

Whoever finds his life will  
lose it, and whoever loses  
his life for my sake will  
find it.  
Mt 10:39

Share the teaching  
Guard the sharing

# Male Call

## October 26, 2007—The Great Commission: Discipleship—Part XI

6:00 – 6:05	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Coffee &amp; Donuts</li> <li>2) Opening Prayer</li> </ol>
6:05 – 7:00	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Review:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) How would you spend 30 minutes with Jesus if he were in the next room?</li> <li>b) Last week's field trip</li> </ol> </li> <li>2) <i>Our most determined efforts at personal reform do not last long. We win only as long as we achieve a constant walk with Christ. Human effort loses the fiber in its intention. Discipline is a matter of the inner reign of Christ. He will be victorious when he is allowed full sovereignty.</i> (Miller, 29)</li> <li>3) <i>The best way, then, to deal with sin is not to attempt reform but to adore the Savior. Winning over our lower nature is made by positive adoration. While we worship the enthroned and inner Christ, we cannot be intrigued by negative preoccupations with sin.</i> (Miller, 29)</li> <li>4) Where are the eyes and ears of our heart?<sup>3</sup> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Basic soul needs:                 <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Significance</li> <li>ii) Security</li> <li>iii) Acceptance</li> <li>iv) Unconditional love</li> </ol> </li> <li>b) How do we fill these needs?</li> </ol> </li> <li>5) Christ is not just our <i>Savior</i>, he must be our <i>life</i>.             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Gen 2:17—of which tree was Adam and Eve not to eat?</li> <li>b) Why evil <i>and</i> good?</li> <li>c) How do we judge evil (bad) and good? Examples?</li> <li>d) What if all of our life was God at work trying to turn our eyes and ears toward him alone?                 <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Would this shape our view of good and evil?</li> </ol> </li> </ol> </li> <li>6) God doesn't necessarily take away those things of the flesh that tempt us or hurt us or please us (2Cor 12:7-9) because these things turn us toward him. Only turning to Christ can we find relief from these things.<sup>3</sup></li> </ol>

	<p>7) St. Antony, the first of the Desert Fathers, referred to Christ followers as <i>athletae Dei</i>, athletes of God.<sup>4</sup> What sort of discipleship training program should we specify?</p> <p>8) Finish where we started. Recall our exercise to look at the life of Jesus, the things he did. We should live our lives as he did.  a) Handout: Christian fitness program.</p>
7:00	Closing Prayer

<sup>1</sup> Finley, James. *Merton's Palace of Nowhere*.

<sup>2</sup> Miller, Calvin. *The Table of Inwardness*.

<sup>3</sup> Wells, Michael. *Sidetracked in the Wilderness*.

<sup>4</sup> Foster, Richard J. *Streams of Living Water*.  
26. Antony lived from A.D. 251 – 356.

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## Christian Fitness Program

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Before proceeding with the workout program, several points must be made:

1. The various exercises in the program have been given different names by different authors. What appears below is a combination of the work of Willard and Foster.<sup>a</sup> This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of possible exercises; rather it is a list of the most common.
2. It is generally agreed that prayer is the central exercise. It is only through prayer that we build a relationship with God and are ultimately empowered to persevere in our exercise program.
3. As with any exercise program, yours must be tailored for you. I can show you my program and it may help you start; however, your program must eventually be worked out with God. Also, not every exercise is appropriate in the same way all the time.
4. We each may prefer one or more of these exercises. However, following Jesus requires that we participate in each of them just as he did.
5. As humans, we are prone to make the program itself the goal. This can never be the case, and here lies one important reason for being with other believers who can help us resist this tendency. As we said above, the goal of the workout program is to discipline ourselves as God's athletes training for godliness, which is good *now* and *for the life to come* (cf 1Tim 4:7-8).
6. We may each feel the pull of God into a deeper love through any one of these exercises or during our obedience to any one of Jesus' commands. One may experience God's pull after being asked to serve, another from continual prayer, yet another through study, and another from an evangelistic encounter. The common point is that we must respond to God's call in our life as we hear it and we must be charitable to other Christians who have heard and responded to the call of God differently than we; all within the bounds of Scripture, of course.

