

## Spiritual Disciplines Guide

# Spiritual Disciplines Guide

Basic Practices to Help you Grow in Your Walk with Jesus

# Spiritual Disciplines Guide

Ask yourself this question: 5 years from today, will I be more like Jesus? If no, why not? If yes, why so? This is not a question of if God will love or accept you, but rather if you will experience the joy of submitting more and more of your life to Him. In other words, in 5 years from today, how much will your faith have grown and what are you going to do about?

## Training for Godliness

Without question, there are many reasons why we *won't* be more like Jesus 5 years from today. Life is hard, life is busy, life is complicated. Perhaps you work long hours or awkward shifts. Perhaps entertainment has a more dominant place in your life than it should. Perhaps your cell phone sees more of your eye contact than loved ones. Either way, there are many reasons why we won't experience the joy and the love of Jesus over the next 5 years.

But we must not make the mistake of letting our *reasons* become *excuses*. Instead, we must decide that we are going to pursue a life of obedience—despite the obstacles in our way. The good news is this life of obedience also produces the greatest joy. The battle is worth it. Perhaps this is why the apostle Paul said:

But have nothing to do with pointless and silly myths. Rather, *train yourself* in godliness. For the training of the body has limited benefit, but *godliness is beneficial in every way*, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance. For this reason we *labor and strive*, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. — 1 Timothy 4:7–10 CSB

If we want to be godly, then we must train ourselves and be intentional with our spiritual growth. The process is training, but the goal is godliness. By godliness, Paul doesn't simply mean the outward appearance of our lives (i.e. go to church on Sunday and make sure you don't drink, smoke, or cuss throughout the week). This is mere behavior modification, which is certainly a *part* of godliness, but it is not the *definition* of godliness.

Instead, Paul is talking about becoming like Jesus in every aspect of our lives. In the way we think, in the way we feel, and in the way we live—godliness is about a transformation of our hearts to love what God loves and hate what God hates. As one author put it, "...the true indicator of spiritual well-being is growth in the ability to love God and people."<sup>1</sup>

This is something we never arrive at, but rather something we are always in process of experiencing more or less of. However, to experience any measure of godliness, we must train ourselves. We must discipline our lives so that we make time to intentionally grow in the ways God has instructed. The result? Jesus told us:

If you keep my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. "I have told you these things so that *my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete*." — John 15:10–11 CSB

Did you catch that? Faith & obedience *to* Christ leads to joy *in* Christ. In this guide, we've listed five spiritual disciplines that we think will help you cultivate your faith and obedience to Jesus so you can experience joy in Him. There are many more disciplines we could have listed and there is much more we could say. However, we've listed five to help you get started in your journey toward godliness.

---

<sup>1</sup> John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 45.

# Spiritual Disciplines Guide

## Before You Get Started

Before we introduce these disciplines to you, we need to make some very important observations about how these disciplines fit into everyday life.

First, the integration of these disciplines into your everyday life must take into consideration the complicated nature of work, family, play, and everything else that life entails. Practically, this means you must decide how to prioritize these spiritual disciplines in a way that is realistic and practical for *you* (and *your family*).

Second, spiritual disciplines are about personal *growth*, not personal *salvation*. The practice of spiritual disciplines is about helping you *experience—not earn—the* grace of Jesus.

Third, the goal of spiritual disciplines is to become more like Jesus in the way we think, feel, and live. It's so easy to become a self-righteous person who defines your maturity by how many spiritual disciplines you do or by how consistently you do them. But the greatest commandment is not to do the spiritual disciplines, but to *love God* and *love people*:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. — Matthew 23:37–39 CSB

Our focus must not center on the *practice* of the disciplines, but rather the *goal* of the disciplines: loving God and loving others (see 1 Timothy 1:5).

Finally, *less is more*. Don't get hung up trying to read the Bible in a year or pray for an hour a day. That's great if you do, but don't bite off more than you can chew. This only creates frustration, disappointment, and disenchantment with the pursuit of spiritual growth altogether. Let's not do this.

