

## Appendix 2:

Anglican Articles of Religion give us fundamentals to consider

### 2. The Word, or Son of God, who became truly human

The Son, who is the Word of the Father, was begotten from eternity of the Father, and is the true and eternal God, of one substance with the Father. He took humanity's nature in the womb of the blessed virgin Mary, of her substance, in such a way that two whole and perfect natures, the Godhead and humanity, were joined together in one person, never to be divided. Of these two natures is the one Christ, truly God and truly human. He truly suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried, to reconcile his Father to us and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt but also for all actual sins of men and women.

### 6. The Sufficiency of the Scriptures for salvation

Holy Scripture contains all things necessary for salvation. So whatever is not read in Scripture nor can be proved from Scripture cannot be demanded from any person to be believed as an article of the faith. Nor is any such thing to be thought necessary or required for salvation. By Holy Scripture is meant those canonical books of the Old and New Testaments whose authority has never been doubted within the church. Listing of 66 canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, along with a listing of other books which the church reads for example of life and instruction of behaviour but not for establishing of any doctrine.

## Appendix 3:

An example of spiritual priorities in the 18th Century:

The Sunday tradition has held fast for centuries as a "space to be set aside". For example, it is stressed in writings of Susanna Wesley (1669-1742), mother of John and Charles Wesley

*This is the Day that the Lord hath made; I will rejoice and be glad therein Glory be to Thee, Eternal Father of spirits, for so kindly and mercifully indulging one Day in seven to the souls Thou hast made. Wherein it is their duty as well as happiness, to retire from the business and hurry of a tumultuous and vexatious world, and are permitted to enjoy a more immediate and uninterrupted attendance on Divine Majesty. Oh Blessed Indulgence! Oh most Happy Day!*

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# Practical Christian Spirituality



## Spiritual Disciplines Are Never Out Of Date

In Christian history there is a wealth of examples of those who modelled a wholesome spirituality. The notion of "disciplines" suggests that one might pursue a life that is diligent and devoted. It suggests a life of rhythm and balance, in tune with God, in step with the Spirit and in harmony with people and the whole of creation. For Anglicans, Archbishop Cranmer, at the time of the Reformation in England, left us the legacy of a framework for Christian spirituality. The Anglican prayer book sets out a life of worship together. The Church Year and lectionary provides a framework for communities to consider the breadth of biblical teaching and to reflect on the examples of our ancestors of faith (see the Appendix 1 with an explanation of the Church Year).

A more original framework for corporate Christian disciplines can be found:

- In the early church Sunday became the day to celebrate the Resurrection and took the place of the Sabbath as the day of physical rest and spiritual refreshment. Traditionally this is the day the whole church gathers to celebrate the resurrection and grow together in Christ. The Sabbath was a day to identify oneself as a covenant person with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel. Sunday has for Christians become the day to identify with the New Covenant people of God.
- Wednesday and Friday were set aside in early Christian communities for fasting. Wednesday was aligned with the day Christ was betrayed and Friday, the day Christ was crucified.
- (See Appendix 3 for an 18th Century example also)

What about spiritual disciplines and spirituality today? Life in Australian society shows little regard for a classically Christian pattern to living; life is dominated by a hectic devotion to the dollar. And yet the desire for "spirituality" is increasingly evident.



How can we endeavor to live a life of rhythm and balance in tune with God today in a post-Christendom context?

## Doing Spirituality Today

Alister McGrath in his book “Beyond the Quiet Time” makes the point that his book is not about the history of spirituality; nor is it about the theory of spirituality. Rather, it is about *doing* spirituality:

Discovering the full richness of our faith

Developing ways of keeping our faith alive and growing

His book encourages churches, particularly those in the Evangelical tradition, to take a fresh view of a disciplined framework for our spiritual lives. He makes the point that being a Christian can become like the proverbial old chair, a familiar and comfortable practice most of the time, but getting a bit weary and worn needing restoration from time to time. Our spiritual life is supposed to be a dynamic experience of a relationship with the living God! To be so, we need to explore what it is that God has instructed and provided to nourish and enrich our spirituality.

