with ourselves. Excellence comes at a price, and one of the major prices is that of inner control.

"We have not advanced very far in our spiritual lives if we have not encountered the basic paradox of freedom, to the effect that we are most free when we are bound. But not just any way of being bound will suffice; what matters is the character of our binding. The one who would like to be an athlete, but who is unwilling to discipline his body by regular exercise and by abstinence, is not free to excel on the field or the track. His failure to train rigorously and to live abstemiously denies him the freedom to go over the bar at the desired height, or to run with the desired speed and endurance. With one concerted voice the giants of the devotional life apply the same principle to the whole of life with the dictum: Discipline is the price of freedom."

—*The New Man for Our Time* by Elton Trueblood

"Our five senses are dulled by inordinate pleasure. [Repentance and confession] makes them keen, gives them back their natural vitality, and more. [Repentance and confession] clears the eye of conscience and of reason. It helps us think clearly, judge sanely. It strengthens the action of our will. And [repentance and confession] also tones up the quality of emotion; it is the lack of self-denial and self-discipline that explains the mediocrity of so much devotional art, so much pious writing, so much sentimental prayer, so many religious lives."

—*Thoughts in Solitude* by Thomas Merton

"My central claim is that we can become like Christ by doing one thing—by following him in the overall style of life he chose for himself. If we have faith in Christ, we must believe that he knew how to live. We can through faith and grace, become like Christ by practicing the types of activities he engaged in, by arranging our whole lives around activities he himself

BIBLE STUDY & REFLECTION—ONE

Luke 5:1-11—45 minutes

practiced in order to remain constantly at home in the fellowship of his Father. What activities did he practice? Such things as solitude and silence, prayer, simple and sacrificial living, intense study and meditation on God's Word and God's ways, and service to others."

—*The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard

"Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life."

—*The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

"Concerning the second proposition in Philippians 4:11, 'I have learned in whatsoever state that I am, therewith to be content.' This word, 'I have learned,' is a word that imports difficulty; it shows how hardly the apostle came by contentment of mind; it was not bred in nature. St. Paul did not come naturally by it, but he learned it. It cost him many a prayer and a tear, it was taught him by the Spirit. Whence our second doctrine: good things are hard to come by....The trade of sin needs not to be learned, but the art of divine contentment is not achieved without holy industry: 'I have learned.'"

—*The Art of Divine Contentment* by Thomas Watson

"We are tempted to believe there is nothing we can do. If all human strivings end in moral bankruptcy (and having tried it, we know it is so), and if righteousness is a gracious gift from God (as the Bible clearly states), then is it not logical to conclude that we must wait for God to come and transform us? Strangely enough, the answer is no. The analysis is correct—human striving is insufficient and righteousness is a gift from God—but the conclusion is faulty. Happily there is something we can do. We do not need to be hung on the horns of the dilemma of either human works or idleness. God has given us the Disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace. The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us."

—*Celebration of Discipline* by Richard J. Foster

"One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. When he finished speaking he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water, and let the nets down for a catch.' Simon answered, 'Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.' When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said 'Go away from me, Lord, I am a sinful man!' For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men.' So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything, and followed him."

- What does Jesus reveal about himself?
- In what ways does Jesus surprise Peter?
- What does Peter receive from Jesus?
- What attributes would you ascribe to Jesus and which ones to Peter?
- How does Peter's belief about Jesus develop as this passage goes forward?
- How does Peter's prior work and training, his knowledge and experience, influence his response to Jesus?
- What is the role of Peter's obedience in this passage?
- Consider what you believe about Jesus. Could Jesus give you gifts in accordance with your profession, skills, and intellectual needs?
- How might your obedience in following Jesus precede your daily efforts in choosing course content, course structure, research projects, or office hour conversations?

The impetus for this study came from Be Not Afraid by David Ivaska (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

BIBLE STUDY & REFLECTION—TWO

II Corinthians 10:1-6—45 minutes

“By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I Paul, who am ‘timid’ when face to face with you, but ‘bold’ when away! I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.”