Instead, as you look at your life and read through the disciplines in this guide, you may ask yourself some questions:

- What is the *first—or the next—*discipline I need to place into my life?
- What is a discipline that would be the easiest to add to my schedule?
- What are some small sacrifices I can make (i.e. 15 minutes in the morning or at night) to place one of these disciplines into my life?

Life is complicated, but spiritual growth is not hopeless—even for the busiest among us. As you read through this guide, think about what small steps you can take to begin putting the discipline of intentional spiritual growth into your life. In the end, the goal is to experience the joy of Jesus. Paul reminds us that “...*godliness is beneficial in every way*, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (1 Timothy 4:8).

# Spiritual Disciplines Guide

## Discipline #1: Bible Study

Without question, the most important spiritual discipline is the discipline of studying God's Word. On more than one occasion, the Scriptures tell us that the happiest people are those who seek to know, love, and obey God's Word.

How happy is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked or stand in the pathway with sinners or sit in the company of mockers! Instead, *his delight is in the Lord's instruction*, and he meditates on it day and night. He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams that bears its fruit in its season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. — Psalm 1:1–3 CSB

Happy are those who keep his decrees and seek him with all their heart. — Psalm 119:2 CSB

Without revelation people run wild, but one who follows divine instruction will be happy. — Proverbs 29:18 CSB

Do you want to experience the joy of following Christ? Then you must be a student of the Scriptures. This doesn't mean you become a scholar or an expert. Jesus called us to have a posture of humble, child-like faith (Matthew 18:3). This doesn't mean have a *childish* faith that is uninformed, but a *child-like* faith is humble, submissive, and simply obedient. This happens as we commit ourselves to a lifetime of studying, trusting, and responding to the Scriptures.

I will look favorably on this kind of person: one who is humble, submissive in spirit, and trembles at my word. — Isaiah 66:2b CSB

Without question, this is the most important of all spiritual disciplines, because it is the foundation for every other discipline (i.e. prayer, serving, evangelism, etc.). Moreover, it is the most important discipline because it addresses our greatest spiritual need, which is to hear from God. Again, "Without revelation people run wild" (Proverbs 29:18a).

So, let's get practical. Where should you start in reading the Bible? Here are a couple of options:

1. **Old Testament & New Testament Mix.** Read one chapter a day from the Old Testament and one chapter a day from the New Testament. You can mix this up however you'd like, but here are a few examples:
  - Psalms // The Gospel of Mark
  - Proverbs // Romans
  - Psalm // Colossians
2. **Book Study.** Do a deep dive into a single book of the Bible like the Gospel of John, Romans, or 1 Samuel. Here are some study tools you may want to look into:
  - A Good Study-Bible like *The ESV Study Bible* or *The CSB Study Bible*.
  - A Good Commentary like *The John MacArthur Whole Bible Commentary*
  - Individual Books of the Bible Studies by *Crossway*.
3. **A Topical Study.** Download the YouVersion Bible App and search through any of their topical Studies.

However you decide to begin reading the Bible, the most important thing is that you *start* and then *keep going*. If you miss a day (or two or three or seven), just pick it back up the next day. There is grace for your failures, but there is also grace for your obedience. Either way, get into the Word of God so the Word of God can get into you!

# Spiritual Disciplines Guide

**Helpful Tip: Carve Out the Time.** Reading the Bible is kind of like eating a meal. When you don't plan to have breakfast, lunch, or dinner, you usually don't. The result? You're starved of nutrition and then just eat whatever is convenient. When we don't intentionally carve out time to read God's Word, our souls starve and we settle for spiritual nuggets and out-of-context Bible verses on social media. God has so much better for us.

But we must be intentional, even a bit obsessed with having intentional time in God's Word. It doesn't have to be long by any means. In fact, we'd suggest you try to carve out 15 minutes in your day to be with Jesus by reading His Word. Make this your time with Him and then protect it. Don't shame yourself if you miss a day, just pick it back up.

When you miss a meal, you don't stop eating altogether. When you miss a day in God's Word, don't stop reading it—just plan your next meal time with Jesus.

