

Spiritual Disciplines

Introduction

Every believer is called to become like Jesus Christ (Rom 8:29)
Christians must pursue holiness as part of salvation (Heb 12:14)
The goal of spiritual discipline is godliness (1Tim 4:7)

God uses (1) circumstances, (2) people and (3) spiritual disciplines to change us
Spiritual disciplines are personal and corporate actions that promote spiritual growth

Bible Study

The most important spiritual discipline is regular study of God's Word

Tips for getting the most out of Bible study:

- First, make time for regular Bible study, preferably not at bedtime
- Second, find a practical Bible reading plan
- Third, find a word, phrase or verse for meditation each time

The easiest Bible study discipline is simply hearing God's Word

The second Bible study discipline is inductive Bible study

The third Bible study discipline is memorizing God's Word

Important reasons for memorizing Bible passages:

1. Memorization supplies spiritual power against temptation (Ps 119:11)
2. Memorization strengthens faith (Prv 22:17-19)
3. Memorization assists witnessing, counseling (Rom 2:17-20)
4. Memorization enables God's guidance (John 14:26)
5. Memorization stimulates meditation (Ps 119:97)

Tips for memorizing: (1) have a plan, (2) write verses out & (3) review daily

The fourth Bible study discipline is meditating on God's Word

Christian meditation involves focusing the mind on God & truth

The goal of Christian meditation is understanding, application and prayer

- There is a connection between meditation and success (Josh 1:8)
- Meditation should lead to application (Ps 1:1-3, John 13:17)
- Pray for understanding as part of Bible study (Ps 119:18)

It is better to read a small passage with meditation than a large section without

Misunderstanding the meaning of a passage leads to misguided applications

We must understand the original application before we can apply it now

Ask application oriented questions:

Is there something to believe about God?

Is there something to praise God for?

Is there something to trust God about?

Is there something to pray about?

Is there something to do?

Spiritual Disciplines

Prayer

God expects us to pray (Col 4:2, 1 Th5:17)

People fail to pray because:

- Time isn't planned, allotted
- They doubt that anything will happen
- Life seems manageable (self-sufficiency)
- They haven't learned how to pray

We learn how to pray by:

- Praying regularly (Rom 8:26)
- Meditating on Scripture
- Praying with others (Prv 27:17)
- Reading about prayer (Prv 13:20)

Prayer is answered; everyone who asks, receives (Mt 7:7-8)

If you ask and receive not, something is amiss:

- God has answered but not in an obvious way
- God wants us to persist, show we're serious (Luke 18:1ff)
- We're asking for something outside His will (Mt 6:10)
- We're praying with selfish motives (James 4:3)
- We're failing to deal with blatant sin (Isa 59:1-2)

General guidelines for prayer:

1. Pray in private, not to be seen by others (Mt 6:5-6)
2. Be concise, direct; God isn't impressed with wordiness (Mt 6:7-8)
3. Begin by addressing and honoring God the Father (Mt 6:9)
4. Next, offer petitions that advance God's Kingdom and purposes (Mt 5:10)
5. Then, ask God to provide personal needs (Mt 6: 11)
6. Fourth, request forgiveness and extend forgiveness (Mt 6:12)
7. Fifth, seek protection and deliverance from evil (Mt 6:13)
8. Finally, request all petitions in Jesus' name (John 15:16, 16:23)

Worship

God expects us to worship Him (Mt 4:10)

Worship means giving praise and honor to God

It is possible to worship God in vain (Mark 7:7-8)

We must worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24)

We must worship (1) from the heart (2) according to the Bible

We should not stop worshipping even if we don't feel like doing it

Meditating on the truth can kindle the emotions of worship

God expects us to participate in regular, corporate worship (Ps 95:6)

He also expects us to worship Him in private (Mt 6:6, 9)