### Exercises of Abstinence<sup>b</sup>

Peter urges believers as aliens and strangers in this foreign land "to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul" (1Per 2:11). We must seek to master any "natural" lust that distracts us from God. This could include television, hobbies, sports, eating, sex, video games, email, surfing the net, etc. Of course there is nothing intrinsically wrong with these activities; however, as fallen people, our desires too often run amok. Practicing abstinence from these things that pull us from God exercises our self-control. Here are some specific exercises.

#### SOLITUDE/SILENCE (Lk 5:16)

There are several benefits to solitude and silence with God. First, we are too often distracted by our need for information, to be in contact, and for entertainment. In this exercise, we push away the ever-encroaching noise generated by our society to renew our eternal perspective.

*In solitude we find the psychic distance, the perspective from which we can see, in the light of eternity, the created things that trap, worry, and oppress us.<sup>c</sup>*

*When you are faithful in [silent meditation]...you will slowly experience yourself in a deeper way. Because in this useless hour in which you do nothing "important" or urgent you have to come to terms with your basic powerlessness, you have to feel your fundamental inability to solve your own or other people's problems or to change the world. When you do not avoid that experience but live through it, you will find out that*

## Christian Fitness Program

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*your many projects, plans, and obligations become less urgent, crucial, and important and lose their power over you.<sup>d</sup>*

Second, the pace of life overwhelms us. We are a 24/7 world; we move fast, fast, fast. I once read that with computers becoming increasingly popular in offices, there was a rise in techno-stress brought about by our frustration when we had to wait a few additional *seconds* for our computer to boot or a network to respond. We want our relationships to develop at an equal pace and get irritated when they require time we don't have to give them. Sadly, what often passes for a relationship with another today is little more than casual contact squeezed into our busy lives. Leisure time to spend with another is viewed as either a luxury we cannot afford or as a sign of weakness.

*Once we learn to master our schedule, we will be able to approach God in peace. Those who have not learned this come to God as they do everything else...late! We can hardly enjoy [God] if we are always looking at our watches, wondering how much time we may safely give our Host. Holy living is not abrupt living. No one who hurries into the presence of God is content to remain for long. Those who hurry in, hurry out.<sup>e</sup>*

Unlike Eastern religions that seek solitude and silence for the sake of emptying ourselves, the Christian discipline seeks to make room for God to join us and speak to us. It is a time for being alone *with* God and a time for *listening* prayer, to build our relationship with God through the events, good and bad, of our lives. It is within the context of solitude and silence that we practice prayer.<sup>f</sup> Because of this, it holds a privileged position among the exercises.

Third, we often come before God in prayer driven by our desire to ensure he knows all about our take on a situation or of our need for our self or that of another and how we think he should resolve the issue or provide for the need. Certainly, in the mystery of prayer, God has asked us to intercede for others and make our requests known; yet, how often do we mute the quiet voice of God in the raucous roar of our necessity and the cry of our grief.<sup>g</sup>

Fourth, creating a quiet space within our selves is an act of spiritual hospitality for another soul.

*Although I often try to pull it off, I know I cannot really be present for another person when my inner world is filled with preoccupations and distractions. This is one of the biggest challenges I face in being present for others—being still with my own soul. Stillness is a precondition of presence. I must first be still with myself if I am to learn to be still with another. And, of course, I must learn to be still before God if I am to be still in myself.<sup>h</sup>*

Truly communicating with God carries risks for the unprepared. When one is alone and undistracted, God can begin to help us see with him the sin within us. It can be a terrifying experience as God, over our lifetime, illuminates our soul with an increasingly brighter light. As we see ourselves ever more as God sees us, we can begin to understand how Paul, toward the end of his life, viewed himself as the chief of sinners (1Tim 1:15).

If we open ourselves to God, he shows us our inequities so that we might increasingly rely on Him!