**Helpful Tip: Memorizing Scripture.** One way followers of Jesus have maximized their time spent in God's Word is by selecting a verse to commit to memory. Everyone approaches this differently, but you may begin to try and memorize a verse a week or a verse a day. Either way, being intentional about remembering God's word can be a very effective way to retain and apply God's Word.

Moreover, this will help you resist the temptations from the world, the flesh, and the devil. Much like putting bullets in the chamber of a gun, memorizing Scripture puts ammunition in our hearts for the battle of faith. Does it take a little extra work? No question. But is it worth the effort? Absolutely.

I have treasured your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you... I will meditate on your precepts and think about your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word. — Psalm 119:11, 15–16 CSB

## Extra Resources

### Some Things to Read

- “How to Study the Bible” available on our Resource page
- “H.E.A.R. Bible Study Card” available on our Resource page
- “The Clarity of the Bible” available on our Resource page
- *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible* by Robert Plummer
- *Taking God at His Word* by Kevin DeYoung
- *Women of the Word* by Jen Wilkin

### Some Things to Listen to

- Podcast: “Ask Pastor John” with John Piper
- Podcast: “Word Matters” with Trevin Wax
- Podcast: “Real Truth, Real Quick” with Todd Wagner
- Podcast: “Knowing Faith” by the Village Church
- Podcast: “The Bible Project”

# Spiritual Disciplines Guide

## Discipline #2: Prayer

“Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16 CSB).

Prayer is not just a spiritual discipline, but a royal invitation into the throne room of God. You may be at your coffee table, driving in your vehicle, or waiting in line at the grocery store, it doesn't matter. When you to pray you enter into the royal presence of God Almighty.

Let that sink in for a moment.

The King of the universe invites us to pray in order to give us the blessing of His “grace to help us in time of need.” What an *awesome* privilege. Through Jesus Christ, we have become guests of honor in the throne room of God. But there's more: God is not just our great King who invites us into His presence; He is also our Heavenly Father who inclines His ear to us.

For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, “*Abba, Father!*” — Romans 8:15 CSB

And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “*Abba, Father!*” So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then God has made you an heir. — Galatians 4:6–7 CSB

Because of Jesus, we have unlimited access to God. However, when we think about prayer, we must not think in terms of presenting a wish list to Santa Clause. No doubt, God wants us to present our needs and concerns to him (Philippians 4:6–7), but when Jesus taught us to pray, He also taught us how to *prioritize our lives*. In the famous “Lord's Prayer,” Jesus reveals what should be the guiding priorities of our lives and in this way, shows us how we should pray:

Therefore, you should pray like this: Our Father in heaven, your name be honored as holy. Your kingdom come. Your 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 do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. — Matthew 6:9–13 CSB

Notice how Jesus tells us to prioritize the glory and the will of God. Moreover, He tells us to pray against evil and temptation. Simply put: Jesus is showing us how to prioritize God's agenda over our own. He's showing us how to put Kingdom matters over earthly matters.

This doesn't mean that these are the *only words* we can pray, but rather this is the *proper outline* for our prayers. Practically, this means beginning your time of prayer with praise and thanksgiving to God, asking Him to give you a passion and vision for His work in your life, *and then* moving into personal requests for faith, wisdom, holiness, compassion, etc.<sup>2</sup>

This doesn't mean we shouldn't or can't pray for earthly needs. Jesus instructs us to ask God for “our daily bread,” which is an abbreviation for earthly concerns. Again, Jesus isn't telling us the *limits* of our prayers as much as he's telling us the *priorities* of our prayers. The Psalmist put it this way, “Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you your hearts desires” (Psalm 37:4 CSB).

---

<sup>2</sup> For great examples of this, see the prayers of Paul in passages like: Romans 15:13; Ephesians 1:15–20; Ephesians 3:14–21; Philippians 1:9–11; Colossians 1:9–11; 1 Thessalonians 3:11–13.

# Spiritual Disciplines Guide

Translation: when we learn to love what God loves and desire what He desires, He gives us the things we pray for. Why? Because our prayers become an expression of *His* heart, *His* will, and *His* agenda on earth (see also John 14:12–14; 1 John 5:14–14).