## “Spirituality”

Before going on, we should acknowledge that not all spirituality is Christian. For example, the Buddhist practice of meditation is considered in our contemporary language as a spiritual discipline, but it is ostensibly a practice of emptying one’s mind of all its thoughts. This stands in direct contrast to the idea of meditation described in the Bible where one is encouraged to focus on God’s precepts and on Jesus Christ. Christian spirituality focuses on the deepening of faith and experience of our relationship with the risen and exalted Lord Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In a Christian sense, spirituality focuses on the ‘spiritual person’ (*pneumatikos anthropos*) as coined in 1 Cor. 2:14-15. This is the person who has faith in the risen Jesus and is in the process of being renewed by the Holy Spirit. For our purposes the disciplines will include a wide range of activities that will help a person to grow in holiness; in the likeness of Christ, in faithfulness to God and in effectiveness in mission.



Christian spirituality will have 2 essential platforms:

**The person and work of Jesus:** his love and ministry, his suffering and death for sins, his resurrection and call to mission, and..

**The authority of Scripture.** Many writings and pictures and songs and other things will have benefit in encouraging our growth, however they be given their right place to serve to help us understand, appreciate and respond faithfully God’s revelation to us in the canon of Holy Scripture.

## Appendix 1:

Church Year of Western Christianity– a framework for spirituality

### 1. Advent

- marks the start of the church year, four weeks before Christmas
- adventus = “coming” or “arrival”
- intended to focus on the two “advents” of Jesus coming in humility as a human being at Christmas (the Incarnation)
- coming in glory as judge at the end of time
- traditions: “Advent Wreath” or “Advent Crown”

### 2. Christmas

- Celebrated December 25. An old, popular theory is that the date was chosen to substitute for a pagan winter festival; others wrote that Jesus was conceived (Annunciation) and suffered on the same date - March 25. December 25 is 9 months from March 25.
- Central theme: birth of Jesus, the Incarnation
- Service of Nine Carols and Lessons” originated at King’s College Cambridge

### 3. Lent

- begins on Ash Wednesday, 7 weeks before Easter
- In the Old Testament, ashes on the face / clothing was a sign of repentance and remorse (Esther 4:1, Jeremiah 6:26)
- duration based on Jesus’ 40 days of fasting in the wilderness after his baptism

### 4. Holy Week

- Palm Sunday: commemorates Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem
- Maundy Thursday, Holy Thursday: focuses on the Last Supper, final acts of Jesus before his death. “Maundy” = corruption of Latin word *mandatum* (command). In the middle ages, services began in Latin with verse (John 13:34): “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” = *mandatum novum do vobis...*
- Good Friday: Focuses on the crucifixion, suffering, and death of Jesus, and the costliness of human redemption. It is the most solemn day in the Christian year. The practice of observing the “Three hours of the Cross” began in the 18th C.
- Holy Saturday: often celebrated with a late evening vigil service with imagery of light and darkness.

### 5. Easter

- The most important festival of the church year which marks the Resurrection of Jesus and affirms the identity of Jesus as risen Savior and Lord- the Christian hope of a personal resurrection.

### 6. Pentecost (Whitsunday)

- Recalls the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and marks the beginning of the promised age of the Spirit who is present with all believers.

### 7. Sundays after Pentecost, or “Ordinary” time.

- Pentecost is then followed by the Sundays after Pentecost or Ordinary Time, which continue until the new church year begins in Advent.

### 8. The Daily Commemorations and Celebrations of the Lives of Saints

- A parallel to the calendar of seasons of the Church Year (Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost), is a secondary calendar of daily commemorations / celebrations of the lives of significant Christians down the ages.

Over the coming weeks we will explore some of these in detail and even practice them and share with one another how these disciplines may assist in deepening our faith in Christ.

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### Exercise:

The diagnostic chart associated with this series of sermons lists a number of spiritual disciplines relevant to today's Christian living (the list is by no means exhaustive). You can download the chart at [www.stmichaelsnc.org.au](http://www.stmichaelsnc.org.au)



Each person is encouraged to rate each of the listed disciplines listed between 1 and 5, with 5 indicating that is highly important to you and 1 indicating it as of least importance to your own spiritual growth and maturity at present.

Your group may like to list anonymous survey results at the end of the exercise with the total figures added from all surveys for each discipline. This will give us an insight into how narrowly or broadly your group is experienced in the classic disciplines at present and help you to encourage new experiences in the coming weeks.

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It is a fundamental diagnostic for Christians that those writers or teachers of spiritual things who point us away from or seek to diminish the authority of Scripture or the divinity of Christ are to be judged accordingly. Instead we should pursue a life of discipleship founded on these truths (e.g. 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Tim. 3:16,17; 2 Pet. 1:20,21; Matt. 22:29; Luke 24:27,32; John 5:39,40; 2 Pet. 3:15-18. See also Anglican Articles of Religion #2 & #6 in Appendix 2).

