

## An Introduction

The spiritual disciplines serve a very specific role in the Christian experience—they lead believers to become more like Jesus in our thoughts, words, and actions. For centuries, Christians around the world have engaged in the practice of spiritual disciplines.

When many hear the phrase “spiritual disciplines,” their thoughts immediately turn to monastic communities dedicated to ascetic living. Our busy, Western minds tend to think of the practice of spiritual disciplines as a Sisyphean task reserved for those who have immense amounts of time on their hands. But the reality is, that any of us can engage the spiritual disciplines with whatever amount of time we have and discover God moves our hearts in significant ways!

Yes, the spiritual disciplines are for our discipleship. However, they are for much more.

For many, spiritual disciplines and evangelism are seen as opposites—one reserved for isolated practice and the other for public proclamation. But what happens when we fuse the two to make a real impact in a broken world? How can things like Bible reading, worship, prayer, confession, and submission shape the way we practice evangelism?

We have included eight of the spiritual disciplines:

- Bible Reading
- Worship
- Prayer
- Solitude & Silence
- Confession
- Sacrifice
- Submission
- Fellowship

We recognize there are many more as well. In each section, we have included several passages for you to reflect on, as well as a guide to follow as you engage in each discipline for the furtherance of your discipleship, as well as the furtherance of the gospel. Finally, we have included reflection questions.

Spiritual disciplines are hard work. But that hard work stretches believers in ways that lead them to deeper experiences with our Savior. We hope this short, guided approach to these disciplines through the lens of evangelism change not only your life but the lives of others around you.

## DAY 2: BIBLE READING

It is not a coincidence that the longest chapter in the Bible is about God’s Word (Psalm 119). Every one of the 176 verses refers to God’s commands and laws. It’s a meditation that has at its heart the deeply-held belief that without God’s Word and guidance, we are aimless. According to Wycliffe Bible Translators, there are an estimated 160 million

people without access to any scripture in their heart language and at least 1.5 billion people are without the full Bible in their first language. Even of those who have scripture in their heart language, in many places of the world, like various Islamic-dominated areas, it is nearly impossible to access the Bible.

So we begin with this very basic fact: having the Bible, and being able to read the Bible in our heart language, is a tremendous gift.

We begin the discipline with gratitude for God's Word, which is available to us. Scripture accessibility.

Next, we recognize that the words we read are God-breathed. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." God works through His Word. How many of us have found passages come alive at certain times when previously we just skimmed right over them? That's God's Spirit at work.

We ask God to reveal His heart to us as we engage His Word. What does He want for our world? Why did He even come in the first place? We ask, He answers. It's a back-and-forth communication, just as Habakkuk spoke of: "I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give..." (Hab. 2:1).

As we go deeper into scripture, we continually push into this reality: Jesus came to seek and save the lost. His whole purpose for creating us was for fellowship with Him, but how are people to be in fellowship with Him if no one tells them how to be in fellowship with Him (see Rom. 10:14-15)? We cannot get more than several chapters through scripture before we are again and again confronted with the reality that our world is dying and in need of a Savior.

As we encounter this, we finally stop and ask God, "So what is my role in offering Your light to a world that is drowning in sin?" We begin to seek personal responsibility and personal accountability. We spend space with God, open to His Word, about the next steps. As Psalm 119:11 says, we have hidden God's Word in our hearts. We store it up for the moments when God opens doors to gospel conversations. As God's Word fills up more and more space in our lives, our transformation begins: the very DNA of our salvific God is transferred to us; we desire to show & share His life in more and new and exciting ways.

Questions for Reflection:

- How does your Bible reading impact your desire to spend more time with God?
- When you approach scripture, do you do so with a heart posture of expecting to hear from God?
- How has your Bible reading impacted your evangelism?
- What passages can you carry with you that would equip you to better share your faith?

DAY 3: WORSHIP

C.S. Lewis once said, "The most valuable thing the Psalms do for me is to express the same delight in

God which made David dance." When you hear the term 'worship', what comes to mind? Perhaps it is a holy solemnity or arms raised high in devoted song. Regardless of style or tradition, at the heart of worship is adoration and celebration. Eyes lifted high, we acknowledge the One Creator and Being, who we call "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15), to be worthy of all of our praise and efforts. Each breath we live, we live for Him.