Praying this way may feel completely foreign to you and that's ok! Consider this practical advice from Donald Whitney:

If you've ever learned a foreign language, you know that you learn it best when you actually have to speak it. The same is true with the "foreign language" of prayer. There many good resources for learning how to pray, but the best way to learn how to pray is to pray."<sup>3</sup>

We can listen to advice on prayer until our heads fill up like a balloon, but the only way to actually learn to pray as Jesus commanded is to begin praying as Jesus commanded. Over time, you'll notice how God's priorities become your priorities. In this process of prayer, God shapes us into the people He wants us to be, because we've learned to prioritize and pray for the things that matter most.

**Helpful Tip #1: Pray the Bible.** Many believers find it helpful to turn the words of Scripture into their own personal prayers. This is always a good idea, because it's a pretty good guide for knowing how to pray for God's will in our lives. As you do this, you'll notice that God's will is less concerned with our outward circumstances and more concerned with inward transformation.

To give an example, let's say you read Romans 12 in your Bible reading for the day and you really want to focus on praying verse 9 which reads: "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good." You might pray for these realities to become true in your life by saying the following:

*Father, teach me to be a person of **genuine love**. I know this is how Jesus loved me, so please teach me to love in the same way. Teach me also to **hate what is evil**—teach me to **hate sin** and **love what is good**. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.*

**Helpful Tip #2: Journaling** Another tool believers have found helpful through the years is journaling. In some sense, the entire book of Psalms is a series of journals inspired by the Holy Spirit. Journaling is a great way to express our hearts to God, reflect on His promises, and write down our prayers. As we do this over time, we can look back on previous journal entries to remember God's faithfulness in the storms of life and even specific answers to prayer He has provided.

**Helpful Tip #3: Fasting.** Jesus expected His followers to combine prayer with fasting. That's right—*fasting*. Jesus didn't say, "*If you fast...*", but rather, "*When you fast...*" (Matthew 6:16–17). There are a number of ways people define fasting, but in general "Fasting is a believer's voluntary abstinence from food *for a spiritual purpose*."<sup>4</sup> In other words, fasting is not meant to be a form of torment, but rather a method for *intensified* and *focused prayer*.

---

<sup>3</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines For The Christian Life*, 2nd Edition (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 85.

<sup>4</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 192 emphasis added.

# Spiritual Disciplines Guide

Practically, this comes down to making three choices:

1. Identify a specific issue you would like to devote some specific prayer to (i.e. pride, anger, lust, marriage problems, difficulty at work, etc.)
2. Select a day (24 hour fast) or a time period (i.e. 8–5; temporary fast) to pray about this issue. Every time you feel the sensation of hunger, that's your alarm bell to pray and seek the Lord.
3. Commit to this time of prayer and fasting.

You may be surprised that what seems a bit crazy to our world of self-indulgence is actually a great tool for spiritual relief and growth. The best way to find out is to give this a try for yourself.

## Extra Resources

### Some Things to Read

- “How to Pray” available on our Resources page
- *Praying the Bible* by Donald Whitney
- *Prayer* by Timothy Keller

### Some Things to Listen to

- Podcast: “Pray the Word” with David Platt

# Spiritual Disciplines Guide

## Discipline #3: Serving

One of the greatest tragedies of living in the fallen world is that we become so self-oriented that we willingly bypass the needs of others. Even as Christians, we can be radically content to *be served* by Jesus in His life, death, and resurrection, and yet be radically content to *not serve* others.

As Christians, we must not let this misplaced contentment abide in our hearts. Instead, we must “train ourselves in godliness” by committing our lives to serve others. Indeed, Jesus told us:

Then he said to them all, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will save it. — Luke 9:23–24 CSB

Die to yourself. Those are strong words. Yes, indeed. But they are strong words with a promise: you will save your life! Translation: you will experience the true and rich blessings from God as you commit to serve people in this life. For all of us who claim to follow Jesus, this is a non-negotiable. Because He has served us greatly, we serve others sacrificially.

Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross. — Philippians 2:5–8 CSB

At Stonegate, we talk a lot about servant-leadership, because we believe true leaders serve and true servants lead. Scan the leadership section at Barnes and Noble next time you’re there and you’ll notice that this is something consistently taught by authors on leadership today.<sup>5</sup>

The point is simple: the ones who *lead people most effectively* are the ones who *serve people most faithfully*. Practically, what does this actually look like? Here are some suggestions:

- 1. Start with the People Around You.** Before you try to save the world and inaugurate world peace, you may start with being kind to your spouse, encouraging your co-worker, taking dinner to a neighbor, or picking up trash around your office. Jesus hasn’t called you to save the world (that’s His job), but He has called you to walk in a spirit of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control” (Galatians 5:22–23) with the people in your life. Right now, think of 2–3 people you know you need to begin serving with your words, your attitude, and your deeds and start there.
- 2. Talk to a Ministry Leader About Where to Serve.** You already know this, but Stonegate is a big church family full of lots of kids and lots of places to serve. As a result, we genuinely desire for people to plug in, start serving, and experience the personal discipleship that comes as a result. You can call the church office at 432-694-5100 or speak to someone at the info desk on Sundays.

As you think about this, realize that you never graduate from the basic “little things” of serving. Sometimes you don’t see the immediate impact of your serving and sometimes you do. As anyone who’s followed Jesus for a while can tell you, there are seasons of planting—when you

---

<sup>5</sup> See for example Simon Sinek, *Why Eaters Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don’t* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014).

# Spiritual Disciplines Guide

invest a lot of time and energy—and there are also seasons of harvest—when the fruits of your labor really shine bright.

Sometimes these seasons overlap, but in the end we serve primarily because we are followers of our great King-Jesus who served us unto His death. This great King promises a life of true joy through a discipline of service. Serving is not flashy and its not fancy, but it is faithful to the call of discipleship Jesus gave us. Moreover, God richly rewards us with deeper experiences of His presence as we commit to a lifestyle of service.

## Extra Resources

### Some Things to Read

- *Spiritual Leadership* by J. Oswald Sanders
- *Rescuing Ambition* by Dave Harvey
- *Dare to Serve* by Cheryl Bachelder

### Some Things to Listen to

- Podcast: “The Craig Groeschel Leadership Podcast” with Craig Groeschel
- Podcast: “The Andy Stanley Leadership Podcast” with Andy Stanley
- Podcast: “The Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast” with Carey Nieuwhof
- Podcast: “Start the Conversation” with Patrick Payton

# Spiritual Disciplines Guide

## Discipline #4: Evangelism

“The gospel came to you because it was heading to someone else. God never intended for your salvation to be an end, but a beginning. God saved you to be a conduit through whom His glorious, life-changing gospel would flow to others.”<sup>6</sup>

Re-read that paragraph. Let that sink in for a moment. The God of the universe has chosen *you* to be an instrument in His gracious plan to save the world. Maybe that excites you or perhaps it terrifies you. Either way, the truth remains: God’s plan to save the world is accomplished through the personal evangelism His people engage in.

He also said to them, “This is what is written: The Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day, and repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem.— Luke 24:46–47 CSB

Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you.” — John 20:21 CSB

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ’s behalf: “Be reconciled to God.” — 2 Corinthians 5:20 CSB

What is evangelism? There are many definitions out there, but a simple definition is this: *Evangelism is sharing the message of God’s love for the world through Christ.* In other words, Evangelism is the act of verbally sharing with someone what Jesus has done for them to be saved. There are a variety of ways to do this, but at the center of evangelism is the art of connecting with people in a way that helps them see Christ and their need for Him.

But you may be thinking to yourself: “That sounds *terrifying*. I could *never* do that! What would I say? What if they get upset or ask me a question I can’t answer? I’ll look so stupid!” These are all understandable concerns. Moreover, you’ve probably seen your fair share of people talk about the message of Jesus in a harsh, judgmental, or self-righteous way. Understandably, you don’t want to be like them.