## Christian Fitness Program

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*Repentance is not the exposure of our evil hearts but looking inward with God in weeping agreement about our condition. Here in the final end of pride, we wait for him to cleanse us.<sup>i</sup>*

This is an act of love from God; we can only endure seeing ourselves from God's perspective by clinging to Christ who is with us. We may decide it is too hard to look at ourselves with God and pull back. If we do so, it will not prevent God's search of our heart and it will hinder our spiritual growth.

Henri Nouwen reminds us that a value that must guide a Christian organization is:

*Not how to keep people busy, but how to keep them from being so busy that they can no longer hear the voice of God who speaks in the silence. Thus, organizations can be seen as the creation of space where communion becomes possible and community can develop. But let us not be too literal about silence. After all, silence of the heart is much more important than silence of the mouth. Abba Peomen said: "A man may seem silent, but if his heart is condemning others he is babbling ceaselessly". But there may be another who talks from morning till night and yet he is truly silent. Silence is primarily a quality of the heart that leads to ever-growing charity. Charity, not silence, is the purpose of the spiritual life and of ministry.<sup>j</sup>*

Some say that they cannot engage in solitude and silence. Some say they struggle in community, preferring to be alone. Dietrich Bonhoeffer warns both:

*Let him who cannot be alone beware of community.*

*Let him who is not in community beware of being alone.<sup>k</sup>*

He goes on to note that we heard God's call alone, answered it alone, struggled alone with God in prayer and obedience and we die alone. We are called into community. Our struggle and pain is that of the community's. Our death affects the community.

### FASTING (Mt 4:2)

Food and drink have a primary place in our lives: they are necessary for our survival. Abstaining from eating or drinking for more than a few hours and our bodies begin to remind us of our neglect. Fasting can entail abstaining for food and drink or just food, or only some types of food (e.g., eating only bread and water). The length of a fast can vary from one meal to many days. Fasting can be a humbling experience: it is remarkable to observe in ourselves how quickly missing a meal disrupts our inner being and how quickly we begin to focus on our suffering and needs. We quickly see how poorly we suffer.

Just as quickly, it can help us to understand Jesus' comment to his disciples that he has food about which they know nothing (Jn 4:32). Some believe that Satan attacked Jesus toward the end of his 40-day fast in the desert because Jesus was at his most vulnerable. This is the world's point of view. We should realize that Jesus was at his strongest. Relying completely on God for our physical survival—our bread—makes apparent that we can rely on God for our spiritual survival.

*Fasting unto the Lord is therefore feasting—feasting on him and doing his will.<sup>l</sup>*

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## Christian Fitness Program

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Further, fasting can help us learn to suffer well. Jesus commands as much (Mt 6:16-17). Avoiding a gloomy face and turning to God in the midst of our suffering from hunger or thirst teaches us to avoid being gloomy and to turn to God in all our suffering. And, because hunger and thirst are such basic desire, fasting helps us control and moderate our higher-order desires.

### STEWARDSHIP (Mt 8:20)

Jesus practiced stewardship with his time, treasure, and talents throughout his ministry. In a culture that is 24/7 where we can get anything at anytime and are expected to be available all the time, we no longer know how to say, “Enough!” In a culture where we are continually exposed to advertising peer pressure telling us what we need to make us funnier, more attractive, smarter, happier, more successful, or richer, we no longer know how to say, “Enough!” In a culture that expects us to be all that we can be and more in the world and to employ ourselves fully in that pursuit, we no longer know how to say, “Enough!”

*Our stuff and the spiritual development of our soul...are very important topics to God—so important that seventeen of the thirty-eight parables of Christ were about possessions. Possessions are mentioned 2,172 times in Scripture—three times more than love, seven times more than prayer, and eight times more than belief. Obviously God understood that believers would find this a difficult area of our lives to turn over to him. [Stewardship] is God’s design for living as a Christian in a non-Christian world through how we handle our time, talents, and money. Stewardship is God’s way of raising people, not man’s way of raising money.<sup>m</sup>*

While through stewardship we can do things for God and society, as a discipline, stewardship can help us to exercise self-control over our material goods, the use of our time, and our employment of who we are. In this sense it is an exercise of abstinence, we will see below that service, a particular case of stewardship, is an exercise of engagement.

