

Ascetics

Abstaining from comforts to make more space for God.
Loving God in solitude & simplicity

I feel closest to God when...

I deny myself normal pleasures in order to pray.

To be spiritually renewed I need to...

Fast from food or media or simplify my life in some other way.

It's especially helpful for me to connect with God through...

Keeping my life simple and uncluttered.

I benefit especially from speakers and authors who help me to...

Be disciplined to make more space in my life and my soul for God.

Solitude



Community

Asceticism and Contemplative Prayer

...

Caregiving and Social Justice

Seeing Ascetics in the Bible

Can you think of Bible characters or incidences which show this pathway.

Can you think of Christians you admire who fit this pathway?

About this Pathway

1. Solitude

This is essential – Ascetics live an internal life. The important thing is a sense of “apartness” – it can be created in a busy life by using a spare room for prayer or going into the church when it is empty.

2. Austerity

Monks often choose environments of low sensory input so that they won't be distracted in their prayers.

3. Strictness

Ascetics want to preserve a major portion of their lives for their passionate pursuit of God. It is a means not an end, a way to love God more. It is very close to the contemplative life.

Acts of the Ascetics

Quiet worship in the night.

Being still. Being silent – try it for a few hours!

Fasting. It doesn't earn us any extra merit points with God but God can use it to teach our humbled hearts.

Obedience. To authorities (managers, church leaders, parents ...) invites us to live in humility. It honours God. Working. Strength & the ability to work are God's gifts, all people can be worshipping God through their work. Going on retreats. Scheduling time apart from society helps a focus on being nearer to God.

Living simply. A quiet, plain room is a call to prayer rather than an ornate cathedral.

Enduring hardship. Rather than adopting a demanding spirit that stunts our growth we can embrace hardships & learn from them & mature.

The Temptations of Ascetics

1. Over emphasis on personal piety (holiness). A focus on outward signs not the heart
2. Neglecting social obligations. Not ministering to others.
3. Seeking pain for it's own sake.
4. Seeking to attain God's favour. Need to remember that fasting, sleeping on hard ground etc do not make God love us more.

Consider – perhaps in groups

1. Which aspects of the ascetic's path to connecting with God seem most helpful or intriguing to you? Which aspects seem least interesting?
2. How might developing each of the three disciplines enhance your connection with God?
3. Read Matthew 4:1-11. Before Jesus launched his public ministry, he sought his Father in solitude, austerity, and strictness in the Judean wilderness. With what does Satan tempt him? How does Jesus respond? Satan promised Jesus things he would eventually get in God's perfect timing and way but tempted him to take the shortcut around the pain (especially the cross) to get to that point. As you think about some of the ways that Satan has tempted you, what can this incident in Jesus' life teach you about enduring the difficulty involved in your own fulfillment of God's purpose for your life?
4. Where was Amos when God called him (see Amos 1:1)? Ezekiel (see Ezekiel 1:1)? John the Baptist (see Luke 1:80)? How can the practices of the ascetics prepare us for ministry?
5. Which temptations of the ascetics are you most likely to fall prey to?
6. What do you think Dietrich Bonhoeffer meant when he wrote that "if we do not have some element of the ascetic in us, we will find it difficult to follow Christ?" Do you believe this statement to be true? Why or why not?
7. Create an ascetic experience this week by adopting one of the following: a night watch, a period of silence, a fast, a work for the Lord, a personal retreat, a hardship that you intentionally endure. Describe your experience.

For everyone:

Consider these Spiritual Disciplines

<https://www.soulshpherd.org/spiritual-disciplines-list/>

Solitude, Silence, Fasting, Sabbath, Secrecy, Submission

Bible reading, Worship, Prayer, Fellowship, Personal reflection, Service

Read (to be challenged, comforted, provoked to argument, helped to grow ...)

Richard Foster's Celebration of Discipline

Brother Lawrence's The Practice of The Presence of God

Joel McKerrrow's Woven (an artist remaking the faith he almost lost)

Brian McLaren's Generous Orthodoxy (or for more controversy the more recent A New Kind of Christian)

Henri Nouwen's In the House Of The Lord (an amazing unpacking of a short passage of scripture, you can do a whole term of Home Group studies from this little gem!)

<https://www.follow.org.au> for contemplation in a busy world