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## **“The Quest for the Spiritual Jesus: Jesus and the Spiritual Disciplines”**

Les Hardin

Professor of New Testament

Johnson University Florida

### *Abstract:*

*The instrument of Jesus’ spirituality wasn’t the miracles, exorcisms and healings he performed (which were a part of his unique role as Israel’s Messiah), but rather the routine practices of faith (i.e., disciplines) that permeated his daily life and gave rise to his “growth” (Lk. 2:40, 52; Heb. 5:8) in the Spirit. This article examines the disciplines that he practiced and seeks to determine whether or not they fostered the power of the Spirit in Jesus’ every-day, human existence.*

At the center of any spirituality that is decidedly *Christian* lies the consideration of the spirituality of Jesus himself. Men and women in the community of faith seek to imitate Jesus, to pattern life after his example, to “mimic Christ” as Paul counseled (1 Cor. 11:1; cf. Phil. 3:17, 4:9; 1 Cor. 4:16; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3: 7). It’s easy to push Jesus-style spirituality to the side if our understanding of him is that he was mostly divine, with a sprinkling of humanity. But the testimony of the Church, for all of Christian history, is that Jesus was immersed in *both* divinity *and* humanity, that he was fully God and fully man. The author of Hebrews calls him our Brother (Heb. 2:11, 17) and insists that he was intensely human (2:14-18; 4:15-5:3; 10:10) as a necessary requisite for the redemption he offered. Paul also hints at this when he says that Jesus was “raised from the dead (divine), descended from David (human)” (Romans 1:3-4; 2 Tim. 2:8). The imitation of Christ—his life, his speech, his teachings, his faith, his willful submission to the Father—is the essence of Christian spirituality. It’s the mimicry of his humanity, not his divinity or his unique role as Israel’s Messiah that Christians seek. And when we come back around to

his humanity, we find ourselves bound to imitate him, “practicing the Spirit”<sup>1</sup> as he did. As a man endowed with the Spirit of God, he was intensely “s/Spiritual.”<sup>2</sup>

And yet, historical Jesus research has ignored the question of his spirituality. Scholarly discussion of Jesus’ life and ministry has largely focused on his preaching and his death, with little discussion paid to the question of his spiritual development. The academic study of spiritual formation has only recently garnered serious attention, and the discipline has not yet made its way into any quest for the historical Jesus. It is typically taken for granted that Jesus either *was* spiritual (in an ecstatic way, evidenced by miracles, exorcisms, and healings) or was *portrayed* as working miracles in the Spirit by the evangelists memorializing him after his death.

Perhaps this is why only one serious study to date, Stephen Barton’s *The Spirituality of the Gospels*, has attempted to explore the issue. Even Barton’s presentation is not concerned with the spirituality of Jesus himself, but rather with the spirituality of the evangelists as it appears in their Gospels.<sup>3</sup> Completely absent from Barton’s approach is any consideration of the spirituality of the man Jesus. Cheslyn Jones takes the same approach in *The Study of Spirituality*, quickly moving from the spirituality of the evangelists to that of Paul and John, ignoring any discussion of Jesus’ spirituality altogether.<sup>4</sup> It is commonly held among modern Biblical scholars that the Gospels are shaped more by the post-resurrection community and the author’s

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<sup>1</sup> Meye, “Spirituality,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. G. F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove: InterVarsity: 1993), 909. “Practicing the Spirit” for Paul, as Meye describes it, meant “a comprehensive pattern of action governed by one’s basic perspective.”

<sup>2</sup> This is how Gordon Fee uses the term in relation to Paul, which denotes not just a generic inner vitality, but specifically an outlook fashioned by the Spirit of God. See *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 24-26; *Paul, The Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), x-xi.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen C. Barton, *The Spirituality of the Gospels* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1992), 63. Matthew portrayed a spirituality of obedience to the master’s commands. Mark’s emphasis upon a “dark, strenuous spirituality” was born from an attempt to encourage a community undergoing persecution. In Barton’s view, Luke-Acts is concerned with the presence of the Spirit of God and the joy found in Christ, and John with an interpersonal relationship with Jesus, which is available to his disciples and resembles the close dependence he had upon his Father.