### SUBMISSION (Lk 22:42)

This discipline is at the very heart of discipleship. One cannot imagine true salvation without submission to Jesus. Jesus the evangelist says to the disciples and the crowd:

*If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. (Mk 8:34)*

Sadly, if there was ever a disciple gone wrong, this is it. We are all too quick to point out how wives must submit to their husband’s leadership, how children must submit to their parents, or how church members must submit to leadership. This is the world’s way: submit to me because of my position and status. But we overlook Jesus’ intent for submission: to deny ourselves, forfeiting our “rights” of status or power and submit ourselves to Jesus’ way.

*It is impossible to overstate the revolutionary character of Jesus’ life and teaching at this point. It did away with all claims to privileged position and status...undermined all social orders based on power and self-interest.<sup>n</sup>*

This is the exercise that takes practice: to work at denying what our culture or our natural self tells us is rightfully ours.

But, there’s more. From submitting ourselves to Jesus we gain a profound deepening of our relationship with him—an abiding relationship!

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## Christian Fitness Program

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*The highest kind of obedience does not come from always asking, “What will you have me do?” but in the moment-by-moment rehearsal of our love for Christ. My wife and I love each other, and as we live in the enjoyment of our relationship, we continually surrender our wills to each other. We do not continually ask, “What would you like me to do?” Because of our relationship, we know each other’s desires, and we do all we can to meet them, often without the exchange of words.<sup>o</sup>*

More than any other discipline, this exercise has its limits when submitting in context of human relationships or to human authority. Beyond an obvious limit is an act of submission that would cause us to break God’s law, such as submitting to the mandate to punish a child unreasonably. Other limits are harder to define.<sup>p</sup>

### SACRIFICE (Jn 15:13)

Today, sacrifice is thought of as something that causes an inconvenience in our lives. Biblically, it is much more than that. A true sacrifice is to give up something that is necessary. Jesus sacrificing his life for us is an obvious example. The widow who gave all to the Temple is another example (Lk 21:2-4). Exercising the discipline of sacrifice is to put ourselves in a position of being unable to meet our own needs through our means.

*The cautious faith that never saws off the limb on which it is sitting never learns that unattached limbs may find strange, unaccountable ways of not falling.<sup>q</sup>*

There is a more practical, daily benefit from learning the disciple sacrifice: prayer. It is only through sacrifice that we can pray as Jesus did, “Yet not as I will, but as You will.” This is the way of effective prayer.

### Exercises of Engagement

It is not enough to be exclusively inwardly focused as a Christian. These exercises act as a balance to the exercises of abstinence. We must be both inward and outward.

### STUDY (Lk 2:41-52)

As solitude with God is the primary discipline of abstinence, study of God’s Word is the primary discipline of engagement.<sup>r</sup> It can be hard work and we so often eschew such work. But one is confronted with the question: How can we know the Living Word if we do not study his written word? Some would answer that we can know God by communing with him only in prayer. This is dangerous. Many a mystic has been led astray by visions, feelings, and “words from God” that are nothing but their own self-deception or diabolical leadings from Satan. Study takes effort and there is no substitute for it.

*Mystics without study are only spiritual romantics who want relationship without effort.<sup>s</sup>*

One does not have to be a scholar of the Bible to study well. At no time in history have we been able to avail ourselves of the vast resources with which to study the Bible. We must remember that while these resources are very helpful, there simply is no substitute for reading God’s word itself. God brought his word to life through the lives of people. We do not have to be Hebraic scholars to get the point of the apostasy of the Jewish people told again and again through the Old Testament or Greek scholars to understand what Jesus tells us in the gospels. The word of God comes to life through the stories and letters of the Bible.

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## Christian Fitness Program

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Robert Mulholland notes that there are two ways to study the Bible: informational (to learn more) and formational (to be changed).<sup>1</sup> Both are useful.