So, what do you do? First, we need to make it clear: evangelism is a spiritual *discipline* as much as any other spiritual discipline is, which means it will take work and effort. However, just like any other discipline (spiritual or otherwise), the more you do it, the better you become. You may not naturally think about sharing Jesus with people throughout your day, but here are three reasons why you should:

- Because He wants you to have a front row seat to His grace at work to save people.
- Because He wants you to experience the joy of sharing His goodness with others.
- Because He wants to experience the joy of being stretched by uncomfortable circumstances that force you to face your insecurities.

The fact is, Jesus has commissioned all His followers to be His agents of rescue. You can sit on the side-lines if you want, but you’ll miss out on the growth, progress, and joy that comes from playing the game.

Think about it this way: Imagine you’re a doctor. You and your team recently discovered the cure for cancer—all cancer. Would you keep this to yourself? Of course not. You would do

---

<sup>6</sup> Robby Gallaty with Randall Collins, *Growing Up: How To Be A Disciple Who Makes Disciples* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2013), xix.

# Spiritual Disciplines Guide

everything you could to get this cure into the hands of as many people as you could. Why? Because human lives are at stake and you've just discovered the very thing that can save millions.

Now, if we would share the cure for cancer to save human lives, then why wouldn't we share the cure *for sin* to save those very same lives? You see, we're all infected with the spiritual cancer of sin that eats away at our souls. But we have been given the gospel of Jesus Christ—the cure for our cancer! Why wouldn't we share it with anyone we could?

Perhaps your love for Christ has grown stale or perhaps your love for people has been absent. That's ok! Perhaps God is inviting you to seek Him for a renewed love for Him and others. Perhaps you need to take a *risk*—yes, a risk to feel awkward, look strange, or be rejected—and ask someone what they think about Jesus, the church, or religion in general. A basic question along these lines can be a very easy and natural in road to sharing the gospel with someone.

Jesus has given us the joy and the privilege of evangelism, but “Unless we discipline ourselves for evangelism, we can easily excuse ourselves from ever sharing the gospel with anyone.”<sup>7</sup>

Speaking Practically then, what does this look like? Here are some suggestions:

1. **Establish the Connection.** For most people, they don't want to listen to a word you have to say until they feel comfortable with you. As a result, we must work hard to build a bridge between ourselves and the people we want to share Jesus with. A good place to start is by asking them to lunch, having them over to your house, or doing something *besides* talking about Jesus. Yes, you want to share Jesus, but let that be your *goal*, not your *starting point*. Even if you share Jesus with a random stranger, start with *them*—*build a bridge*—and *then* talk about Jesus.
2. **Ask Questions.** “A fool does not delight in understanding, but only wants to show off his opinions” (Proverbs 18:2). You've probably been in a conversation in which the other person did most of the talking—in which case it was more of a lecture than a genuine conversation. When it comes to sharing Jesus with someone, one of the most practical things you can do is ask them questions about *their* life, *their interests*, *their* church experience, and *their* personal beliefs. Not only does this communicate that you care, but it can also open doors for you to share the hope of Jesus with them.
3. **Less is More.** Don't believe the lie that says you have to present a well-crafted, full informed gospel presentation when you share Jesus. Very often, it's little questions or statements that make all the difference—especially when they're not covered up by too much verbal clutter. Don't focus so much on “closing the deal,” but on “planting a seed” that you'll continue to water and attend to over time. Evangelism is quite often a long-term process, so feel free to slow down, take your time, and say only what needs to be said (see Proverbs 15:23; 1 Corinthians 3:5–8).
4. **Serve in our Next Gen. Ministry.** Without question, one of the best ways to share Jesus with people who don't know him is by serving in our Next Generation ministry. In this ministry, you'll have an opportunity to share Jesus *every week* with kids and students who don't know Christ. Yes, they will equip you! If this interests you, then call the church office at 432-694-5100.
5. **Just Be Faithful.** When it comes to Evangelism, *you're not responsible for the results*. That's God's business. Your job is to simply be faithful and leave the results in His hands. Yes, there will be times when it is awkward. Yes, you will be told things you're not sure how to answer. That's ok! Use these as opportunities to *grow*, not *quit*. In the end, God uses the *willing*—not the *perfect*. The question is: are *you* willing?