There is perhaps a no better picture of this than 2 Samuel 6:5, where we get a picture of David and his men moving the Ark of the Lord to Jerusalem: "David and all Israel were celebrating with all their might before the Lord, with castanets, harps, lyres, timbrels, sistrums, and cymbals." They were praising God with their bodies and minds, hearts, and strength.

We begin the discipline of worship with an acknowledgment of who God is. Hearts bowed down, we affirm the totality of God: the omniscient and omnipresent One who yet hides in the shadows of our hearts. As we adore Him for His goodness and grace outpoured to us, we declare our utter poverty and brokenness. First Chronicles 16:23-31 provides helpful textual guides for what worship and adoration towards God entail.

In worship, we also find that our hearts fall more in love with our Savior as we see Him more clearly. And as our love grows deeper, so too does our willingness to be all that He desires us to be. Romans 12:1 reads, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, given God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.." So our next stop in worship is the acknowledgment that true worship does not end when the last song has been sung, or the last prayer has been uttered. True worship continues its momentum throughout each moment of life. Likely, we have heard or read much about our bodies as "living sacrifices." We get the picture of one squirming endlessly until either (1) it has escaped the table or (2) it has lost the battle in surrender.

The reality is, our lives are not our own. They've been purchased with a price. From the tip of our toes to the top of our head, we are the Lord's. Redeemed, made new. The caterpillar-butterfly analogy goes far here. We were once, and are now the same...but better.

As we surrender to the fact that we are living sacrifices who are under the mighty and loving hand of a God who cares about our good and the good of the world, our worship leads us to tell others about Him.

In the darkest and most dire of situations, we cannot help but tell others about this God we adore. Paul and Silas experienced this:

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" The jailer called for lights, rushed in, and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and all the others in his house. (Acts 16:25-32)

True worship must express itself to others. Peter and John say it this way: "As for us, we

cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). We have felt the goodness of God and are moved to share His kindness and grace with others. The fruit of fulfilled worship is a life of proclamation.

Questions for Reflection:

In what ways do you best worship, God? Have you ever experience God in a powerful or new way during worship? If so, how? What has the role of worship been about your evangelism? How is God calling you to use your praise of Him to extend to those around you?

#### DAY 4: PRAYER

Martin Luther once said, "To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing." If we look at the model of Jesus, it would indeed be impossible to extract the importance of prayer from an honest picture of what life with God looks like. He was known to pray alone and pray with others. His life was a complete picture of connectedness to His Father God. In Matthew 6:5-8, Jesus tells us how to pray:

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray to stand in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your unseen Father. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Prayer begins with the right spirit. Why are we praying? For others? For ourselves? Out of guilt? Need? The truth is, every action has a motivation. As we dig deep into the recesses of our hearts, we must come clean with God. Honest prayer is the only kind of prayer God desires.

Next, we engage in prayer that is expressive and creative. It's worship and praise, it's intercession and confession. In Matthew 6:9-13, Jesus guides His disciples:

This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, you will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Do you see what happens here? Jesus starts by saying, "This, then, is how you should pray." Like this. It's a model prayer that includes praise, intercession, petition, confession, and pleading. There is no right or wrong way to pray, but what we shall never omit is a heartfelt prayer. Whether it's a traditional orthodox prayer or one that is birthed in your mind and heart, the discipline of prayer must always and ever draw us nearer to the heart of Jesus and His love for a lost and dying world.

Prayer builds passion. The 24-7 Prayer Movement has long held a Vision Poem that lays out a radical view of prayer that changes everything. In it are these words: "With blood and sweat and many tears, with sleepless nights and fruitless days, they pray as if it all depends on God and live as if it all depends on them."