INFORMATIONAL READING	FORMATIONAL READING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cover as much as possible</li><li>• Read line after line</li><li>• Have a goal of mastering the text</li> <li>• Treat the text as an “object”</li> <li>• Solve problems</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cover what we need</li><li>• Read for depth</li><li>• Have a goal of being mastered by the text</li><li>• Treat ourselves as the object of the text</li><li>• Be open to mystery</li></ul>

The danger of much study in the traditional (informational) sense is that it leads us to a greater knowledge of God but not a greater experience of God. And we serve a relational God; hence the importance of formational reading. Experiencing God is what changes us; it leads us from knowing to becoming.<sup>11</sup>

Is there more to study than the Bible? Most certainly. There are a number of classic writings by great saints of history. It is worth reading their works to learn from them, they have much to offer about the journey we are each on. There are great commentaries and other scholarly works to enrich our understanding of Scripture. However, Richard Foster gives us a caution:

*Remember that the key to the Discipline of study is not reading many books, but experiencing what we read.*<sup>v</sup>

Solomon offers the same caution:

*My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.* (Ecc 12:12 ESV)

Beyond books, we can look to the natural world, God’s creation. We can learn of the Creator by studying his creation.

*The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge.* (Ps 19:1-3)

*For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.* (Rom 1:20)

WORSHIP (Lk 4:16)

*I’ll praise the Maker while I’ve breath;  
and when my voice is lost in death,  
praise shall employ my nobler pow’rs.  
My days of praise shall never pass,  
while life and thought and being last,*

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## Christian Fitness Program

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*or immortality endures.<sup>w</sup>*

One might wonder why worship is considered a spiritual discipline. Foster answers “that worship should be a Spiritual discipline...because it is an ordered way of acting and living that sets us before God so he can transform us.”<sup>x</sup>

We may be occupied in worship whether alone or with others. In worship, we are engaged with God through song, word, symbols, and rituals. We dwell on God himself: his love, beauty, glory, holiness, goodness, patience, wisdom, power, transcendence, and eternity.

Undoubtedly we each have an image of “worship.” Generally, we think of a Sunday morning experience with music and an exposition of scripture. Indeed, this is the classic instantiation of corporate worship that has come to us through the ages even before Christ. As we come together in worship we join *geographically* with the universal church; as morning breaks across the world on any given Sunday morning, God is being praised. When we engage in traditional rituals, sing songs written many hundreds of years ago, and read scripture, we are joining *across time* with the universal church.

We worship together because we are made in the image of God. Just as the Triune God exists in community, we are made to exist in community. It is in community, by our love of each other, that unbelievers will know us (Jn 13:35). We are now and in the life to come members of one great congregation.<sup>y</sup>

*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!*  
(Ps 133:1)

Today, we often come to worship expecting something from it, such as a good show or an inspiring sermon. If we walk away without feeling good about our worship experience we judge the “performers.” We have lost the sense that worship is something we do out of devotion to our God who alone is worthy of praise. Rather than ask, What did I get out of this worship time? we should ask, What did I bring to God during my worship?

It is during worship that the disciplines of solitude and silence can help us. From these disciplines we learn to quiet our hearts and minds to be open to the Spirit. However, this should not put us into a dour state, may it never be! It is entirely appropriate to clap, dance, stand, sit, kneel, lift our hands, lift our face, stretch out our arms as on a cross, be reserved, or prostrate oneself as one feels. The only caution is that we do these things to be seen by man or out of fear of conforming and not out of genuine praise of God.

Worship goes beyond community worship on a Sunday morning. Just as solitude and silence can help us, we see that our private practice of the disciplines of submission and sacrifice are acts of worship in themselves.

*Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*  
(Rom 12:1-2)

And, there is still more. Brother Lawrence has written to us across the centuries of his experience in continual worship and communion with God:

## Christian Fitness Program

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*I make it my business only to persevere in his holy presence, wherein I keep myself by a simple attention, a general fond regard to God, which I may call the actual presence of God; or to speak better, a habitual, silent, and secret conversation of the soul with God, which often causes me joys and raptures inwardly, and sometimes also outwardly, so great that I am forced to use means to moderate them and prevent their appearance to others.<sup>z</sup>*

Some will be quick to point out that Brother Lawrence lived in a sheltered world and was not subjected to the pace of life as we know it today. Perhaps. Little is known of his life beyond his few letters. Present day author, Richard Foster, caught the same vision:

*Catching the vision from Brother Lawrence and Frank Lauback, I dedicated one whole year to learning to live with a perpetual openness to Jesus as my present Teacher. I determined to learn his vocabulary: is he addressing me through those singing birds or a sad face? I sought to allow him to move through my every action: my fingers writing, my voice while speaking. My desire was to punctuate each minute with inward whisperings of adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. Often I failed for hours, even days at a time. But each time I came back and tried again...I found it increasingly easier to distinguish his voice from the blare of everyday life.<sup>aa</sup>*

Recalling Foster's definition of worship as "an ordered way of acting and living that sets us before God so he can transform us," it becomes easy to see how we may engage in worship in a corporate setting, such as a traditional church service, in a small group or home church, with another Christian, or alone.

### SERVICE (Jn 13:14-16)

It is in our love of our neighbor that the love of God for us manifests itself. John tells us that if we say we love God but hate our brother, then we are a liar. (1Jn 4:20). Our love of neighbor manifests itself outwardly in our service of others.

At first, we see a difference between being with God and doing for God. We set aside time to be alone with God, to pray, meditate, and reflect. We look for opportunities to do for God by serving in church, going on mission trips, or helping the poor. There is a clear difference between our times of being like Mary, at Jesus' feet, and like Martha, in the kitchen cooking for Jesus (cf Lk 10:38-42).

While retreats will always be a necessary part of a Christian's life, as our relationship with Christ grows, the distinction between being with Christ and doing for him begins to blur. In times of work, we feel an inner solitude in which we commune with God. Service becomes itself an act of worship. Finally, Mary and Martha unite:

*It is a great favour which the Lord grants to these souls, for it unites the active life with the contemplative. At such times they serve the Lord in both these ways at once; the will, while in contemplation, is working without knowing how it does so; the other two faculties are serving Him as Martha did. Thus Martha and Mary work together.<sup>bb</sup>*

This is a most advanced state of discipleship! But even without this mysterious unity of act and will, we should begin to see our very character transformed such that we no longer see what we do as sacrificial service for Jesus; it is simply something we do out of our transformed and

## Christian Fitness Program

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transforming character. Our life itself becomes ministry,<sup>cc</sup> and when confronted by the King with our good works, we say with the righteous:

*“Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?” The King will answer and say to them, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.” (Mt 25:37-40)*

Our good works of service and obedience (cf Mt 5:13-48) are hidden even from ourselves (cf Mt 6:1-24).

CONFESSION (Mt 3:13-17)

Confession, as used here, is an admission of and repentance from our sin. Wayne Grudem defines repentance this way:

*Repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience of Christ.<sup>dd</sup>*

Confessing our heartfelt sorrow is a theme throughout scripture. John the Baptist came preaching a baptism of repentance (Mt 3:11). Peter, in his first sermon, told his listeners to repent (Acts 2:38).

Up to now we have only considered disciplines in which Jesus participated (and even this is not an exhaustive list). Here we have a discipline in which Jesus seemingly had no need to participate. Yet, he was baptized in the Jordan River by The Baptist; in fact, he insisted on it “to fulfill all righteousness” (Mt 3:15). Why would Jesus, the perfect God-Man, insist on receiving the baptism of repentance? Scot McKnight answers the question this way:

*Clearly, then, if Jesus doesn’t need to repent, then he must be repenting for others, for us. Why would he do that? There is only one reason...: We can’t repent adequately.<sup>ee</sup>*

While it is true that repentance entails confession and commitment, as Grudem explains above, true repentance also entails a true perception of the sin. We are fallen creature incapable of repenting adequately because “we don’t know our hearts truly.”<sup>ff</sup> We can only see our own sin dimly; only by following Jesus—being his disciple—can we participate fully with him in repenting for our sins.<sup>gg</sup>

Do we confess only privately to God or publicly to a fellow Christian? The answer is “Yes.”<sup>hh</sup> Paul tells that there is but one mediator between God and man: Jesus (1Tim 2:5); James tells us to confess our sins to one another (James 5:16).

