

### **I. Introduction to the Disciplines** – Excerpts from Authentic Discipleship article:

[http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/2-spiritual-](http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/2-spiritual-formation/Spiritual%20Disciplines/SF%201.0%20Introduction%20to%20the%20Spiritual%20Disciplines.pdf)

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#### **A) WHAT IS A “SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE”?**

1. Spiritual Disciplines are not the desired end product of spiritual life – but rather they are a means to an end. They are... the intentional development of authentic Spiritual life and intimacy with God.
2. Quotes about the disciplines:
  - a. Richard Foster → *“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. ... They are God’s means of grace.”*
  - b. Moore → *“A discipline is something to which we submit in order to effect change. ... God has given us the disciplines of grace as a means to help us grow in our love for him and our neighbors.”*
  - c. Whitney → *“The Spiritual Disciplines are those personal and corporate disciplines that promote spiritual growth. They are the habits of devotion and experiential Christianity that have been practiced by the people of God since biblical times.”*
  - d. Dallas Willard → *“A discipline is any activity within our power that we engage in to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort.”*
  - e. Dallas Willard → *“... Spiritual growth and vitality stem from what we actually do with our lives, from the habits we form, and from the character that results.”*
  - f. Henri Nouwen → Saw the disciplines as a means “to create space to meet with God that you otherwise had not planned on.
  - g. M. Robert Mulholland → *“Things that intrude into our lives to align us with God’s purpose.”*
  - h. Douglas Rumford → *“A means to develop soul memory for reflexive spiritual responsiveness.”*

#### **B) BASIC DEFINITION OF A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE – IT IS:**

1. A deliberately self-imposed habit that nurtures spiritual health and fosters spiritual growth leading to maturity.
2. A set of deliberately self-imposed actions to alter existing life and thought patterns, thereby breaking the normal cycle of life and breaking the focus on the mundane to contemplate the sublime.
3. Repetitious actions driven by spiritual decisions rather than natural environmental reactions.
4. Spiritual exercises to develop “Sacred Rhythms” to engage in intentional spirituality in the pursuit of intimacy with God.

#### **C) BASIC CONCEPTS BEHIND SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES:**

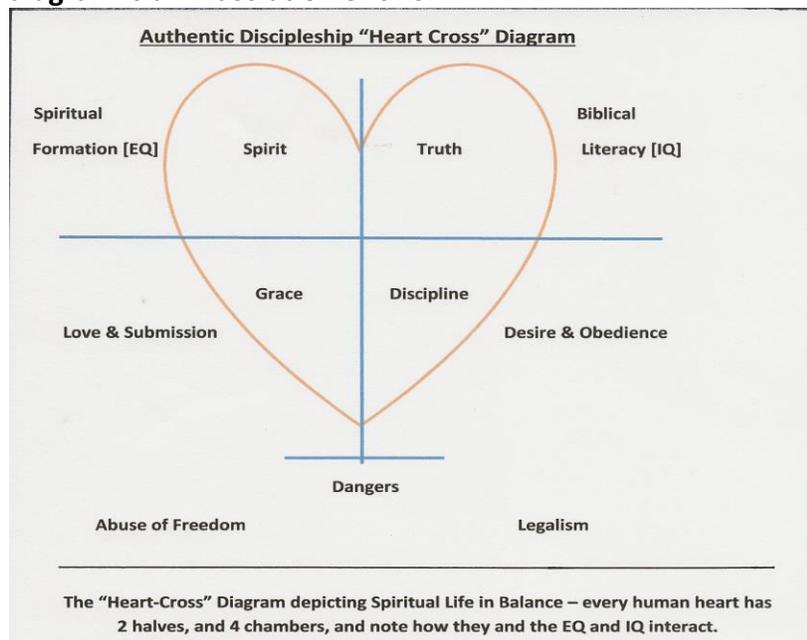
1. These are called disciplines because they are not the natural intuitive thing to do.
2. The “physical disciplines” include developmental exercises set within the natural order of the physical body or mental aptitudes. Whereas the “Spiritual disciplines” are developmental exercises within the supernatural order that open us into the spiritual realm of existence.
3. They are disciplines because I need to make a conscious choice to engage in them... they are not what I would otherwise do of my own accord.
4. There are times I don’t feel like doing what I know to be necessary for my spiritual health.

