Spiritual Disciplines in Transformative Evaluation

Frank G. Cookingham…October 2016, January 2019
Four spiritual disciplines are suggested to inform evaluators as they work with stakeholders to plan, implement and report findings of an evaluation.

Study, Reflection, Prayer, Discernment
Spiritual Disciplines are at the Center

• Believers differ greatly in their understandings of spiritual disciplines and how they exercise them. In TE such differences are respected, but all team members are encouraged to participate in suggested activities. At a minimum team members should not disrupt activities when they choose not to participate.
Let Holy Spirit Guide You Moment by Moment

• Incorporating spiritual disciplines into the evaluation activities involves much more than beginning the day with devotions and closing the day with prayer.

• A goal for Transformative Evaluation (TE) is that everything said and done is in response to seeking to be Christ-like in all aspects of living, including participation in an evaluation exercise.
1. Study as a Discipline

- Richard Foster defines study as a “specific kind of experience in which, through careful attention to reality, the mind is enabled to move in a certain direction” (p. 63).

- This discipline should be exercised as evaluation information is collected, analyzed and interpreted.

- More important, the Bible should be studied regularly by the evaluator so that the kingdom perspective can influence the mind as other things are studied.
RCCR Steps to Guide Study

- **Repetition** regularly channels the mind, “wiring” the brain to guide behavior with thoughts consistent with the ways of God.
- **Concentration**, or focusing attention on what is being studied, is best done in a setting free of distraction.
- **Comprehension** involves understanding the truth in what is being studied. Repetition and concentration are essential for the “aha” moment to occur.
- **Reflection** involves ruminating on what we comprehend from different points of view, including implications for change in our thinking and beliefs.
2. Scriptural Meditation/Reflection

- This is the discipline of internalizing the meaning or significance of a passage for you. It is exploration of what God is personally saying to you in your present circumstances. Accept the Word of scripture, and ponder it in your heart. Use all of your senses and imagination; put yourself at the feet of Jesus and be taught by him (Richard Foster).

- Expect that you will be guided in changing your attitudes and behavior; there is no other way to become more like Christ. Surrender all fear of change to God.
3. Prayer
Dialoging with God

- Individual and corporate prayer are both needed during a TE exercise.
- Individuals need to maintain their prayer life for ongoing personal transformation.
- The team needs to pray regularly for discernment of God’s will for this evaluation exercise, and for courage to be obedient.
4. Discernment
Understanding from God’s Perspective

“Discernment is the skill of understanding and applying God’s Word with the purpose of separating truth from error and right from wrong. It is a task in which we attempt to see things as God sees them. People who are discerning have a heightened ability to see and understand issues from God’s perspective. Empowered by his Spirit, they strive for and are given an understanding of what is pleasing to God and what is not. They do this by understanding God through his Word, the Bible, and by applying the wisdom of the Bible to their lives. All the while it is God who gives the motivation, the desire, the ability, and the power to both know and discern (Challies, page 71).”
Discerning Evaluation Conclusions

• Discerning meaningful TE conclusions is an artistic endeavor rather than a step-by-step procedure. The quality of transformative evaluation conclusions is influenced greatly by the spiritual maturity of the evaluation team members and their willingness to listen for God’s guidance.

• Prayerful discussion among team members that is based on principles of dialogue rather than persuasion is the primary means of discerning meaningful conclusions.
Other Disciplines

- Richard Foster describes twelve disciplines. I have mentioned three of them. An evaluation team may use others (e.g., fasting) as they are led.
Final Thought

- Including spiritual disciplines in an evaluation exercise will add a considerable amount of time to the exercise. Be guided by the Holy Spirit moment by moment.
May your evaluation work be strengthened as you exercise spiritual disciplines.
Discernment Resources

  The book looks to the Bible to seek what God teaches on the subject of spiritual discernment, a term defined as the skill of understanding and applying God’s Word with the purpose of separating truth from error and right from wrong.

  This book provides holistic, accessible, and solid guidance for practicing discernment across the spectrum of Christian denominations (Janet Ruffing).

  The book weaves practical insights for cultivating discernment with page-turning stories and repeatable practices (Kent Ira Groff).
 Discipline Resources

    • Clear descriptions of twelve spiritual disciplines along with many examples of bringing them into daily life.
    • Descriptions of 21 forms of prayer.
    • “The mark of disciplined persons is that they are able to do what needs to be done when it needs to be done.” An inspired and inspiring examination of the importance of spiritual disciplines.
For further information about TE...

- See posts at www.EvalFrank.com, especially the other five orientation slide presentations.