

A few months ago, I got my first smart watch, a \$19.99 knockoff, that gently wakes you in the morning, measures your pulse oxygen, monitors your heart rate, and counts your steps. For me, this last feature has become the most consequential. I am obsessed with getting 10,000 steps each day.

I park further from the door; I load and unload the car with multiple trips; I choose the long way round; more than once, the dog and I have gone out one more time before bed to finish the job. I recognize that there are equal parts healthy and neurotic in this new found discipline, but I am learning some lessons by walking through life with measured steps.

Here are a few: a lot of our steps are not according to any plan we might have made. Life is movement, and even without trying, even when trying not to, the steps add up. Conversely, hitting 10,000 steps a day almost certainly requires intention and execution: a walk, jog, or hike probably needs to be on the calendar.

I've learned it's best to start early. 5000 steps before breakfast almost guarantees success.

My son figured out you can fake steps. With my watch on his wrists, he stood with feet planted on the kitchen floor and swung his arms for an extra 300 steps. My wife believes that the way I talk with my hands is padding my numbers.

I've learned that the steps are not the goal in and of themselves, but rather a means and indicator of the way in which we are moving through our days.

I've learned that each morning brings you back to zero.

For all the reasons above and more, I've come to consider 10,000 steps a spiritual discipline, a part of my rule of life, a practice that contains no magic, no power of its own, but does provide time, space, and focus to attend to the work God is doing around, in, and through me. As I walk, I try to bring to mind, in as many ways as possible, that I am walking with the Lord.

He goes before, beside, and behind me. That is always true, but it is not always true that I am attending to his presence. That's the discipline.

Here is Dallas Willard:

“What then is the specific role of the spiritual disciplines? Their role rests upon the nature of the embodied human self- they are to mold and shape it. And our part in our redemption is, through specific and appropriate activities, to “yield” the plastic substance of which we are made to the ways of that new life which is imparted to us by the “quickening spirit.”

In the weeks ahead, we will be walking through Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, as recorded in Matthew 5-7. As we attend to the words of scripture we will simultaneously attend to the spiritual disciplines, the embodied practices, that turn ideas into actions, hopes into habits, statements into steps. Word becomes flesh.

At the outset of this walk, we will look at the beginning and end, design, and context of this foundational teaching. These will be first steps, followed by many more.

Walking it out day-by-day,

Matthew

## Exploring the Sermon on the Mount

*Matthew 5:1-2, 7:28-29 [The beginning and end]*

*1Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.*

*2And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:*

*7: 28And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, 29for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.*

- Jesus came to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29)
- But He also came to teach as one who had authority.
- As we enter into the Sermon on the mount, how do we receive and respond to Jesus as our teacher?
- What makes Jesus' teaching unique?
- How does his teaching interact with our learning style?

*Matthew 5:2-11 [The structure]*

*3"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*4"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

*5"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*

*6"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

*7"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*

*8"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

*9"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

*10"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*11"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

- These opening verses (the beatitudes) provide an outline for the following chapters.
- They also outline three “ways” of spiritual formation.
- Verses 3-5 describe the way of *purgation*: “I need help.”
- Verses 6-8 describe the way of *Illumination*: “Show me how.”
- Verses 9-11 describe the way of *union*: “life is ‘great’ in the kingdom”
- Take some time to reflect on each section of scripture and each of the “ways.”
- What elements most compel your attention at the outset of the teaching?

## Exploring the Disciplines: Solitude

### *Matthew 4:1-11*

*1Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” 4But he answered, “It is written,*

*“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”*

*5Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple 6and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,*

*“He will command his angels concerning you,’ and*

*“On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.”*

*7Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”*

*8Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” 10Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written,*

*“You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”*

*11Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.*

- Jesus’s public ministry and foundational teaching is preceded by, and punctuated thereafter with times of solitude
- Solitude can be defined as leaving people to enter into time alone with God.
- From Willard (in, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*):  
 “Solitude frees us...the normal course of day-to-day interactions locks us into patterns of feeling, thought and action that are geared to a world

set against God. Nothing but solitude can allow the development of a freedom from the ingrained behaviors that hinder our integration into God's order.

- From Calhoun (in, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*):  
“Solitude is a formative place because it gives God’s spirit time and space to do deep work.”
- What might solitude look like for you (it will look different for each of us)?
- How can we encourage/hold one another accountable to “practice” solitude this week?
- How can we be praying for one another, knowing that we will each be entering into time alone with God.