## LD – 6.5 – On Developing a Spirit Driven Life

Disciplines provide methodology and structure and order to carry me through the times I would otherwise ignore my spiritual health.

### D) Practical CAUTIONS IN APPROACHING THE DISCIPLINES:

1. Spiritual disciplines are not the same as spiritual maturity, though they are intended to enable and foster spiritual growth. Actual spiritual maturity is in the purview of the Spirit.
2. Spiritual disciplines are not unlike any other developmental methodology in that they seek to engender a more disciplined approach to God.
3. The proper focus of the disciplines is to know God at a deeper and more dependent relational level... where I am intentionally seeking His will and purpose and growing in maturity and confidence in hearing and obeying Him.
  - a. We engage in the disciplines because we love God and want to press into Him and know Him better.
  - b. Engaging in the disciplines essentially places us on the spiritual highway where we can be more easily picked up by the Spirit... but it is not our effort that earns us the right of access, but rather God's grace that bestows it and draws us in.
4. Spiritual disciplines focus on the relational and qualitative aspects of knowing God, not merely the intellectual and quantitative aspects. They are more of an "Emotional Quotient" rather than merely an "Intellectual Quotient." [EQ vs. IQ]
5. Most people find they are inclined toward either a mind or cognitive [IQ] approach to life and God; or they are disposed toward a heart of emotive/relational [EQ] approach.
6. By nature, the results of the disciplines may be seen and perhaps measured, but only in hindsight because the disciplines themselves will resist quantitative analysis. This is always the nature of EQ components.
7. Spiritual disciplines are not a guaranty for spiritual growth; rather they open the opportunity for growth by creating space for God to allow something good to happen in transforming our lives.
8. Spiritual Disciplines are a part of an integrated and balanced life for every disciple. The following "Heart-Cross" diagram is an illustration of this:



### **II. Why the Disciplines are Important** – Excerpts from Authentic Discipleship article:

<http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/2-spiritual-formation/Spiritual%20Disciplines/SF%201.5%20Prayer%20Practicum%203%20-%20Developing%20Spiritual%20Vitality.pdf>

Why do some have a deep passion for God, while others don't? If you had the choice to engage God in a more Spiritually vital way, what would you be willing to undertake? Another way to look at this is asking "what can I do to make myself a more receptive heart for God to express His love into and through to others?"

1. **Modern Faith in practice has become more transactional rather than transcendent. Modern sensibilities tend to discount prayer and the disciplines as "wasting time" because there are no immediate and quantifiable objective result to show for the exercise... no "deliverables." We have reduced faith to a process of doing this or that, rather than expressly pressing into God with deliberate relational intent. We often look to God as a means to an end... for obtaining peace, happiness or prosperity and thinking that this is the proper objective of discipleship; rather than seeing intimacy with God as an end in itself. I would like to propose that our anemic faith is largely due to our lack of engagement with God. Elements of the Spiritual Life include:**

- a. **Experiences of presence, wonder and intimacy with God which occur in private engagement such as our prayer life, contemplation and meditation. We need to make room for the intentional development and perception of God... both individually and corporately.**
- b. **Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias says that "the human heart desires wonder and magic." He says that "technology is what we now use to supplant our desire for awe and wonder." He says that what "the human heart is really longing to do is to worship God, to stand in awe of a God we don't [completely] understand and we can't explain."**
- c. **Christian author Donald Miller says this differently in his book Blue Like Jazz, he says... "We worship a Being our life experience does not give us tools with which to understand. If we could, God would not inspire awe. You cannot be a Christian without being a mystic. The little we do understand [of God] that grain of sand our minds are capable of grasping, those ideas such as God is Good, God Feels, God Loves, God Knows all, [these things and many others] are enough to keep our hearts dwelling on His Majesty and otherness forever."**
- d. **What both Zacharias and Miller are referring to is a desire for a "transcendent mystical experience." In such experiences, our mind and heart is caught up in the awe and wonder of God. The Bible is filled with stories of how God entered redemptive history on behalf of His people. These stories keep fresh the awesome nature of God. Personal mystical experiences serve to support and intensify our understanding of Scripture and strengthen of our faith. Such faith develops from objective and experiential encounters with the Living God, rather than academics alone found in a book study.**
- e. **Ravi Zacharias argues that it is a reasonable desire to press into the Supernatural and experience**