The more we worship God, the more we become like Him

We tend to emulate what we are thinking

Spiritual Disciplines

Evangelism

Every Christian is called to be a witness of the truth (1Pet 3:15)
But, only a few witnesses are called to be evangelists (Eph 4:11)

The Holy Spirit gives us power to witness to others (Acts 1:8)
But, be careful not to cast your pearls before swine (Mt 7:6)

Successful evangelism is measured by accurate delivery of the message (Gal 1:6-7),
not by the response of the recipient (John 6:44)

The most powerful witness comes from someone who is living God's Word (Col 4:5-6)

God called us to help fulfill the Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20)
One way is to let our light shine (Mt 5:16)
Another is to raise godly children (Eph 6:4)
Another is financial support of the Church (1Th 9:14)

Serving

Paul expected Christians to serve the Lord (Rom 12:11)

True Christian service should be motivated by:

- Obedience (Dt 13:4)
- Gratitude (1Sam 12:24)
- Gladness (Ps 100:2)
- Forgiveness (Heb 9:4)
- Humility (Php 2:3)
- Love (Gal 5:13)

The Holy Spirit gives every Christian spiritual gifts for serving others (1Pet 4:10)
A spiritual gift is not the same thing as a natural ability (1Cor 12)
A spiritual gift is manifested and confirmed through serving

Roman 12:4-8

(1) Prophecy (2) Service, (3) Teaching (4) Exhortation, (5) Giving, (6) Leadership and (7) Mercy

1Cor 12:5-11

The Holy Spirit distributes gifts of (1) wisdom, (2) knowledge, (3) faith, (4) healing, (5) miracles, (6) prophecy, (7) distinguishing spirits, (8) languages, and (9) translation

1Cor 12:27-31

God has appointed in the church (1) apostles, (2) prophets, (3) teachers, (4) miracles, (5) gifts of healing, (6) assistants, (7) administrators and (8) languages

Serving God is work, but He gives us with the power to serve, and no other work is so rewarding
Worship motivates service, and serving expresses worship

Spiritual Disciplines

Stewardship

Stewardship is the disciplined use of our resources

- We must discipline our time, use it wisely (Eph 5:15-16)
- We must discipline our thoughts, be heavenly minded (Col 3:2)
- We must discipline our bodies, practice self-control (Gal 5:22-23)
- We must discipline our money, spend it wisely

God will hold us accountable for our use of time (Rom 14:12)

- Life is short (James 4:14), and the future is uncertain (Prv 27:1)
- Time is easily lost (Prv 24:33-34), and we can't regain it (John 9:4)
- We must do the will of God when it ought to be done (Eccl 3:1)

God owns everything; we are only stewards (Ps 24:1)

- We must provide for our family (1Tim 5:8)
- Offerings are an act of worship (Php 4:18)

Our giving reflects our faith in God to provide (Mt 6:25-26)

Our giving reflects our love for God (Mt 6:21)

Our giving should be:

- Proportional to our blessings (1Cor 16:1-2)
- Done willingly, cheerfully (2Cor 9:6-7)
- Planned and systematic (Deut 16:16-17)

If we give to God, He will give to us (Luke 6:38);

If we give generously, He gives generously (2Cor 9:6-8)

Fasting

Fasting is voluntary abstinence from food and water for spiritual purposes

The Bible always describes fasting as abstinence from food and water

- Moses ate no bread, drank no water for 40 days (Deut 9:9)
- Esther and the Jews did not eat or drink for 3 days (Est 4:16)
- Ezra ate no bread, drank no water to mourn Israel's sin (Ezra 10:6)
- Paul did not eat or drink for 3 days (Acts 9:9)

The purpose for fasting

To express urgency, importance in our prayer requests (Esther 4:16)

To seek God's guidance, discern His will about a matter (Acts 14:23)

To express grief, mourning about a tragedy or loss (2Sam 1:11-12)

To seek deliverance or protection from evil, danger (2Chr 20:3-4)