<sup>4</sup> Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edwin Yarnold, eds., *The Study of Spirituality* (Oxford: University Press, 1986), 58-89.

theology than from an intimate, accurate portrayal of Jesus' daily activities. As a result, little study has been done to ascertain exactly what, if anything, Jesus' every-day routine teaches his followers about spiritual development.

So we're left with the question: "Was Jesus spiritual?" And if so, was it developed over time, or did it come upon him full-bloom? Does his spirituality equate with his vocation as Israel's Messiah, making him unique and inimitable? Or is there something in his spiritual development—as a human being—that deserves imitation? While the early church certainly believed him to be divine and "Lord"<sup>5</sup> (John 1:1, 3, 10, 20:28; Col. 1:16; Phil. 2:11), they also believed him to be our Brother, made in the likeness of humanity (Heb. 2:14-18, 4:14-15). While *endowed* with the Spirit (Lk. 4:18-21; Acts 10:38), Jesus is presented in the NT as *growing* in the Spirit (Lk. 2:40, 52<sup>6</sup>; Heb. 5:8), suggesting a development in spiritual practice.<sup>7</sup>

### *Spirituality as Mundane*

To set the framework of Jesus' spirituality on the proper foundation, we must first take a step back and *define* exactly what we mean by the term "spiritual." The most significant works throughout Christian history have emphasized biblical spirituality as something inherently *mundane* (i.e., "earthly"), expressed in practical, tangible ways. Ignatius of Antioch encouraged his readers to give devotion to Christ simply by obeying the local bishop.<sup>8</sup> François Fenelon warned against neglecting daily responsibilities in lieu of "spiritual" activities. In his view,

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<sup>5</sup> Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), esp. 79-153.

<sup>6</sup> The verbs used here are imperfect tense, suggesting that his growth was continuous and ongoing rather than instantaneous.

<sup>7</sup> I am conscious at this point of the danger in running this argument too far toward the human end of the spectrum, of placing too much emphasis upon Jesus' humanity. I can only say that, while Jesus was fully divine, he was also fully human, and to place emphasis upon one is not to deny the other.

<sup>8</sup> *Ephesians* 5; *Magnesians* 6, 13; *Trallians* 13; *Philadelphians* 3.1-3.

spirituality was completely intertwined with practical, everyday routine.<sup>9</sup> Jean-Pierre de Caussade counted it a “sublime faith” to be able to discover God in the most ordinary of things.<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Hermann (known as Brother Lawrence) so married the spiritual and the routine that he was just as comfortable in worship scrubbing the kitchen floor as he was kneeling before the altar.<sup>11</sup> Against those who find themselves attracted to the ecstatic, Eugene Peterson quips that he is “more likely to find a spiritual readiness for the uniqueness of the Christian message among those who are dealing with the basics of daily existence than among those who are trying to escape them.”<sup>12</sup> Peterson’s advice is ancient, and reminiscent of the counsel of Abba Moses to those who believed they would find a more ecstatic spirituality apart from his leadership: “Go sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.”<sup>13</sup> For the classical masters, spirituality is intertwined with the everyday matters of life.

This emphasis upon a practical expression of spirituality in the midst of everyday life is right in line with the teaching of Scripture. Paul counsels the Galatians to “keep in step with the Spirit” (5:16, 22-25), where the practical expression of keeping in step with the Spirit is the avoidance of carnal living (5:17, 19-21) and taking care of fellow believers (6:10). His advice about life in the Spirit always has a practical expression fleshed out in everyday life.<sup>14</sup> Blessing

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<sup>9</sup> François Fenelon, *The Seeking Heart* (Jacksonville: The SeedSowers, 1992), 127. “You will not get closer to God by neglecting your daily responsibilities and calling it ‘spiritual.’”

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Pierre de Caussade, *The Sacrament of the Present Moment* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1966), 64.

<sup>11</sup> Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (Los Angeles: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1895), 30. “‘The time of business,’ said he, ‘does not with me differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament.’”

<sup>12</sup> Eugene Peterson, *The Wisdom of Each Other* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 52.