awe and wonder with God. He says we as Christian leaders need to promote awe and wonder rather than settling for the emptiness of ritual with its minimal spiritual significance. One of the great failures of the modern church movement is that we have intellectualized God, mechanized knowledge and worship, and reduced salvation and our hope for eternity to a transaction to avoid hell rather than to know and enjoy God forever. We desperately need an infusion of awe and transcendent wonder in discipleship and in the Church.

- f. George Barna commented in his book Growing True Disciples, that “Almost every church in our country has some type of discipleship program or set of activities, but stunningly few churches are a church of disciples.” With Jesus’ Great Commission” ringing in our ears, “Go and make disciples of the nations,” Barna says we settle instead for sound-bites, for making people feel better about themselves, and helping them so their life works better. True discipleship raises up people who reflect Jesus’ life and priorities in their everyday world. That is what being salt and light is all about... being committed and engaged in Jesus’ missional commands.
- g. So... the real question before us is why don’t we engage God more frequently and seek out times of intimacy and transcendent Spiritual life?

**2. As we ponder this, let’s consider the story of the “Tree and it’s Fruit from Matthew 7:15-23... after the prolonged teaching of “The Sermon on the Mount” Jesus says this:**

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

**Please note that these people who were excluded thought they had met Jesus’ requirements for entering the Kingdom of God. They “believed” and performed “works”... and missed the mark. It begs some questions:**

- a. Is it possible to do things for God and not really know Him or be committed to Him? Yes.
- b. Is it possible to know about God and do things in His name, but not love Him? Yes.
- c. Is it possible to love God and not know Him? No.
- d. Is it possible to personally experience God, or faithfully serve Him without loving Him? No.
- e. If you love God as a disciple of Jesus, you are motivated by the Spirit to live out 2 things:
  - i. The Great Commandment – to love God and others
  - ii. The Great Commission – the Go of evangelism and the teaching of discipleship.

### III. How to Understand the Inner Spiritual Life –

1. Scripture teaches us that God wants to be engaged, known, and experienced; and knowing that Jesus has promised to be with us always and He has provided the Spirit which indwells us and leads us to perfect us [which He promises in Philippians 1:6]. So how then do we cooperate with the Spirit to know God more intimately and become increasingly a better reflection of Jesus?

I believe that the passage of Philippians 2:12-13, speaks into this desire. Remember that in his letter to the Ephesians, Paul is encouraging this Church that was doing so well in their growth as disciples to press on in their Spiritual Life.

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not just in my presence only, but now even more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.

Based upon our understanding that Paul was delighted with the Spiritual growth and character of the Philippian church, we can consider this passage as a “Spiritual Vitality Summary Statement”:

$$SV \approx ((O+OW) \times (WI+WGP)) \times (A+W)^\infty$$

- a. SPIRITUAL VITALITY (SV) is approximately equal to my obedience (O) resulting with my intentional work which is the outward working of my faith (OW).
- b. God works in me (WI) to continue the Spiritual Transformation process He began and sustains it in accordance with His Will and Good Pleasure (WGP).
- c. Note that the first half of this summation is our response, the second half is God’s promise.
- d. The text says “Fear & Trembling” but a better translation is “Awe & Wonder” (A+W); which flows out of my close personal experience of God’s Greatness.
- e. As a result of this, the experiences of “awe and wonder” are the transformational driver of the summation. Because the greater God is in your life and experience, the greater the multiplier in the spiritual vitality summation... thus there is no limit on what God can do in and through us, and so I give awe and wonder the power of infinity.
- f. The concept I believe Paul is encouraging here, is of a transcendent experiential relationship with God.
  - i. This involves the deliberate laying down of my right to rule my life and submitting to God’s rule. To make Jesus “Lord” is an act of love and obedience, and is the heart of Christian discipleship.
  - ii. The focus here is not conforming to the world’s standard, but instead to be transformed in the renewing of my mind and heart to God’s standard, which comes as a result of deliberately living in the supernatural with God.
- g. The development of a transcendent experiential relationship with God comes from pressing into God determinately. The Spirit living within longs to carry us as perfected beings into God’s Presence, and my work is one of obedience and cooperation with what He is doing.
- h. Bible-Box Illustration – most people discover the person and nature of God in Scripture, then promptly place God in a box of their own making. This box represents the boundaries they have