This vision of the prayer life draws us straight back to Jesus and His model of prayer. As

we intercede for our world, our hearts draw close to the marginalized, the broken, and the lost. Our, "How long, Oh Lord?" translates into action as we can no longer stand the thought of those around us living life without the One thing that will change everything: Jesus. Charles Spurgeon expressed his desire this way: "If sinners are damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our bodies. If they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees. Let no one go there unwarned or unprayed for."

Authentic, real, heartfelt prayer makes our hearts burst to share the good news of Jesus with those still in darkness.

Questions for Reflection:

How do you view prayer? What models of prayer work best for you as you come near to God? In what ways can you incorporate prayer into your daily life? How can you use your prayer times as opportunities to build your passion for gospel witness?

#### DAY 5: SOLITUDE & SILENCE

Quiet. Not many of us get enough of it, and when we do, we don't know what to do with it. Ecclesiastes 3, however, tells us that there is a time for all things: mourning and dancing, building and breaking, seeking and losing. The totality of human existence and the emotions which seek to overcome us at times have their place, God reminds us. But how are we to understand and process these without moments which seek their independence from the busyness of life? Psalm 46:10 is beloved for a reason: "Be still, and know that I am God."

The discipline of solitude & silence begins with creating space for God to speak to our restless hearts. We come with open hands and hearts in anticipation of what God might say. If we are lucky, Isaiah 30:21 might become a reality: "Whether you turn to the right or the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'"

As the flurry of life fades to the background, we begin to hear something which sounds almost foreign. Can that be God's voice, we wonder? In solitude & silence, we begin to hear God's voice again. The world and all its cares are pushed to the background as, for just a fleeting moment, we can rediscover what it means that God has never left our side.

In solitude & silence, we find God's nearness and bigness simultaneously. When all is quiet, we hear the drip of the faucet, the whisper of a leaf in the wind, the steady breathing of a dog in a midday nap. The world comes alive in silence, and we rediscover what it means that God sustains the universe and holds everything in His right hand. We see the beauty of a sunset and feel the softness of a pillow. God is overall.

And in our sighs, we also remember that God is in all. "For in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). And in us, He has deposited His greatest gift. Second Corinthians 1:21-22 reads, "Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." His love is so vast that He cannot help but be in our hearts as well. He is indeed in all and overall.

Finally, silence & solitude lead us to such worship and awe that His Holy Spirit deposited in us births a new life of gospel witness. We become aware that as we find God in quiet, many do not. We acknowledge that too many turn to other things instead of God. But what if it's true that God does desire all to be saved and to come to a knowledge of Him?

It is true, God says as we sit in silence. Our silence to others on matters of faith becomes deafening the longer we spend time with God. Silence moves us, ultimately, towards more conversation about Jesus, about life, about hope.

Questions for Reflection:

Do you find silence and stillness unnerving, or comforting? Why? Have you incorporated quiet times of listening to God into your worship of Him? In what ways can you use silence and solitude to edify your faith walk, as well as draw you nearer to the heart of God? How does silence interact with evangelism?

## DAY 6: CONFESSION

It's no fun to admit we are wrong, especially when we have deeply wounded another. In a 1993 edition of *Today in the Word*, we find this story:

In the washroom of his London club, British newspaper publisher and politician William Beaverbrook happened to meet Edward Heath, then a young member of Parliament, about whom Beaverbrook had printed an insulting editorial a few days earlier. "My dear chap," said the publisher, embarrassed by the encounter. "I've been thinking it over, and I was wrong. Here and now, I wish to apologize." "Very well," grunted Heath. "But the next time, I wish you'd insult me in the washroom and apologize in your newspaper."

The only way for us to be right with God and others is through the hard road. Sometimes, with people, we may not receive forgiveness when we confess. But with God, that is never the case. First John 1:9 tells us, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." God always forgives.

**The discipline of confession starts with a humble heart that wants to be forgiven.** In Psalm 32:3, David said, "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long." We acknowledge that we fall short in who God made us be. Sometimes, our sin seems more profound and ugly; other times, it is subtle and quiet. Both offend God. Both should bring us to our knees. We simply must seek to be right with God.