<sup>13</sup> *Apoth. Moses 6*. In Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1975), 118

<sup>14</sup> E.g., in Romans his warning to “put to death the misdeeds of the body” which cause death (Rom. 8:5-12) bring to mind the very tangible expressions of sinful living in 1:18-2:24. Spiritual wisdom in Corinth is demonstrated among the believers by dealing intentionally with sexual misconduct (5:1-13, 6:12-20), settling disputes amicably (6:1-11), behaving properly in respect to marriage (7:1-40), acquiescing to the weak in regard to

and vindication, along with the privilege of standing (not kneeling or groveling) before God's very throne (Ps. 24:3, 5) are promised to those who guard their actions, speech, and worship in daily living (Ps. 24:3-4). Facing the wrath of God, convicted by Peter's preaching, the men of Jerusalem asked not about ecstatic experience, but rather, "what shall we *do*?" (Acts 2:37).

Biblical spirituality, then, is inherently practical. Based on the biblical evidence and its development in Christian history, it becomes prudent to talk about spirituality as *practical partnership with the Spirit*. Students of Christian spiritual formation differ slightly as to who takes the initiative (the Spirit or the believer), but almost all agree that partnership is in view. This does not necessitate a "works righteousness."<sup>15</sup> Rather, it draws us near to the partnership we have with the Trinity in bringing about the fruit of spiritual development.

### *The Spirituality of Jesus*

With this view of spirituality in mind—practical, every-day, partnership with the Spirit—we are now ready to begin asking, not "Was Jesus spiritual?" (for the answer is a resounding "Yes!") but rather "What did Jesus do on a regular basis to foster practical partnership with the Spirit?" When we define spirituality this way, nine spiritual practices (which we may call "disciplines") in Jesus' life and ministry begin to emerge from the Gospels and warrant consideration.

Certainly *prayer* takes a prominent position in Jesus' routine spirituality. Jesus spent much time in prayer, sometimes early in the morning (Mk. 1:35-37; Lk. 4:42), sometimes in the

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food sacrificed to idols (8:1-13), and showing love toward one another (13:4-7). A long list of ethical considerations also can be found in Ephesians 4:17-6:9 as encouragement to manage the "deposit" of the Spirit (1:13-14).

<sup>15</sup> A common objection to the spiritual disciplines or to the discipline of spiritual formation. For a rebuttal, see Steve L. Porter, "Sanctification in a New Key: Relieving Evangelical Anxieties Over Spiritual Formation," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*, 1, no. 2 (2008): 143-144.

evening after a long day of ministry (Mk. 6:45-46; Lk. 6:12; John 6:15). While he prayed the *Shema* (Dt. 6:4-6) twice daily,<sup>16</sup> he never insisted on fixed, liturgical forms as normative for his own prayer experience. His own prayers were simple and honest, requesting guidance,<sup>17</sup> interceding for his disciples,<sup>18</sup> and struggling with obedience to the Father's will.<sup>19</sup>

From his routine of prayer Jesus found the resources necessary to *overcome temptation*. The desert testing immediately following his baptism demonstrates this most clearly. The Gospels tell us that he was fasting (Mt. 4:2; Lk. 4:2), which naturally included prayer, and probably for the sake of dealing with the constant barrage of temptation. But the Gospels also tell us that once it was over the Devil began looking for more opportune times to tempt him (Lk. 4:13). Jesus' mother (John 2:1-4) and brothers (John 7:1-9), like Satan, also attempted to goad him into public demonstration of his power. John mentions the attempt of the Galilean Jews to forcibly anoint him king (John 6:14-15), for which he had to retreat to the mountainside in prayer (Mt. 14:22-23; Mk. 6:45-46). The specific temptation was akin to that in the desert, to receive the allegiance of the kingdoms of the world without the appointed suffering.<sup>20</sup> He would face it again in the wake of Peter's confession (Mt. 16:16-23), and during his ordeal in the Garden.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, "Prayer," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, eds. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 617, suggests that by Jesus' day the tradition may have increased to three times daily.

<sup>17</sup> For example, guidance about the next location of his preaching tour (Mk. 1:35-39) and the selection of the Twelve (Mt. 9:37; Lk. 6:12; Mk. 3:13).