## LD – 6.5 – On Developing a Spirit Driven Life

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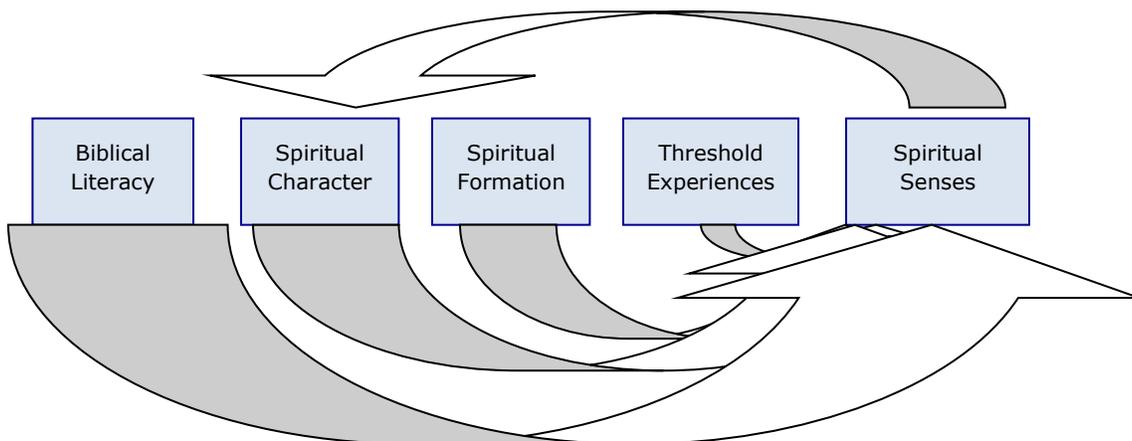
constructed to make God fit in to the reality they are most comfortable with. Some boxes are bigger than others, but they still limit God as to what His claim may be on me personally, and what He'll do in the world in general. The examples of broken humanity in the Presence of God whether it was Isaiah 6:1-8; or Ezekiel 1:28-2:2; Daniel 8:15-18, 10:7-12; Matthew 17:1-7; or Revelation 1:9-17 is pretty uniform... an overwhelming experience of Awe and Wonder. Pressing into God opens our hearts and minds to awe and wonder and the greatness of God.

2. There are 5 Spiritual Perceptions through which we engage and process the Spirit or non-material world. [For more on this topic see the entire article link below]

<http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/2-spiritual-formation/Spiritual%20Maturity/SF%202.2.1%20-%20Spiritual%20Journey%20Discovery.pdf>

Though the Fall has truncated the natural perceptions of the Spirit realm so that now we “see a poor reflection as in a darkened mirror, but in eternity we shall see clearly face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Cor 13:12). Yet even in our Fallen state, something still remains of our Spiritual receptors, and God has given us the Spirit to allow us to interact with Him.

- a. Our Christian Spiritual identity is formed in Christ through the Spirit, and it includes the places in the ‘innerman’ where the Spirit shapes our identity in Christ as well as by the choices we make.
- b. These Spiritual Perceptions are the result of the inner transformation of the Spirit – where our spiritual character is fed by: 1) quantitative responses [“works” such as moral obedience] as well as 2) qualitative transformation [“Christian character” such as love and desire to serve God].
- c. The following diagram reveals the dynamic of the perceptions:



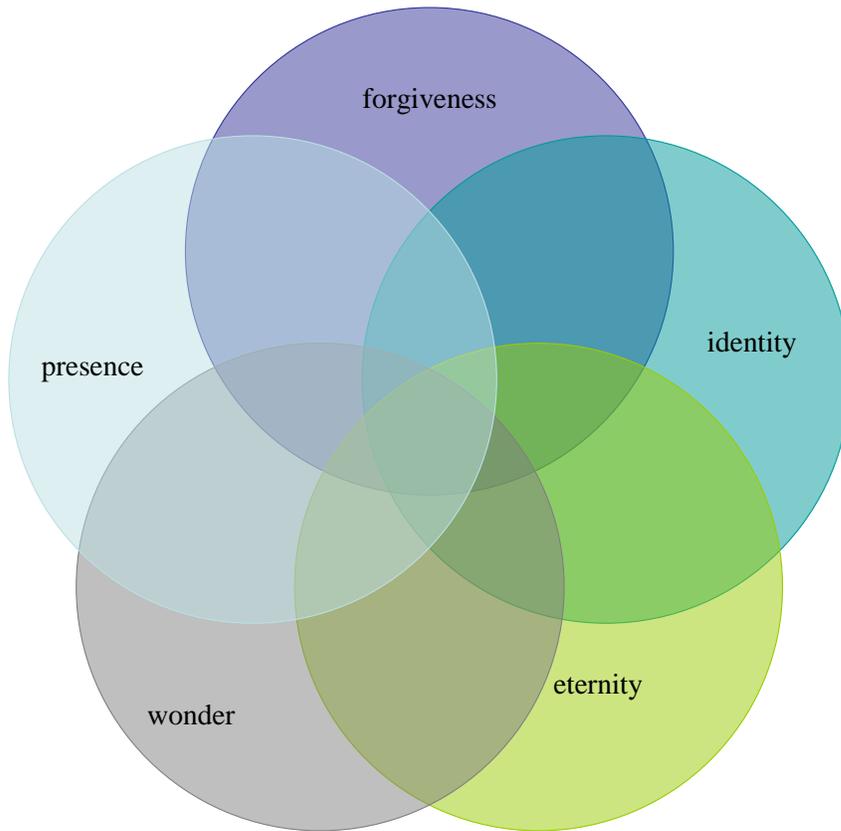
- i. **Biblical Literacy** – this involves both the cognitive process of study and application of God’s Word, as well as the resultant process where the Scripture masters the disciple and a greater desire for knowing and loving God is ignited under the guidance of the Spirit. Scripture provides the Spiritual medium where conviction, remorse, repentance, restoration, and reconciliation occur, and where personal transformation results.
- ii. **Spiritual Character** – this involves Jesus’ nature being formed within the disciple where

- we increasingly reflect our Lord Jesus [Imago Christi]. We remain uniquely individual as God's creation [Imago Dei] where our own personality remains. We also become increasingly reflective of Jesus' nature and character in the "inner-man" as Paul calls it.
- iii. **Spiritual Formation** – this involves a wide variety of spiritual formation practices where we consciously engage God, where we purposefully restrain our own natural impulses, and intentionally cooperate with the Spirit who delights in performing inner-transformation.
  - iv. **Threshold Experiences** – are those experiences where we recognize God has intervened in our life and we are changed by the experience. Some of these will be major trajectory changes where our life purposefully heads off in another direction at the intervention of the Spirit. However, most often we will experience nudges and sometimes pushes where God redirects and refocuses us.
- d. **Spiritual Senses** – are roughly equivalent to the five senses through which we interpret the material world. These five senses that comprise the "Spiritual sense palate" which are the natural outworking of God's Spirit. These senses comprise who we are in the inner-person, and they are what shapes our worship and ministry. The five senses comprise:
- i. **A Sense of Forgiveness** – this derives from our understanding of our own need and the magnitude of the forgiveness we've been provided in Christ Jesus [see Spiritual Formation/Spiritual Disciplines 1.13 - Forgiveness Study and Practicum].
    - 1. 2 Pet 1:9; 1 Tim 1:15-16; 1 Cor 1:8-10; Eph 2:8-10
    - 2. A growing awareness of my having been forgiven and the sufficiency of Grace.
    - 3. It is knowing how broken and fallen I really am... and understanding the Spiritual life God provided through His grace and mercy.
  - ii. **A Sense of Identity** – this derives from how we see our self as a child of God and disciple of Jesus... this is true "Christocentric Faith" or in other words it is true Christianity not "churchianity":
    - 1. 1 John 3:1; 1 Pet 2:5-11
    - 2. This is understanding who we really are in Christ.
    - 3. It is knowing how God sees us as the son/daughter He loves, not how we see ourselves. This involves our moving from the "sinner saved by grace" of the new born experience, to the "saint who sometimes sins" of spiritual maturity.
  - iii. **A Sense of Eternity** – this derives from knowing there is more to life than the obvious here and now, and that our true home is with God in eternity... it is Kingdom of God mindedness, rather than worldly mindedness:
    - 1. 2 Cor 4:16-18; Rom 8:18-26; 2 Kings 6:15-17; Col 3:1-4; 1 Pet 3:10-12
    - 2. A growing awareness that something bigger is going on that I am caught up into and am made a part of. It is finding our role in the advancement of the Kingdom of God and being a willing participant with the Spirit.