A.W. Tozer, in *Knowledge of the Holy*, says it like this:

Until we have seen ourselves as God sees us, we are not likely to be much disturbed over conditions around us as long as they do not get so far out of hand as to threaten our comfortable way of life. We have learned to live with unholiness and have come to look upon it as the natural and expected thing.

The wondrous thing is, when we confess to God, He always forgives. *Always*. Just a few verses later in Psalm 32, David is moved to action: "I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin" (v. 5). **In confession, we breathe a sigh of relief knowing that we are forgiven.** God casts our sin as far as the east is from the west. *Forgiven forever*.

What kind of God is this who never holds a grudge and never brings up our iniquities? It's the God we want all to know. It's the Prodigal Son's Father. **Having fully experienced the freedom of**

**forgiveness, we extend extra grace and mercy to others.** True confession that leads to complete forgiveness impacts everything we do and every relationship we have. The fruit of kindness and goodness and gentleness fall from our trees freely.

**Finally, the discipline of confession empowers us to show & share the gospel message with those who don't yet know**

**Jesus.** The metanarrative is overflowing with stories of God's mercy and kindness towards those who have sinned against God. We desire all to know they are truly loved in Christ and forgiven of their wrongs. We speak of the love that captures guilt and shame forever.

**Questions for Reflection:**

- *Do you find confession unnerving, or comforting? Why?*
- *How has God met you during times of confession in the past?*
- *In what ways can you use confession to draw near to the heart of God?*
- *How do you view the role of confession in personal evangelism?*

## **DAY 7: SACRIFICE**

When you hear the word 'sacrifice', what comes to mind? Merriam-Webster gives us this definition: *an act of offering to a deity something precious*. Here, the word we seek to understand is 'precious'. Something of great value and worth. Two short parables in Matthew 13 get to the heart of this: the Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Parable of the Pearl of Great Value:

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. (Matthew 13:44-46)

**So in the discipline of sacrifice, we must begin with acknowledging idolatry.** We are all pulled towards things other than God. *What are you pulled towards?* Defining and naming our idols which we have placed above our love of the Savior is a critical step towards deepening our relationship with God. Is our first love money or the praise of others or our children or our work? Here, we harken back to the discipline of confession in many ways. We confess that we have not loved God as we should.

God forgives but doesn't stop there. How, then, do we begin to place God at the center of all our days again? We can't do it alone. **The discipline of sacrifice cries for the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.** Galatians 2:20 says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." As living sacrifices, we don't wiggle on the table; instead, we readily submit to the will of God and His authority and work in our lives. *Christ in us. Come, Holy Spirit. Maranatha.* We need God's power to overcome our tendencies to turn to things other than Him.

But what is the true sacrifice God desires? Jesus tells us in Matthew 9:13: "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." **Sacrifice is found in the transformation of our hearts.** Sacrifice is displayed in how we live our lives and how we respond to others. In short, true sacrifice is putting others above ourselves. And this deeply translates into evangelism.

**The discipline of sacrifice must always end in showing & sharing the love of Jesus in a broken and hurting world.** It shrugs off the idols of *fear, complacency, and self*, and extends, with two arms open, the good news of Jesus. If Christ is now in us, then He desires to make Himself known to others. Our offering to God is allowing Him to do that through us. We become vessels of mercy and grace to a world drowning in sin and sadness.

**Questions for Reflection:**

- *Do you find the idea of sacrifice to God unnerving, or comforting? Why?*
- *When you think of sacrifice, what comes to mind as you think about your life? In what ways have you placed other things above God?*
- *How can you best shrug off the idols in your life?*
- *How can you sacrificially give of your time, talents, or resources to be a witness for Christ?*
- 

## **DAY 8: SUBMISSION**

The Book of Habakkuk ends with a powerful submission: Though the fig tree does not bud and there is no fruit on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though the flocks disappear from the pen and there are no herds in the stalls, yet I will celebrate in the Lord; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation! (Hab. 3:17-18)

Habakkuk knew that things were not going well. Yet he did not turn away from God. Job did a similar thing several millennia prior, as did David. God's *Omni* characteristics unilaterally give Him the right to pour both good and bad things on all. Matthew 5:45 says, "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

**The discipline of submission begins with a recognition of who God is.** William Booth once said, "The greatness of a man's power is the measure of his surrender." Jesus models this. In the garden of Gethsemane, He "fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will'" (Matt. 26:39). He submitted to His Father, who He knew had the good of all in mind. He put His trust in One whom He knew to be trustworthy.