<sup>18</sup> He indicated to Peter that he had been praying for him (Lk. 22:31) and willingly received little children and prayed for them (Mt. 19:13-14; Mk. 10:13-16; Lk. 18:15-17). The Upper Room Discourse concludes with a lengthy intercessory prayer (John 17:6-23).

<sup>19</sup> As he struggles in the Garden to "drink the cup" of suffering ordained for him (Mt. 26:38-39, 42; Mk. 14:34-36, 39; Lk. 22:42).

<sup>20</sup> The Suffering Servant Song in Isaiah 42-56, against which both Jesus and the Evangelists viewed his ministry, suggests that the Servant would receive the allegiance of the kingdoms of the world (Is. 49:6; 51:4-6; 52:13-15; 53:12), but not without the suffering appointed to the Servant (51:17-23; 53:4-10).

<sup>21</sup> Three times Jesus prayed for "the cup" to be taken from him. He likely refers to the Song of the Suffering Servant, where the cup of Yahweh's wrath (Is. 51:21-23) is due to Israel, but taken out of her hands (Is. 51:22) and appointed to the Servant (Is. 49:4). That Jesus prayed for the removal of the cup repeatedly suggests a heightened level of temptation here on the precipice of his drinking it.

Overcoming temptation was spiritually routine for Jesus during his earthly ministry. His proficiency at it was evident in his question to the Jewish leaders, “Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?” (John 8:46). None could answer in the affirmative.

*Scripture study and memorization* were also part of Jesus’ regular routine. His knowledge of Israel’s sacred Scriptures came through his education in the home and the synagogue.<sup>22</sup> Because the synagogue service was primarily concerned with prayer and the reading of Scripture, Jesus had access to the content of the Law and Prophets from an early age.<sup>23</sup> It’s clear from Luke’s presentation of Jesus’ preaching in Nazareth that he could *read* (Lk. 4:16-17), but in an oral culture his acquiring of the text primarily came by way of oral instruction. Nevertheless, Jesus demonstrated a profound memory of the biblical text in his ministry, for he was regularly able to recall at will texts that answered accusations leveled against him. Citations from and allusions<sup>24</sup> to Scripture can be found on Jesus’ lips throughout the Gospels, and it’s clear that he knew not only the *content* of what he was quoting, but the *context* in which it was set.<sup>25</sup> He was familiar with the *breadth* of the Old Testament<sup>26</sup> and not

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<sup>22</sup> Joel E. Hoffman, “Jewish Education in Biblical Times: Joshua to 933 B.C.E.” *JBQ* 25, no. 2 (1997): 114; William Barclay, *Educational Ideals in the Ancient World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959), 14-17; Howard Clark Kee, “Defining the First-Century CE Synagogue: Problems and Progress.” *NTS* 41, no. 4 (1995): 481-493; Lee I. Levine, “The Nature and Origin of the Palestinian Synagogue Reconsidered.” *JBL* 115, no. 3 (1996): 429-436.

<sup>23</sup> The reading of Scripture (particularly the Law, with additional readings from the prophets) was the main focus of the first-century synagogue service. For a detailed discussion see Roger T. Beckwith, “The Daily and Weekly Worship of the Primitive Church in Relation to Its Jewish Antecedents.” *EQ* 56, no. 2 (1984): 65-80; Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 456-463; Emil Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Christ*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, [1890] 1994), 2.2.27; E. Yamauchi, “Synagogue,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, eds. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 781-784; Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, 6 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1:94-105.

<sup>24</sup> R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1971), 15, reminds us, “It is not easy, however, to decide what constitutes an allusion to the Old Testament. There is no rule of thumb by which intentional allusions can be detected, and it is possible to see references to the Old Testament in the most innocent everyday language.”

<sup>25</sup> For example, Jesus’ allusion to the lifting of the serpent in the desert involves more than just the “lifting up” motif, but rather invokes the context of God’s judgment and his gracious salvation found in what is lifted (Num. 21:4-9; John 3:16-21).

just a few favorite passages, enabling him to speak with integrity to Israel’s leadership about her place in salvation history and the direction God was leading her in bringing salvation to the world. Jesus’ knowledge of Scripture wasn’t downloaded *Matrix*-style into his consciousness. He “grew in wisdom and knowledge” (Lk. 2:52).