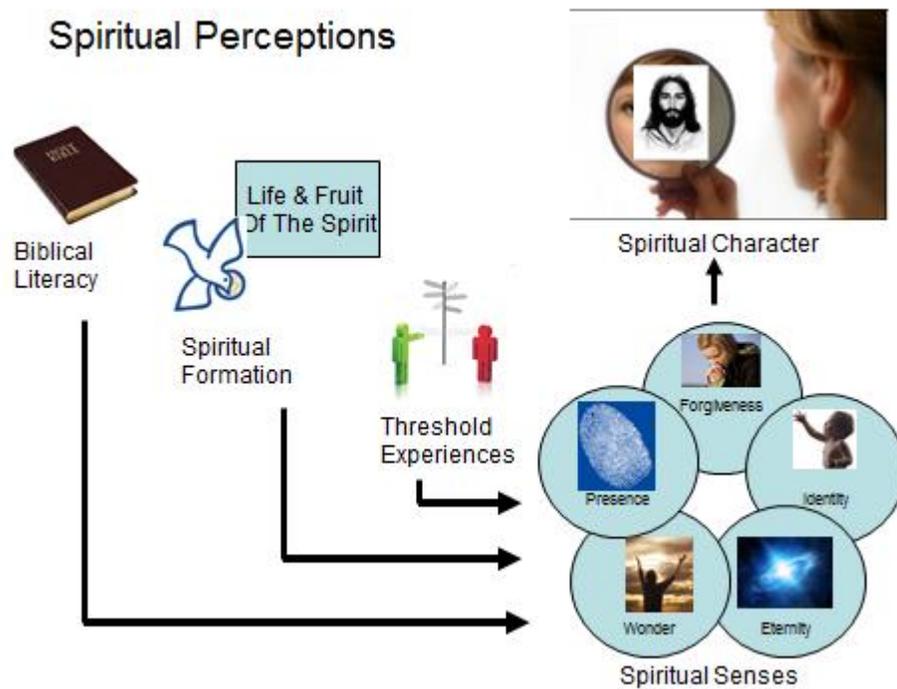
3. It is seeing the spiritual reality behind the more obvious physical event.
- iv. **A Sense of Wonder** – this derives from being caught up in the cosmic wonder of the Kingdom of God... it is getting caught up and pressing into the “supernatural world” rather than remaining content in the “natural world.” It is the delight of understanding God’s invitation to travel with Him “further up and further in” as C.S. Lewis wrote in the conclusion of his Chronicles of Narnia series where “Aslan” invited his faithful friends to explore His Kingdom with Him.
  1. Gal 4:15; Phil 2:12-15, 4:4-7; 1 Pet 1:8-12; Eph 1:18-19; Job 42:1-6
  2. Recognizing that God is more wondrous and amazing and He is beyond all explanation.
  3. His revelation is such a small part of all He is... but it is enough to capture our mind/heart and enchantment.
- v. **A Sense of Presence** – this derives from recognizing God’s finger prints through all aspects of our life... of being and becoming more aware that God is everywhere and in everything and the delight of encountering Him in the simple walk of life:
  1. 1 Chron 12:32a; Phil 1:21-24; 1 Pet 4:7-11
  2. It is the spiritual equivalent of GPS – it is understanding the role God has given me to play in this body of believers.
  3. Eph 4:3-7 – being renewed and transformed continually.
- e. I recently had eye surgery. I have cataracts and my vision is sorely diminished. I see things as rather dull and cloudy, and out of focus. Then I had surgery in one eye in which I now have 20/20 vision, and the clarity and brilliance of color is amazing. The stark difference in alternatively closing one eye and seeing as through a “darkened mirror” using Paul’s metaphor in 1 Corinthians 13:12. The startling truth is that the reality I perceived has not changed... it is the same. The difference is in my ability to perceive it.
- f. These senses are distinct but interrelated - the diagram below provides a visual depiction of this dynamic:
  - i. Spiritual senses are the transformational component that drives spiritual formation and the development of spiritual character which consequently loops back and forms the other four perceptions... the more objective elements.
  - ii. If the spiritual senses do not develop in spiritual formation and spiritual character, you are unfortunately left with legalism – both moral and ethical... where no transformation occurs. Eph 4:22-24 [23 is key] and Gal 3 & 5 – speak to the freedom we enjoy in the Grace of Christ.
  - iii. The Perceptions of Biblical literacy, spiritual formation, and threshold experiences all feed into and shape our spiritual senses... which then feeds back and shapes our spiritual character. Spiritual Character is where the fruit of the Spirit takes shape as our nature and character are increasingly conformed into that of Jesus’.