- How does Paul prefer to deal with people?
- What criteria does Paul resist and what does he endorse?
- How do Paul’s tactics differ from those of the world?
- What does this passage tell us about Paul’s style of communication?
- What is the goal of Paul’s encounter with people—his argumentation?
- What does it mean for Christians to demolish arguments and take ideas and thoughts captive to Jesus Christ?
- Can you cite examples of how this has been, or might be, done in your broad field?
- What does this have to say about the quality of personal faith and what does it say about public discourse?
- What are you doing to relate your discipline or specialization to the mind of Jesus Christ?

Written by Dr. Donald Davis, Professor Emeritus of Library History at the University of Texas at Austin and Associate Staff, InterVarsity Faculty Ministry.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE PRACTICE

Awareness of God—45 minutes

Expressing intention

Quiet your heart with a reading from Isaiah 30:15 and 18, “In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it...Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!”

Lectio-reading

Read the verses again. Slowly and meditatively read the verses through as a whole, letting the Word fall on you as a gentle rain falls on parched earth. Read until a word or phrase draws your attention.

Thanksgiving

Begin by looking over the past week or semester, asking where you need to be thankful. Do not choose what you think you should be thankful for; rather, by merely looking over the week or semester see what emerges, what you notice, even slightly. Allow gratitude to take hold of you and express this to God.

Ask to See

This is a prayer of enlightenment from God. Ask God to show you what he wants you to see and remember from the past week or semester.

Finding God’s Presence

Again look over the events from the past time period. This time ask God to show you where he has been in your life, either in you or in others, and in the events of public life.

- What is most significant for you?

Notice what stands out even slightly, such as joy, turmoil, discouragement, satisfaction, confidence, anger, anxiety, freedom, or the presence of God.

- Where and when did you sense you were being drawn by God’s Spirit?
- Where were you cooperating with sin and not doing what you wanted to do in the Lord (Romans 7:15-20)?

PRAYERS FOR YOUR CAMPUS _____

Responding to God...Seeking Guidance

- Is there any one area you are being nudged to focus your attention on, to pray more seriously over, or to take action on?

Close your time asking God for guidance and specific actions to address your needs at this time.

- Give thanks to the Lord for his faithfulness to the university for many decades. Thank him for the current Christians on your campus at this time.
- Seek the Lord for the peace of the university; the flourishing, wholeness, justice, harmony, truth, and leadership of higher education; and issues of immediate concern on your campus.
- Ask the Lord to renew the truth of vocation among his people in the academy, helping them to see its foundational place in the life of discipleship to the Lord Jesus.
- Ask the Lord to empower Christians to be a redeeming influence on the people, ideas, and structures of the university.
- Seek the power of God to overcome the spiritual barriers of insecurity and self-exaltation, inconsistent self-discipline and sloppiness, haughtiness and self-protection, anger and self-centeredness, over-controlling and a lack of trust, and fear and disbelief.

"O God of peace, who has taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, and in quietness and confidence shall be our strength; by the might of thy Spirit lift us, we pray thee, to thy presence, where we may be still and know that thou art God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

–The Book of Common Prayer

This exercise is adapted from unpublished materials developed by Dr. Helen Cepero, Director of Spiritual Formation at North Park Seminary, and Jay Sivits, InterVarsity's Graduate & Faculty Ministries.

HYMN: "WE REST ON THEE"

This triumphant hymn of commissioning is a meditation on the prayer of Asa in II Chronicles 14:11. Confronted with a huge army of invasion, Asa turned to the LORD for help as he went to the daunting challenge before him. Similarly, having devoted time to fellowship with the same LORD we depart from this time of meeting to face challenges. Edith Cherry's meditation reminds us where to repose our confidence.