*Corporate worship* formed part of Jesus’ routine spirituality, as it did for most other Jews of his day. He could be found frequenting the synagogue on a regular basis, for it “was his custom” (Lk. 4:16). Temple worship also formed part of his routine, for he regularly attended the annual Feasts at the Temple in Jerusalem. Attending worship with God’s people afforded him opportunities for ministry through the Spirit. He found opportunities in the Synagogue and the Temple to preach the message of the kingdom and challenge the status quo in Israel. While miracles aren’t part of our consideration, he did find there opportunities for healing and exorcism, both in the synagogue,<sup>27</sup> and in the Temple.<sup>28</sup>

*Submission* to spiritual authority certainly warrants discussion in the life of Jesus, and on this matter we must tread cautiously and articulately. Jesus often seems disrespectful of the Jewish leadership in the way that he confronts them about their hypocrisy and lack of repentance. “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s” (Mt. 22:21; Mk. 12:17; Lk. 20:25) seems incendiary toward the Empire. But we should not confuse *challenge* with *disrespect*. Indeed, Jesus could only challenge the Jewish leaders so often because he spent so much time with them. Jesus’ practice of the discipline of submission was properly placed—toward the

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<sup>26</sup> As seen in statements like “these are the Scriptures that testify about me” (John 5:39), “from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berehiah” (Matt. 23:33-36; Luke 11:50-51), and “Abraham did not do such things” (John 8:40).

<sup>27</sup> E.g., the exorcism of a man with an unclean spirit (Mk. 1:23-26; Lk. 4:33-35), the healing of a man with a withered hand (Mt. 12:9-13; Mk. 3:1-5; Lk. 6:6-10), and the healing of a crippled woman (Lk. 13:10-13).

<sup>28</sup> E.g., the restoration of the woman caught in adultery, the healing of the man born blind, and some extended teaching with the Jewish leadership at the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:53-8:11; 9:1-39; and 7:14-39; 8:12-59; 9:40-10:21, respectively); a challenge about his identity at the Feast of Dedication (John 10:24-39); and the multiplication of the bread and subsequent discourse (John 6:1-15, 25-71) at the Feast of Passover.



Father alone. Sometimes that meant that he seemed disrespectful of others, like his parents (Luke 2:48-50), or the High Priest (Mt. 26:62-63; Mk. 14:60-61; John 18:19-23). In both cases (and every case in between) Jesus' primary authority in submission was his Father. His "food" was to do the Father's will (John 4:34), he taught what God sent him to teach (John 7:16), and declared that he was not here on his own authority (Jn. 7:28). The most significant sign of his submission came in his resignation over his own suffering, "Not what I will, but what you will" (Mk. 14:36; Mt. 26:39; Lk. 22:42).

Closely allied with the discipline of submission is the discipline of *simplicity*—but not as many commonly understand it. Simplicity is often described in terms of material possessions and complexity of schedule. Those who desire a more simplified life are encouraged to whittle down both to a bare minimum. While Jesus certainly had few possessions ("no place to lay his head", Lk. 9:58), he was, in my estimation, one of the busiest public figures in the ancient world. Jesus' practice of simplicity was not about materialism or time, but rather about *singular focus upon the Kingdom*. As he dealt with material possessions in the Sermon on the Mount, he said, "If your eye is *single* your whole body will be full of light" (Mt. 6:22)<sup>29</sup> and encouraged his disciples to "seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these (material) things will be given to you as well" (Mt. 6:33). This singular focus also prevented him from becoming entangled in family squabbles (like that of Mary and Martha, Lk. 10:38-42, or the two brothers fighting over their inheritance, Lk. 12:13-14), altering his plans because of Herod's antagonism (Lk. 13:31-33), or settling petty disputes among his disciples (Mt. 20:20-23; Mk. 10:35-40). His

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<sup>29</sup> See BAGD, "*haplous*," 86, where "single" is one of the possible ranges of meaning. See also D. A. Carson, *Matthew* (EBC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:178.

sole focus was upon preaching and inaugurating the Kingdom of God, and this is the essence of the Christian spiritual practice of simplicity of focus.