To express repentance, remorse for personal or national sin (Joel 2:12)

To express humility, submission before God (1Kgs 21:27-29)

To minister to the needs of others (donate time or money, intercessory prayer)

To overcome temptation, draw close to God by exercising self-denial (Mt 4:2)

To express love and worship toward God with intense devotion (Luke 2:37)

Spiritual Disciplines

Jesus expected His followers to fast after His earthly ministry ended (Mt 9:15)
We should fast discreetly, not to be noticed by others (Mt 6:16-18)
God rewards His people when they fast according to His Word (Mt 6:18)

Fasting must have a spiritual purpose for God to bless it
Fasting is useless if we are sinning against others
Fasting isn't a way to manipulate God into doing our bidding
Fasting is a way to elevate God's concerns over our own

Silence and Solitude

Staying silent for a limited time teaches tongue control for all time

- We should be quick to hear but slow to speak (Jms 1:19)
- Our religion is in vain if we can't control our tongue (Jms 1:26)
- Anyone who can bridle his tongue can control his whole body (Jms 3:2)
- When words abound, sin is unavoidable; he who restrains his lips is wise (Prv 10:19)

There are biblical and logical reasons for seeking quiet solitude:

- To facilitate uninterrupted prayer time (Mark 1:35)
- To facilitate meditation, introspection (Ps 119:148)
- To facilitate rest and spiritual renewal (Mark 6:31)
- To perceive divine answers and guidance (Luke 6:12-13)

Suggestions for silence and solitude

- When forced to wait, use the time as a "minute retreat"
- Schedule daily quiet time for Bible study and prayer
- Schedule a retreat for a longer period of rest when needed
- Ask someone to help with daily tasks so you have quite time

Journaling

A journal is a place to record the works of God in your life

- An account of daily events from a spiritual perspective
- A diary of personal relationships in a biblical context
- A notebook of Scripture questions, insights or promises
- A list of prayer requests, status updates or answers
- A record of personal spiritual goals and progress

Reasons for journaling

- To aid in reflection, self-awareness and self-examination
- To improve concentration during meditation
- To organize thoughts and feelings for prayer time
- To record answers to prayer and providential events
- To recall important spiritual lessons to benefit others
- To set and track daily goals for self-improvement
- To monitor and maintain the other spiritual disciplines

Spiritual Disciplines

Application

There are no rules for journaling; your way is the right way
Journaling is helpful if you write much or just a little
Journaling requires persistence, self-discipline
You must start journaling to experience the benefits

Learning

Christians should be intentional, life-long learners
The Bible exhorts us to get wisdom, get understanding (Prv 4:5)
We are to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord (2Pet 3:18)

Learning is essential for godliness
We can't believe God if we don't know His Word (Rom 12:14)
We can't love God if we don't know who He is
We can't obey God if we don't know what godliness is (2Pet 1:5-7)

Different ways of learning

Audio books, video lectures, computer programs, study guides
Meaningful conversation with spiritually mature Christians
The best way to learn is by reading but choose books wisely
The goal of intentional learning is Christ-likeness

Perseverance

Spiritual growth requires constant struggle, perseverance (1Tim 4:7-10)
Laziness never leads to godliness; a godly person is busy
Spiritual disciplines make the task easier, more successful
Slow and steady progress is better than random, inconsistent effort

The Role of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit creates a hunger for holiness, godliness (Gal 5:22-23)
God has given us a Spirit of power, love and self-discipline (2Tim 1:7)
Success comes when we struggle with all of His power (Col 1:29)

The Role of the Fellowship

Biblical fellowship strengthens the practice of spiritual disciplines
Some spiritual disciplines must be practiced with other Christians
Christian fellowship provides mutual service and help (Eph 4:13-16)
Christian fellowship provides mutual encouragement (Heb 3:13)

Adapted from "Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life" by Donald S. Whitney (NavPress, 1991)