

Discovering Anglicanism
Class 10 - How We Grow Part 1

What insights into Christian maturity does Anglicanism offer?

Three metaphors help to answer this question.

- The roots of a tree.
- Balancing, as if in the middle of a tug-of-war game.
- A journey along a winding path.

A Scripture verse which describes the path toward spiritual growth is:

Acts 2:42 - "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

Let's explore these ideas in more detail.

I. Spiritual Disciplines - a means not an end

A. Definition

Spiritual disciplines are things you do to cooperate with God.

They are not things you do to earn brownie-points with God, nor are they ways to twist God's arm, nor are they things you do that all-by-themselves can reshape your soul.

Spiritual disciplines are like watering a tree. Yes, a human can pour water on the ground near a tree. However, God takes that water and is the actual power, the cause of growth. Can a human capture a bunch of molecules in his hand, and say some words, and out of nothing create even a blade of grass? No, but a human can do things that can help a blade of grass to grow. Spiritual disciplines do not cause growth, but they can help make the conditions right so that growth can happen.

B. The Role of the Holy Spirit

If you wanted to grow the muscles in your arm, you can't just look at your arm and say, "Grow!" Neither do results come from just sitting still and fervently wishing that your muscles will grow. Instead, you lift weights. You invest the discipline and repeat the exercises, and - given the proper conditions of nutrition and amount of weights used - you see results.

Spiritual disciplines are exercises that God uses to build spiritual muscle. They are exercises that touch your soul (don't worry much about the meanings of "soul" or "spirit" right now... just think of that part of you that isn't physical). They require God's Spirit to be the actual nutrition and weight-coach. Doing a bunch of religious things without the Holy Spirit's power and leading won't produce any good spiritual results.

C. Cooperation

You have the choice to cooperate with God, or not. Jesus said in John 5:19, “The Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing.” Learn what God wants, and then cooperate with Him. If God wants to show you His forgiveness, cooperate with Him. Don’t resist His gift. If someone offers you a birthday gift, you must accept it, and unwrap it, and learn all you can about it. Spiritual disciplines are ways we can position ourselves to receive from God, to encounter His presence and His gifts, to learn more and more about Him.

D. Transformation

It is through these encounters with God Himself that our souls are healed and transformed. God is the One who changes us. Spiritual disciplines help us encounter God. Spiritual disciplines in-and-of themselves do not produce change in us. God is the Transformer. He helps us “plug in” to His presence and power by leading us to do various spiritual disciplines in various ways. Different spiritual disciplines may be needed by different people to encounter God, so this is a creative art, not a mathematical science.

“2 days fasting + 5 verses memorized = spiritual growth.” FALSE.

“God’s leading + tailor-designed-spiritual-discipline + cooperation + encounter with God’s presence = spiritual growth.” TRUE

E. Examples

Some spiritual disciplines have such broad potential for bringing us into the presence of God, they are common and well known. Examples include studying Scripture, gathering in a group for worship, and praying for needs. Other spiritual disciplines are suited for more specific areas of growth. For example, if you are selfish, God may lead you to exercise your “generosity” muscle and give a thoughtful gift to someone once a week. If you are lazy, God may lead you to exercise your “stewardship of time” muscle by keeping a list of hours spent sleeping, watching TV, or working each day.

In every case, the key is a “debriefing with God” when you have a conversation with Him about the discipline. What did He want you to learn? What did you feel? What is He saying to you through the experiences? What hurt or pain in you is He getting-at through these activities? How is Jesus touching your heart and healing you and reshaping your soul through these encounters?

The list of spiritual disciplines is endless, because there are countless ways God can lead you to cooperate with Him on your road toward greater wholeness and spiritual maturity.

Next, we will take a closer look at four of the primary spiritual disciplines God often uses to draw us into a closer relationship with Himself.

II. Scripture - words and Word

A. Truth

God has given us His Word as a way for us to get to know Him better. Scripture - the written Word of God, reveals Jesus - the living Word of God.

B. Exercise

Look up these Scriptures, and write down what you learn about the Word of God.

John 1:1-5 Jesus is the Word, and the Word is _____

John 8:31-32 Scripture is the Word, and the Word is _____

Hebrews 4:12 The Word is _____

2 Timothy 3:16 The Word is _____

III. Community - Examples and Encouragement

A. Fellowship

God Himself is a Community, 3 Persons in 1 Trinity. He has made us in His own image, and He has given us a desire to live in community. Christianity is not a spectator sport nor a lone ranger venture. When you become a Christian, you become a member of Christ's Body on earth. You are a member of a community. The community is there to provide you with guides and encouragement and help of all kinds. And, you are part of a community and you share in offering those same things to others. You cannot remain healthy nor grow spiritually apart from fellowship with others in the Body of Christ.

B. Exercise

Look up these Scriptures, and write down what you learn about fellowship.

1 Cor 1:9 and 2 Cor 13:14 Our primary call to fellowship is with _____ and _____

1 Cor 1:10 We are also called to fellowship which is _____

Hebrews 10:23 We are called to hold on to _____ because _____

Hebrews 10:24 We are also called to consider _____

Hebrews 10:25 We are warned not to _____

IV. Worship - Externals and Encounters

A. Reverence

God is our Creator and Redeemer. We exist because He made us to have fellowship first of all with Himself. The primary definition of “human” is therefore “worshiper.” God calls us to worship Him through His Son Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Various liturgies and forms of music have as their first purpose to glorify God. Worship is unto God, for God, and Scripture gives us patterns for how God wants to be worshiped. Worship is not primarily about human experience.