In *proclamation of the Kingdom* (or evangelism, in the strictest sense) we come most near to Jesus' *giftedness* in the Spirit. He couldn't *not* preach. Everywhere he went—from the synagogue,<sup>30</sup> to the Temple,<sup>31</sup> in the Upper Room (John 13-17), and before the crowds in the open fields,<sup>32</sup> Jesus could regularly be found announcing the arrival of the Kingdom. When questioned about his whereabouts and the interest of the pressing crowd, his response to Peter was to go somewhere else, to preach in the nearby villages, for “that is why I have come” (Mk. 1:38).

Jesus also made a habit of *welcoming in the outcast* and the oppressed into his presence. The time he spent around tax collectors, “sinners,” and the poor certainly comes to mind. Gentiles were outsiders to Judaism, and the Gospels portray Jesus being kind toward Gentiles, praising them for their faith in him even when mainstream Jews would not (Mt. 8:10-12). Quite often, it was the groups mentioned above who were more willing to demonstrate repentance than the Jewish leaders (Mt. 21:31-32). Jesus' habit was not to exclude mainstream Jews in favor of the disenfranchised, though, creating a reverse-sort of favoritism. He regularly welcomed into his presence anyone who was interested in his message of the in-breaking of God's Kingdom.

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<sup>30</sup> He began his ministry by preaching in the synagogues in Galilee (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:14-15). On several occasions the Gospels record that his *modus operandi* was to frequent the synagogues in the various towns and villages (Matt. 9:35; Mark 6:6). On two separate occasions Luke mentions that he was going through the villages preaching and teaching, presumably both as he traveled and in the synagogues on the Sabbath (Luke 8:1, 13:22).

<sup>31</sup> Matt. 21:23; Mark 11:17-18; Luke 19:47, 20:1, 21:37-38.

<sup>32</sup> E.g., on the shore of the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 13:1-3; Mark 2:13, 4:1-2; Luke 5:1, 8:4), in the home (Mark 2:2; Luke 5:17), on the side of a mountain (Matt. 5:1-2), on a large open plain (Luke 6:17-18), and in several other venues. In several places the Gospels mention that he taught the crowds (sometimes comprised of thousands) without mentioning the exact location: Matt. 15:10; Mark 6:34; Luke 9:11, 12:1, 15:1-2; John 4:41, 10:41.

And finally, *fellowship meals* warrant consideration in any discussion of Jesus' routine spirituality, for he can be found in the Gospels eating with a variety of people. The intimate nature of table fellowship in the ancient world suggests that Jesus was doing more than just having dinner. Where many in Jesus' day used the seating arrangements at table to rank their guests' importance and status,<sup>33</sup> Jesus freely opened his table to anyone without regard for class distinction. He was enacting the motif of the great messianic banquet (Is. 25:6-8), where Isaiah describes a sumptuous feast prepared for "all people," not just Jews. The description of the banquet, with "all people" attending, concludes with God's designation of them as "His people" (25:8). The tendency in Jesus' day was to view this as a condemnation of Gentiles who would be excluded from the banquet while "his people" (Jews) would be in attendance.<sup>34</sup> But Jesus seems to have understood it differently—that all people were invited to this banquet, and all who chose to sit at the table would be counted as "his people." This motif shows up, not only in Jesus' teaching,<sup>35</sup> but also in his own habit of welcoming to his table "all people," including Pharisees, tax collectors and "sinners," his own disciples, and even the burgeoning crowds. For many in Jesus' day, the type of food set on the table was the issue that separated Jews and Gentiles.<sup>36</sup> Jesus seemed to care less about the food (Matt. 15:11, 17-20; Mark 7:14-19) and

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<sup>33</sup> Ranking guests by their seating arrangements around the tables and providing the more important guests with richer kinds of food was a common convention of first-century table fellowship. See Jerome Neyrey, "Ceremonies," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, ed. Jerome Neyrey (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 364–65; and Dennis E. Smith, "Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke." *JBL* 106, no. 4 (1987): 633-638.

<sup>34</sup> The Targum Isaiah embellishes the text of Is. 25:6-8 to suggest that "Yahweh of Hosts will make for all the people in this mountain a meal; and though they suppose it is an honour, it will be a shame for them, and great plagues, plagues from which they will be unable to escape, plagues whereby they will come to their end." See Mark L. Strauss, *The Gospel of Luke*, Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary, Ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 443.

