

God doesn't just zap us into Maturity!

# The Jesus Style of Spiritual Discipline

**M**odus operandi is Latin for "method of operation". So does God have a Modus Operandi? The answer is Yes! God's M.O. is to use "means" to accomplish his will. A "means" is an instrument or a method used to



*Isaiah 43:19 Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*

accomplish something. God uses means to bring people into his family, and then

he uses means to help us become fully-devoted followers. There is a divine-human cooperation which lies behind Christian growth and transformation. It requires intention, devotion, and pursuit. God doesn't just zap us into maturity. He works in us...and we practice, to grow in our faith. Now... God uses means, but his grace is the ultimate source and cause of our growth. The Word of God tells us that grace is a teacher! Just as a coin has two sides, so does God's grace. Titus 2:11-14 reveals these two sides of grace: what it positively aims to do, and what it does in the face of failure—it's remedial side. One side brings instruction and the other side brings love. My hunch is that many of you are just like me—my sinful heart works to make me forget the positive goals of grace and to think only of God's gracious remedy for my sin.

## Jesus Working in Us

"Spiritual Growth without Intention becomes nothing more than religiosity. Any form of Godliness that lacks devotion to practice and pursuit will perpetuate one's spiritual demise and downfall. It is unavoidable!" ~ JRF

Growth and life-change is first internal and supernatural, and then it becomes external. We are only able to work out our salvation because God is at work within. God's internal and supernatural work in us is the motive and the resource for external change. Mere external deeds without the inward working of God are hypocritical and cannot satisfy him. The means which God has promised to use to grow you up spiritually aren't anything new or sexy (see 2 Kings 5:1-14). There's no "secret" that only a few experts know. What I'm going to tell you are the time-tested means God has established for our growth. If you will do them, you will change. If you turn these down because they sound basic or boring, there is nothing else God has promised to use. The "means" God uses are typically referred to as the "spiritual disciplines"—they simply are the things we see people in the Bible doing, and as a result, growing. We live in an undisciplined age. Spiritual disciplines are either unknown or criticized as legalistic. But these are

spiritual disciplines—ie, they are grace- filled disciplines. They develop faith which has rugged strength and character.

## Spiritual Disciplines are Grace Filled Disciplines.

Discipline without direction is mere drudgery. Hebrews 12:11 shows us the good thing God does as we discipline ourselves for godliness (1 Timothy 4:7). Twenty years ago serious believers challenged themselves to ask, “What would Jesus do?” in the each situation they found themselves in. It’s a noble ideal—but with a serious flaw. Let me illustrate. Suppose it’s the final seconds of the championship game, and the score is tied. I get the ball with two seconds left. What’s wrong with me asking, “What would Michael Jordan do?”. Simply knowing what Michael Jordan would do doesn’t mean that I’m capable of it! Michael Jordan was able to do what he did because of the overall lifestyle he chose for himself. We will be able to do more of what Jesus did when we choose to follow the lifestyle he followed, and thus become more the type of person he was.

Jesus’ lifestyle was one of spiritual discipline. He was a life-long student of the Word. He would often slip away to the wilderness and pray. Jesus fasted. Solitude—time away from the crowd, communing with his Father—was a source of strength for Jesus. But Jesus wasn’t a loner—his times of solitude with the Father equipped him for a life in community with others. (no mere socializing; it was spiritual fellowship. Jesus, obviously, had a life-style of worship—both private and corporate. If we want to be able to do what Jesus did, we’ll have to adopt the disciplined lifestyle that Jesus lived. Sadly, many of us devote hundreds of hours to lowering our golf scores or raising our career competency, but we wilt when we find that the spiritual disciplines don’t come easy. Paradoxically, discipline is the path to freedom. Jesus was the most disciplined man who ever lived; his self-mastery produced the ability to love God and others fully, without limit or reluctance. Disciplined cooperation with God, employing the means his Word authorizes, is the path to growth and freedom for us. If you were to consider the amount of time you devote to the various means that God has given us to grow

and change—the spiritual disciplines—how much time do you actually devote to each?

Remember, these are the means God has given us so that we can cooperate with him, and thereby grow. Spiritual growth is a lot like farming. If God doesn't send the rain, then the farmer cannot eat. But if the farmer does not work his fields, he will not eat. God has already done his part: he has saved us and given us his Holy Spirit to reside within. He has given us his Word to bring light and truth to our darkened minds. He has made us into a family, so we are not alone. He has given us the privilege of access to him through prayer. God has done his part, so growth is possible. But is it happening in your life? If not—or if it is sporadic—then the ball is in your court.