However, God in His mercy often chooses to meet His people with blessings of various kinds in the context of worship. In that sense, worship can also be a spiritual discipline. External forms of worship can position us and help us encounter the powerful presence of God.

B. Exercise

Look up these Scriptures, and write down what you learn about worship.

John 4:23-24 What do you think “worship in spirit and truth” means? _____

Exodus 20:24 What parts of this verse do you think only applied to a certain time and place? _____

What parts of this verse do you think communicate a principle that applies always and everywhere? _____

Revelation 5:8-14 Don’t worry right now about what all the different symbols mean, but make a list of all the different “creatures” who offer God worship in various forms in these verses. _____

Read verses 9, 10, 12, and 14 again, this time out loud, and offer them as a prayer of worship to the Lord.

V. Prayer - Lists and Listening

A. Trust

God is alive and active and interested in everything about you. No request is too big or too small for Him. He is infinite, Omniscient, Omnipotent, Omnipresent, All-Loving, Perfect Wisdom, eternal, unchanging. There is one thing God cannot be, and that is Not-God. In other words, it is not in God’s nature to be limited, flawed, or unloving. He cannot be other than Who He Is. Therefore, He cannot be too busy to hear your prayers. He cannot be disinterested. God always wants to hear everything you want to

say to Him - formally, informally, liturgically, extemporaneously, privately, corporately, with raw emotion, or with simple devotional discipline. We can trust that when we speak, God listens, to all of our lists of every kind. God is the Perfect Listener. And, we can trust that He has the power to answer, in His time, according to His wisdom.

The greater challenge for us in prayer is doing the LISTENING. While it is important to learn to speak (in our hearts as well as aloud) prayer, it is perhaps even more important to learn how to LISTEN in prayer. God is always speaking. And, when God speaks, He creates. God's Word is powerful. We miss much when we do not slow down long enough to encounter God's voice in prayer. Prayer is not just a discipline or an activity of talking to God. A life of prayer is one that learns to constantly be abiding in God's presence, and to delight in glorifying Him ("glorifying Him" means reflecting His image, having His nature manifest through us). Prayer is relational and powerful. Prayer is encountering God in thought, word, and deed through the Spirit of Christ.

B. Exercise

Look up these Scriptures, and write down what you learn about prayer.

Even though we may not see the impact with our own eyes, Scripture teaches that prayer has power. Read these verses and write a few notes to re-read when you *feel* (remember, our feelings do not always speak the truth, but Scripture does) that your prayers are not powerful. 2 Cor. 1:11; Phil. 1:19; James 5:16; Rev. 5:8.

Read 1 Thess. 5:17; Psalm 5:3; 42:8 Biblical examples of prayer happen at what times?

Lamentations 3:8 At the beginning of this prayer, does the person feel like God is listening? _____

Lam 3:1-20 The verses around the one you just read are an example of pouring-out all your feelings and frustrations to God in prayer. He can take it. Read the verses again and think of a time when you felt the same way. What was going on in your life then? _____

Lam 3:21-26 The difference between "complaining" and "lamenting" is returning to a confession of faith after all the ranting-and-raving. It is healthy to vent our emotions to God in prayer, and the biblical way of doing so is ultimately to remember the Salvation and Redemption of Jesus Christ, and other testimonies of God's power in the past. This concludes the prayer by pointing up to God's faithfulness rather than remaining fixated on our problems.

Yellow-highlight, or circle, or underline Lam 3:21-26. Write somewhere in the front of the back of your Bible, "How to Lament - Lam 3:8, 21-26." Yes, it is ok to write in your Bible. Did you write these notes? _____

When the God of Scripture speaks, He will always say things that agree with Scripture. He will not contradict Himself. So, one way you can know that you're hearing God's voice is to make sure what you hear agrees with the Bible. Also, even if God corrects, disciplines, or challenges you, His Word will always bring peace and a sense of His love. Words that bring confusion, condemnation, or despair are not from the Lord. There are a few things you can do to help "tune in" to the voice of the Lord. For example, meditate on a Scripture verse that has encouraged you lately, or paint a picture in your mind of a biblical scene such as the Shepherd's peaceful field of Psalm 23, or the powerful picture of the Cross. Take a moment now and quietly listen for the Lord's voice. Write some notes.

Make it practical

This class has described Acts 2:42 and how we each can grow in our individual relationship with God. We've discussed spiritual disciplines, Scripture, Community, Worship, and Prayer. Take a few moments now and listen to hear if the Lord would like to speak to you about how to cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit. Review this section with an "ear open" to Him. Does He have a tailor-made "exercise" for you?

For Further Reading

Another way to cooperate with the Lord is to read further about a topic that was of special interest in this Class. Email Instructor@DiscoveringAnglicanism.org and ask for reading suggestions. Or, go to <http://www.discoveringanglicanism.org/catalog.php> and consider any of Robert Webber's *Ancient-Future* books in the widget list.

Transition

The next class topic in the Discovering Anglicanism course is 11- How We Grow Part 2. We will discuss how growth happens not just in individuals, but in groups and churches.

Teaser

These few pages have only scratched the surface of the topic of how to press-on toward spiritual maturity and wholeness. Check our website in the future for an entire course about "Transformers." We won't talk about the popular videos, but we will explore ways to help you be transformed more and more into the image of Christ.

When you have finished this Class, go to

<http://www.discoveringanglicanism.org/catechism.html>

Log-in to your Catechism Class Page to submit a Class Completion Form.