Should we run around confessing our sins to every Christian we meet? No.

*The “confessing” that James wrote about is done among the saints. He was not suggesting confessing our sins to a preacher or priest. We confess our sins first of all to the Lord (1 John 1:9), but we must also confess them to those who have been affected by them. We must never confess sin beyond the circle of that sin’s influence. Private sin requires private confession; public sin requires public confession. It is wrong for*

## Christian Fitness Program

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*Christians to “hang dirty wash in public,” for such “confessing” might do more harm than the original sin.<sup>ii</sup>*

*And sometimes it may be well to confess our faults to some prudent minister or praying friend, that he may help us to plead with God for mercy and pardon.<sup>jj</sup>*

Can a fellow Christian offer forgiveness of sins through one’s confession? No. That is for God alone (Mk 2:7). How, then, shall we read Jesus’ words:

*And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.” (Jn 20:22-23)*

Wiersbe’s commentary helps:

*A correct understanding of the Greek text helps us here. Some years ago, I corresponded with the eminent Greek scholar Dr. Julius R. Mantey (now deceased) about this verse, and he assured me that the correct translation both here and in Matthew 16:19 should be: “Whosoever sins you remit [forgive] shall have already been forgiven them, and whosoever sins you retain [do not forgive] shall have already not been forgiven them.” In other words, the disciples did not provide forgiveness; they proclaimed forgiveness on the basis of the message of the Gospel. Another Greek scholar, Dr. Kenneth Wuest, translates it “they have been previously forgiven them.”<sup>kk</sup>*

Calvin agrees:

*While Christ enjoins the Apostles to forgive sins, he does not convey to them what is peculiar to himself. It belongs to him to forgive sins. This honor, so far as it belongs peculiarly to himself, he does not surrender to the Apostles, but enjoins them, in his name, to proclaim the forgiveness of sins, that through their agency he may reconcile men to God.<sup>ll</sup>*

We confess to God for forgiveness. We confess one to another for forgiveness between each other and to bring the sin out into the light. Sin, when exposed to the light, loses its power over us (Prov 28:13). In confessing to each other, “we lay down the burden of hiding and pretending, which normally takes up such a dreadful amount of human energy.”<sup>mmm</sup>

CELEBRATION (Jn 2:1-2)

Imagine a life in which you don’t have to worry about food or clothes. Imagine a life in which you are known completely, understood fully, and still loved unconditionally, where emptiness is filled. Imagine a life in which the rules are meant only for your own good and following them will set you free to be who you were created to be. Imagine a life in which when you suffer, you know your Father is at your side offering comfort; that even in suffering you know you are being transformed into an extraordinary being. Imagine a life in which you are never, ever alone.

Wouldn’t such a life be filled with great joy? Yet, this is the Christian life; a life that *should* be filled with great joy. Jesus tells us that his joy will be in us. Imagine that, the joy of God himself within us. With such joy shouldn’t we be celebrating? Why is it that we often so joyless? The entire eleven lessons of male Call has been about answering this very question.

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## Christian Fitness Program

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We are not salt and light because we are not filled with the joy of Christ. And, we are not filled with this joy because we are not *athletae Dei*, athletes of God with our focus only on Christ.