## An Honest Admission

In recent decades, Evangelical leaders have inadvertently and sadly narrowed the practice of Christian disciplines, often to the detriment of spiritual life for the people. The Bible Study group or "Quiet Time" has been the dominant "legitimate" discipline to employ (largely because these most obviously help one focus on Scripture and on Jesus). However, at least one senior Evangelical from North America has profoundly chastised his colleagues worldwide for often limiting the potential for spiritual growth by neglecting some of the classic spiritual disciplines of Christian history (See Dallas Willard in his book "The Spirit of the Disciplines" pages 15 to 17).

We must be prepared to admit the "Great Omission" of the Church (see Matt. 28:20); the Evangelical Church. It has been strong on evangelism and numerical growth, but too often in many times and places weak on leading people to maturity.

## A Biblical Encouragement

Our Bible reading from First Timothy gives an example of the Apostle Paul's assertion that spiritual disciplines and diligence in relation to them is vital:

1 Tim 4:7-8, 15,16

7 Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly.

8 For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

15 Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.

16 **Watch your life and doctrine closely.** Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Note that Paul was talking to his protégé Timothy, a young pastor at Ephesus. The disciplines he is encouraging Tim to take up are set in the context of his calling as a pastor/leader, but the principle is relevant to other Christians. It's not just what we know of God, but what we do to respond to that knowledge and grow in it that is important.

Timothy had been trained (brought up) in the truths (Gk. *logos*) of faith by his family (2 Tim. 3:15) and by Paul.



In verse 7b Paul calls him to “train” himself in godliness (Gk. *gymnaze* from which we get *gymnasium*). A literal translation of verse 8 is that physical training is “for a little”, in other words it is temporary.

But, by contrast, Paul insists that spiritual training lasts forever. Verse 15 stresses the need “Be diligent” to “practice, cultivate, take pains with” disciplines that make one grow in faith. The idea is to be making progress, and to be seen by others as an exemplary minister to be doing so. The Apostle Peter affirms this truth in some detail in 2 Peter 1:3-11:

3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.  
4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.  
5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;  
6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness;  
7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.  
8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
9 But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.  
10 Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall,  
11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (NIV)

## Why spirituality matters

Baptism and commitment to follow Christ is the beginning of the Christian life, but it is expected that our faith should develop and grow. In agricultural terms, the seed planted has the capacity to grow and flourish if nourished and tended caringly. The nourishing and tending of the spiritual life is what the disciplines are about. The Holy Spirit is at work in every Christian to bring about our sanctification; that is, the making of a holy servant of God.

We must be very clear that activities such as prayer, fasting, singing, service and the like are not exercises that have merit for salvation (Eph. 2:8-10).

It is clear in Scripture that Christ and his righteousness alone is sufficient to put us in the right with God (Rom. 3:19-24).



However, the classic Christian disciplines can:

- make us **more receptive** to God’s continuing grace for growth (1 Tim. 4:7,8; 2 Peter 1:3-11)
- though not important in and of themselves for salvation, **help us to be more dependent** on Christ alone (and to lead to a freedom to trust Him). As Richard Foster said in his revolutionary book “The Celebration of Discipline” back in the 1980’s: “The purpose of the disciplines is freedom. Our aim is freedom, not the discipline...” (pages 96, 97 present this case).
- help us to **recognize the necessity of following the example of Jesus’** whole of life, not merely use them as techniques
- give a **framework to assist us developing all the areas of growth** God desire’s for us (2 Peter 1:3-11; Gal. 5:22)
- help to **correct the activism** prevalent among Evangelical Christians at the expense of being adequately supported, equipped and guided by God.

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### Exercise:

- discuss the reasons Jesus often withdrew to a quiet place to pray?
- what are some different ways of reading and/or hearing Scripture?
- How do these complement each other?
- what role and purpose did fasting have in biblical times?
- How could it help us today?

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## Classifying the classical disciplines

To help us think about the classic Christian spiritual disciplines in a contemporary way I have chosen to classify them as:

1. Inward disciplines
  - Some of the classic inner disciplines are expressed today in the following: devotional bible reading; fasting; meditation; prayer; ‘quiet time’; retreats; solitude; and study.
2. Outward disciplines
  - Some of the classic outer disciplines are practiced today in the following: giving, evangelism, service, simplicity, and submission
3. Corporate disciplines
  - Some of the disciplines practiced in a corporate way include: attending church services; small group; confession; guidance; prayer; hearing the bible read aloud; conferences; praise in song; sharing of possessions/common purse and community.