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g. The following diagram is a pictorial representation of the 5 senses:



h. A Pictorial Representation of the interaction of the Spiritual Perceptions:



## LD – 6.5 – On Developing a Spirit Driven Life

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- i. All five spiritual perceptions have to do with developing spiritual maturity:
  - i. The result of spiritual maturity is a peaceful, joyful person - the first test is our awareness of how we act among others especially non-believers. Which people want to be with us? What do they sense about us? Is there a wholesome/convicting aspect of our presence where people see something different in us? Is our presence balanced with Grace, Hope, Love, and Joy? These gifts of the indwelling Spirit need to be explored, appropriated, and implemented.
  - ii. A spiritually mature person often tends to be a polarizing factor:
    1. On one hand they are attractational... people see the fruit of a spiritually mature life and are both attracted to it and challenged by it as positive Godly characteristics are formed and displayed. The transformational life of God radiates out and engages others.
    2. On the other hand they are convicting... those who refuse to submit to God will find these spiritually mature people an irritant. The transformational life of God is often the brunt and front-line of spiritual warfare.
  - iii. Ministry based on knowledge alone has a shelf life of 3-5 years... by then you have run the course of dispensing information. Information download is not transformational... because it is not relational or spiritual.

3. PRAYER PRACTICUM: Exercise on Prayerful Contemplation/Meditation on Scripture – read the account of Jesus and the Woman at the Well in John 4:1-26 2 or 3 times. Then focus in particular on 4:23-24... press into God and ask/expect Him to reveal His heart to you in this passage.

Spirit and Truth are key for every Christian... we need both ( see the Heart-Cross Diagram on page 2 of this article. Contemplate in expectation before God “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:23-24)

- a. Most people try to go with knowledge and skills to form spiritual maturity... these bypass change in the innerman that births spiritual character.
- b. Mind and heart need to be fused... when the mind is strong with Scripture and the heart is relationally soft with the work of the Spirit, the result is transformational life.
- c. Mere knowledge is not enough - “You believe that God is one. You do well; [but even] the demons also believe, and shudder.” (James 2:19)
- d. Personal relationship with God is born through individual brokenness and humility resulting in my desperate need of Grace.
- e. Most people don’t know how desperate they really are. You hear people say all the time - “but I’m a good person.” Our unredeemed “goodness” is but “filthy rags” to God... Isaiah 64:6 – “All

## LD – 6.5 – On Developing a Spirit Driven Life

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of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.”

- f. **This is not demeaning humanity, rather it is refocusing who we are in Christ and reclaiming the high calling and nature of what it is to be made in the image of God [Imago Dei] and reflecting the nature of Jesus in our redeemed hearts and lives [Imago Christi].**

**As you meditate and reflect on this passage be open for God’s subtle revelations... deliberately press into Him. Be open, what do you “Hear”... what do you “See”? Write down some thoughts and be prepared to share them with the group.**