We should celebrate in each moment of our lives taking great joy in living each moment for God and as God would have us live. Can we take this too far? Of course, as with everything else we can get carried away and celebrate as the world celebrates. Nevertheless, with that warning in mind we should learn the discipline of celebration. As someone once said:

*I said, "God give me all things that I might enjoy life;  
God said, "I gave you life that you might enjoy all things."*

A disciplined life helps us to enjoy all things as God has intended for us. But, it is not enough. To fully enjoy life with God, we must begin to find our true self: your "total self as you were created by God and as you are being redeemed in Christ. It is the unique face of God that has been set aside from eternity for."<sup>nm</sup>

*We do not find our true self by seeking it. Rather, we find our true self by seeking God.<sup>oo</sup>*

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<sup>a</sup> Willard's *The Spirit of the Disciplines* and Foster's *Celebration of Disciplines*. These books provide many insights to the disciplines presented here and other disciplines not presented. Hughes' *Disciplines of a Godly Man* is also an excellent resource.

<sup>b</sup> Categories of abstinence and engagement from Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, ch 9.

<sup>c</sup> Ibid. 161.

<sup>d</sup> Abbot John Eudes Bamberger to Henri Nouwen. Quoted in Anderson, *Running on Empty: Contemplative Spirituality for Overachievers*. 73.

<sup>e</sup> Miller, *The Table of Inwardness*. 36. Emphasis in original.

<sup>f</sup> Nouwen. *The Way of the Heart: Connecting with God through Prayer, Wisdom, and Silence*. 63.

<sup>g</sup> Miller, *The Table of Inwardness*. 73.

<sup>h</sup> Benner, *Sacred Companions*. 47.

<sup>i</sup> Miller, *The Table of Inwardness*. 89.

<sup>j</sup> Nouwen. *The Way of the Heart: Connecting with God through Prayer, Wisdom, and Silence*. 56-57.

<sup>k</sup> Bonhoeffer. *Life Together*. 77.

<sup>l</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. 166.

<sup>m</sup> Willmer. *God & Your Stuff: the Vital Link Between Your Possessions and Your Soul*. 9.

<sup>n</sup> Foster. *Celebration of Disciplines*. 116.

<sup>o</sup> Miller, *The Table of Inwardness*. 82.

<sup>p</sup> The specific example is from Ibid. 121. See 120-121 for a good discussion on this point.

<sup>q</sup> Willard. *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. 175. Emphasis in original.

<sup>r</sup> Ibid. 176.

<sup>s</sup> Miller. *The Table of Inwardness*. 83.

<sup>t</sup> From Robert Mulholland's, *Shaped by the Word*, in McKnight, *The Jesus Creed*. 195-196.

<sup>u</sup> Ibid. 196.

<sup>v</sup> Foster. *Celebration of Discipline*. 72.

<sup>w</sup> Watts, Isaac. "Bless the Lord Oh My Soul."

<sup>x</sup> Foster. *Celebration of Discipline*. 166.

<sup>y</sup> Bonhoeffer. *Life Together*. 77.

<sup>z</sup> Brother Lawrence. *The Practice of the Presence of God*. 36. Emphasis in original.

<sup>aa</sup> Foster. *Celebration of Discipline*. 162.

<sup>bb</sup> St. Teresa of Avila. *The Way of Perfection*. 89.

<sup>cc</sup> Nouwen. *The Way of the Heart*. 27-28.

<sup>dd</sup> Grudem. *Systematic Theology*. 713.

## Christian Fitness Program

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<sup>cc</sup> McKnight. *The Jesus Creed*. 242-243. Emphasis in original.

<sup>ff</sup> Ibid. 242.

<sup>gg</sup> Ibid. 261. McKnight also notes that by following Jesus we can participate with him in living obediently. Here we see the fulfillment of the Great Commission: only by following Jesus—discipling—can we participate fully with Jesus in baptism and obedience.

<sup>hh</sup> For this line of thinking, see Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*. 145ff.

<sup>ii</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Electronic version.

<sup>jj</sup> Henry, M. (1996, c1991). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible*. Electronic version.

<sup>kk</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. Electronic version.

<sup>ll</sup> Calvin, J. (2002; 2002). *Calvin's Commentaries (Jn 20:19-23)*. Galaxie Software.

<sup>mm</sup> Willard. *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. 188.

<sup>nn</sup> Benner. *The Gift of Being Yourself*. 92.

<sup>oo</sup> Ibid. 92.