<sup>35</sup> For instance in the parable of the Great Banquet (Lk. 14:15-24), in which many of the outsiders are welcomed in to the exclusion of those who were originally invited, and in his comment to the centurion that Gentiles would come and take "their place at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Matt. 8:11; cf. Luke 7:29).

<sup>36</sup> Meals were often used as boundary markers for ritual purity, and Gentiles were often excluded. See Craig L. Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 65-96.

more about extending an invitation to “all people” to sit at the banquet table over which Jesus presided as Messiah.

These nine disciplines form the routine activity in Jesus’ spirituality. He was endowed fully with the Spirit at his baptism, but the practice of these disciplines gave him opportunities for the Spirit to work and move, creating opportunities for Jesus to speak truth, to heal, and to inaugurate God’s kingdom. In short, having already been indwelt by the Spirit, these activities reflect the ways in which Jesus fostered the power of the Spirit in his life and ministry.

There are some things that are missing, disciplines normally attached to Christian spirituality that are simply absent from the Gospels in regard to Jesus. Writing was not a spiritual activity for Jesus (either journaling or composing prayers or hymns). Nothing exists purporting to come from his hand. Surely with the emphasis that early believers had on proliferating the Gospels (canonical and non-canonical), had Jesus written anything it would have surely survived. Tithing was a complicated thing in ancient Israel,<sup>37</sup> but the Gospels seem not too concerned to describe his practice of “the tenth” as we know it today. Instead, we find him being generous with what he has, which in his case is more about healing and “good news” than silver and gold. The times he does squabble about money seem related to taxes rather than tithes (cf. Mt. 17:24-27). Singing wasn’t prominent for Jesus, for the Gospels only mention it

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<sup>37</sup> Tithing was required for the first fruit of the crops, new wine, oil, sheep’s wool, and the firstborn of the flocks (Dt. 12:6-7; 18:4-5). On the third year it was to be shared with the alien, orphans, and widows living among them (Dt. 14: 28-29; 26:12 ff.). The average first-century Jew was under pressure from the Pharisees to tithe beyond that (“mint, dill, and cumin”). Jesus believed that underlying the practice of tithing were “justice, mercy, and faithfulness” (Matt. 23:23). William David Spencer and Aida Besançon Spencer, *The Prayer Life of Jesus: Shout of Agony, Revelation of Love, a Commentary* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990), 75, suggest that the tithing system in first-century Israel—complete with regulations about whether to tithe the fruit from your neighbor’s tree that hangs over your fence—was so complicated that it prevented the average person from tithing accurately.

only once.<sup>38</sup> Curiously fasting wasn't even part of his routine during his ministry, for after the desert temptation had concluded and his ministry began, he was regarded as a glutton and a drunk (Mt. 11:19; Lk. 7:34) who neither fasted nor trained his disciples to do so (Mt. 9:14; Mk. 2:18; Lk. 5:33). But we must be careful about excising from our own spirituality that which is not *apparent* in the Gospels relating to Jesus. Though it wasn't prominent during his ministry, he predicted the time when his disciples *would* fast (Mt. 9:15; Mk. 2:20; Lk. 5:35), and just because the Gospels don't mention it in regard to Jesus doesn't mean that we are to ignore the practice or abandon it. His role as Messiah put him in a unique situation in some of these matters.

### *Conclusion*

Jesus was a spiritual man. On that point very few would disagree. But the crux of his spirituality was not primarily found in the miraculous—the exorcisms, the healings, the walking on water. Rather, he demonstrated a partnership with the Spirit that manifested itself in his every-day living, in routine activities (like prayer, casting down temptation, corporate worship, etc.). These disciplines created the conditions for the Spirit to work through him, and provided opportunities for him to manifest the Spirit's presence and power. For those of us seeking to imitate Jesus-style spirituality, our quest is best served, not by lamenting the lack of the ecstatic in our own spirituality, but by conforming our lives after the pattern of Jesus in practical, every-day partnership with the Spirit.

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<sup>38</sup> And this may have been the end of the Hallel Psalmody regularly chanted at Passover (Matt. 26:30), after the distribution of the third cup of wine. See Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1997), 331.