We can submit because we are under the strong hand of a God who saves. **Submission rightly places us where we need to be.** Psalm



91:4 gives us great imagery for this: "He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings, you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart." We are the sheep of *His pasture*, not the other way around. There is no need to usurp His control as King and Shepherd, for with Him we are safe, and without Him we are nothing. Our posture of submission reminds us that as King of our lives, God is the one who issues mandates. **Submission leads to evangelism.** We submit and obey all God asks of us. Evangelism is an act of love, but it is grounded in a command we have been given: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..." (Matt. 28:19). The thought may terrify us, but it is necessary to remember that when we submit to the God of all, we are never alone: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

Our evangelism is His evangelism. As we share about Jesus it is His Spirit who does the work. Our submission, when expressed in showing & sharing the love of Jesus to others, is a humble act of worship that allows the Spirit of God to move within us and through us.

### **Questions for Reflection:**

- *Do you find submission unnerving, or comforting? Why?*
- *When you think of submission, what comes to mind as you think about your life?*
- *What is the relationship between submission and being a disciple of Christ?*
- *How can submission lead us into more frequent and fruitful gospel conversations?*

## **DAY 9: FELLOWSHIP**

Our faith is not our own. In the 21st century, in individualist cultures, we may believe that there are two critical people: God and ourselves. Our discipleship becomes one in which we believe that as long as we have God, we don't need others. Even a cursory reading of scripture nullifies this view of the Christian faith. The Body of Christ and the collective community of faith—be it the Israelites in the Old Testament, the Jewish people of Jesus' time, or the Gentiles who were grafted in—are all family.

Theologian and scholar N.T. Wright says it this way: "If God is our father, the church is our mother." The words are those of the Swiss Reformer John Calvin ... it is as impossible, unnecessary, and undesirable to be a Christian all by yourself as it is to be a newborn baby all by yourself."

Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12 reads,

Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

**The discipline of fellowship begins with a willingness and openness to be vulnerable to others.** Each of us desires to be known and loved for who we are. In a world which praises our accomplishments and accolades, we long for places of authenticity. If we are honest, we know we cannot keep up the charade for long and deep desire to connect with others who feel the same. In fellowship, we commit to showing the good, the bad, and the ugly to those who are journeying alongside us.

**In fellowship, we also work to meet with our community often.**

Acts 2:46-47 is our model:

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.

Every day! Can you imagine that? In the busyness of life, where are we regularly seeking community to worship God and grow in our relationship with Him and as the Body of Christ? We mustn't feel guilty or embarrassed if we do not meet daily, but are seeking *regular fellowship* with other Christians to grow us and encourage us in our faith, and vice versa?

The Acts 2 passage does not end there. There's a powerful conclusion in v. 47: "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." **Fellowship leads to evangelism!** Their worship of God and edification in the faith resulted in hearts that overflowed the goodness of God onto all those they met! Peter and John boast of this in Acts 4:20: "As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." Evangelist D.L. Moody once said, "When a man is filled with the Word of God you cannot keep him still. If a man has got the Word, he must speak or die."

The faith of others inspires us and moves us towards the greater witness. And the double blessing of fellowship is that as we are moved to greater witness, we then have a community of people to rejoice with us in what God is doing in our witness! True fellowship cries together and rejoices together. It moves together in unity on a single purpose of making God known in all ways possible in and through us.

**Questions for Reflection:**

- *Do you find fellowship with other Christians to be unnerving, or comforting? Why?*
- *Give an example of how another Christian has blessed you and/or spoken into your life.*
- *How often are you spending time with fellow Christians?*
- *How can you better invest in other Christians such that more frequent and fruitful gospel conversations occur?*