"We Rest on Thee" has often been used as a hymn of dismissal in the InterVarsity movement. Going forth from a gathering or conference where we have met with one another and with our God, it matters consequentially "in whose name we go." It was sung at a mission conference that forms the backdrop to the foundation of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES) in the dark days just before World War II. As Europe was descending into the barbarity of war, students and faculty, facing their own death, commissioned one another with these words. The same words were on the lips of the five Auca martyrs twenty years later. Elizabeth Eliot's account of their mission and faith and witness in blood was *Through Gates of Splendor*, as in verse four. And many thousands of others of lesser note, sensing both "their own great weakness" and daily need of grace, have yet sung this hymn of triumph from their hearts.

Reflect on these words as you leave your time apart and face the challenges set before you.

"We rest on Thee"—our Shield and our Defender!
We go not forth alone against the foe;
Strong in thy strength, safe in Thy keeping tender,
"We rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go"
Strong in thy strength, safe in Thy keeping tender,
"We rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go."

Yea, "in Thy name," O Captain of salvation!
In Thy dear Name, all other names above;
Jesus our Righteousness, our sure foundation,
Our Prince of glory, and our King of love,
Jesus our Righteousness, our sure foundation,
Our Prince of glory, and our King of love.

"We go" in faith, our own great weakness feeling,
And needing more each day Thy grace to know:
Yet from our hearts a song of triumph pealing;
"We rest on Thee, and in Thy Name we go,"
Yet from our hearts a song of triumph pealing;
"We rest on Thee, and in Thy Name we go."

"We rest on Thee"—our Shield and our Defender!
Thine is the battle, Thine shall be the praise
When passing through the gates of pearly splendor,
Victors—we rest with Thee,
through endless days,
When passing through the gates of pearly splendor,
Victors—we rest with Thee,
through endless days.

FURTHER READING & REFLECTION

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. New York: Simon & Shuster, 1937.

This classic work calls us to single-minded obedience to Christ. Costly grace and faithful obedience to Jesus Christ require daily renewal of faith.

Dunnam, Maxie. *The Workbook on Spiritual Disciplines*. Nashville: Upper Room, 1984.

This is a very straightforward and accessible introduction to six disciplines with a weekly outline of daily practice for six weeks.

Foster, Richard. *Celebration of Discipline*. San Francisco: Harper, 1978.

Foster provides a very clear and comprehensive look at twelve spiritual disciplines and how they create a place in our lives to receive God's grace.

a'Kempis, Thomas. *The Imitation of Christ*. (Based on the English translation of 1530.) New York: Doubleday.

The second most widely read Christian book ever (behind the Bible), and with good reason.

Nouwen, Henri. *The Way of the Heart*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1981.

This brief book centers on the disciplines of solitude, silence, and prayer and how they lead to a ministry of compassion.

Tozer, A. W. *The Knowledge of the Holy*. Lincoln, Neb.: Back to the Bible Broadcast, 1961.

Tozer's great thoughts of God beckon us to spiritual-discipline practice.

Willard, Dallas. *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*. San Francisco: Harper, 1991.

This book offers a brief history and theology of spiritual disciplines, an argument for their centrality to the Christian life, and a compelling description of fifteen practices.

MORE ABOUT INTERVARSITY FACULTY MINISTRY

InterVarsity Faculty Ministry is called to identify, encourage, and equip Christian faculty to be a redeeming influence within higher education.

Our vision is that Christian faculty will be a redeeming influence as they:

- Establish witnessing communities of Christian academics that reflect the diversity of the body of Christ.
- Follow God's call in spiritual formation and vocational discipleship.
- Balance excellence in life, research, teaching, mentoring, and service, for the glory of God.
- Practice their disciplines from a profoundly Christian viewpoint.

Additional Resources

- The InterVarsity Faculty Ministry website:
gfm.intervarsity.org/faculty
- *The Lamp Post*, a quarterly emailed newsletter by Faculty Ministry:
gfm.intervarsity.org/lamp-post-subscribe
- The Emerging Scholars Network (ESN), a national network which supports those on the academic pathway:
blog.emergingscholars.org
- The Well, a resource for women in the academy and professions:
thewell.intervarsity.org
- Event info including regional faculty conferences:
gfm.intervarsity.org/events

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