One major idea from the texts that affirms my spiritual practices can be best seen in Howard Thurman's book, *Discipline of the Spirit.* In the chapter titled, "Commitment", Thurman emphasizes that true commitment requires and involves one's entire being- mind, body, and spirit and that "commitment is a self-conscious act of will be which he affirms is identification with what he is committed to."[1] Commitment is the foundation for all of the spiritual disciplines, without commitment- there is no next step. It requires our entire being and each component is required in order for us to successfully commit to anything.

As I have begun to re-engage in my seminary journey over the last year after taking several years off starting in December 2021, I believe that one aspect missing from my previous experience was surrender and commitment. I was good at saying I was committed, but my actions told a different story. The commitment that God is seeking from me is commitment in all forms and surrendering to God completely, not half-heartedly.

This commitment and surrender is not only an outward expression of salvation, but also "the gradual transformation" that occurs within.[1] I have noticed that during my second seminary journey, there is something different. In the words of Elphaba from the musical *Wicked,* "Something has changed within me. Something is not the same."[2] God has been helping me to be more open to spiritual disciplines and use them to further my relationship with God- through commitment and surrender.

This affirms my spiritual disciplines because I have started to commit myself to trying new spiritual practices. Previously, I would not give my all or submit completely to engaging in any spiritual practices- I would go through the motions and not fully engage or allow myself to partake in prayer, study, keeping the sabbath, etc. without having my mind also somewhere else

[1] Thurman, Howard. Discipline of the Spirit. Friends United, 2003.
[2] Menzel, Idina and Chenoweth, Kristen. Defying Gravity. [2003]

at the same time. Thurman emphasizes that this is not the way it should be and that we need to commit our entire selves- mind, body, and spirit to the work of Christ and spiritual disciplines.

One major idea that has challenged my spiritual practices can be found in Barbara Brown Taylor's Book *An Alter in the World* and most specifically, in her chapter titled, "The Practice of Saying No." In general, I have found that many of Barbara Brown Taylor's works have always been ones that challenge me to pause, think more, and strive to do better. In this chapter, she discusses the Sabbath and how in order to effectively complete true sabbath, you have to engage in what she classifies as the "spiritual discipline of saying no."[3] I have never been good at saying, "No" and I have never been good at practicing the Sabbath. I think that the basic premise that she is getting to is that you have to make time to practice spiritual disciplines. You cant be everything to everyone, you cant be everywhere for everyone.

I think what challenges me most about my spiritual disciplines in this writing is that Barbara Brown Taylor writes, "In the eyes of the true God, the porch is imperative- not every now and then but on a regular basis."[3] When she references the porch as imagery, I take this statement to go beyond Sabbath making, but also to all spiritual disciplines- we are called, maybe even required to engage in spiritual disciplines on a regular basis. Not just when it feels right, or we have time in our chaotic schedules. This is the part that challenges me.

I try to fit spiritual disciplines into a schedule like they are an appointment rather than as a time to become closer to the creator. It shouldn't be done out of desperation, but rather out of jubilation. We should be excited that we have the opportunity to become close with our creator. She closes out this chapter by saying, "When you live in God, your day begins when you lose yourself long enough for God to find you, and when God finds you, to lose yourself again in

[3] Barbara Brown Taylor, An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith, HarperOne, 2009.

praise."[4] This challenges me because I will have to continue to learn to be uncomfortable for awhile in order that I can be open to the fact that God is looking for me.

During this class, I have been drawn to practices where I am able to be in solitude. This has surprised me because I am an extroverted person and I enjoy being around people and engaging in conversations throughout the day. I am drawn to practices such as prayer, meditation, solitude, and Sabbath. Historically, these are practices that I have avoided. I think this is partly because when the hustle and bustle of the world is quieted and you are left to your own thoughts and feelings, it can be a scary place/situation for someone to be in if they haven't done it before.

In each of the readings by Bennett, Calhoun, and Foster for week 8 of class discuss some practical ways to participate in silence and solitude. For example, Foster talks about "Steps into Solitude" and outlines ways that we can find "little solitudes" during the mundane aspects of our lives.[5] Calhoun notes that we can engage in solitude by communicating with God while we run or by practicing other spiritual disciplines alone.[6] Some of those spiritual practices can include prayer, study, journaling, etc. I think what draws me most to these is that there are a multitude of ways to engage in silence and solitude.

One practice that is not currently beneficial to my practice of the Christian faith is the concept of journaling. I have never been very good at journaling. I have numerous clients and staff where I have encouraged them to engage in journaling and they have found it extremely beneficial. For myself, I find that while I can make time to do it, I don't find enjoyment in doing it. At the moment, I have a pretty good memory and I can recall how various events make me

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[4] Barbara Brown Taylor, An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith, HarperOne, 2009.
[5] Foster, Richard J. Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth. HarperCollins, 1978/1998.
[6] Calhoun, Adele. Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us. Intervarsity, 2005.

feel. I do not feel it is necessary to write things down at the moment. That may change in the future, but journaling to me hasn't been fun.

When I have practiced the discipline in the past, it felt more like a chore and I dreaded each night that I had to do it before I could go to sleep. I do recognize that journaling isn't only the writing down and recording of memories, but it is also a time to "reflect on our experiences in the presence of the Holy Spirit to learn from them."[7] I think that there are other ways in which we can reflect on our experiences and receive diving guidance from the Holy Spirit. I will yield that while open-ended journaling has not been something that I have found to be beneficial, I am willing to explore the concepts surrounding journals that provide a prompt and then I write a response to the prompt.

I feel that one of the most challenging spiritual disciplines has been most challenging to me is meditation. This is one that has frustrated me over the years- it is mentioned frequently throughout scripture- meditating on God's word, but I find that I am terrible at quieting my mind enough to focus. I am neuro-divergent so anything quiet is a challenge; however, meditation seems to be a next-level difficulty.

While I do find it to be extremely frustrating and difficult, I will not give up trying to meditate. Calhoun's thoughts on meditation give me pause and hope, "Meditation is not about emptying the mind so there is nothing there. Christian meditation opens us up to the mind of God and to his world and presence in the world"[7]

[7] Calhoun, Adele. Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us. Intervarsity, 2005.

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