---

<sup>7</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 130.

# Spiritual Disciplines Guide

## Extra Resources

### Some Things to Read

- *Sharing Jesus Without Freaking Out* by Alvin Read
- *Questioning Evangelism* by Randy Newman
- *The Unbelievable Gospel* by Jonathan Dodson
- *Tactics* by Greg Koukl.

### Some Things to Listen to:

- Podcast: “Stand to Reason” with Greg Koukl
- Podcast: “Impact 360 Institute” with Jonathan Murrow
- Podcast: “Apologetics Evangelism” with Dylan McCabe
- Podcast: “Crossexamined” with Frank Turek

# Spiritual Disciplines Guide

## Discipline #5: Biblical Community

We now come to our last discipline in this guide. All through the Scriptures, followers of Jesus are instructed to be in biblical community and given powerful examples of what it could look like in our own lives.

I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. — John 13:34–35 CSB

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. — Acts 2:42–47 CSB

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. — Hebrews 10:25–26 NIV

These verses give us both the instruction and model for biblical community, but we must remember that community always occurs in a fallen world. As such, no church-community will ever be perfect. Moreover, the busyness of life, the fluctuation of schedules, and the days of apathy we all experience will often get in the way.

But this is why biblical community is a spiritual *discipline*—something we must *train* ourselves to do, even when challenges persist. Moreover, many have found over the years that the discipline of biblical community helps them practice the other spiritual disciplines as well.

If you are connected to a Bible Study, it's fair to say you're going to read the Bible and pray. If you connect to a small group, there's a good chance you're going to read God's Word, pray together, and even be challenged to serve one another and share Jesus with the people in your life.

In this way, biblical community is a wonderful over-arching discipline that helps motivate and encourage the other four. Moreover, in biblical community, you're engaged in a relational dynamic where God's Spirit is actively working to change how you think, feel, and live out your everyday life. That's why we believe that genuine transformation can truly happen in biblical community.

But you must decide to make this a priority. No one can do it for you. However, if you decide to make this a commitment in your life, we believe God will genuinely change you to be more like Jesus and you'll enjoy the benefits of that personally. In fact, here's a challenge: over the next 6 months—make it a point to consistently engage in one or two of the practical suggestions we have below.

Take a risk, step out of your comfort zone, and embrace what God has for you in biblical community. The fact is, when we don't have biblical community, we miss out on so much of the transforming grace God wants to give us through relationships with His people—messy as they sometimes may be.

# Spiritual Disciplines Guide

With this in mind, here are some practical suggestions:

1. **Weekly Church Attendance.** This may sound elementary, but for many, getting to church every Sunday is quite a challenge—and we feel the difference in our lives. The truth is we need the consistent discipline of corporate worship, corporate prayer, and the corporate listening to God’s Word preached. It makes a difference. Even if every week is unrealistic for you in this season, shoot for a few times a month. Consider if this is a season when you need to give up some weekend commitments to make this a priority. Maybe that’s not an option for you in this season and that’s ok! But maybe this is a good time to plan for an extended season of making some adjustments and planning to gather with God’s people on Sundays.
2. **Join a Small Group, Bible Study, or come to Marriage Night.** Paul put it this way: “We cared so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God *but also our own lives*, because you had become dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 2:8). Small groups, Bible Studies, and our weekly Marriage Night for couples are three ways we attempt to help people meet each other, get connected, start friendships, and experience genuine biblical community. You may have reservations; you may not like people or get uncomfortable in groups. That’s understandable, but these may be the very things God wants to change in your heart through a group of people seeking Jesus and helping you do the same. Just something to consider, but the point is simple: joining a small group can be a great way for you to experience biblical community. You can go online ([www.stonegatefellowship.com](http://www.stonegatefellowship.com)) or call the church office (432-694-5100) to find out what this could specifically look like for you.
3. **Serve in a Ministry Area.** A great way to invite biblical community into your life is by experiencing it as a by-product of serving. There’s something special that happens when a group of people partner together in the struggle for something—a task, a project, or the salvation of a teenager. Again, if you haven’t already, call the church office to find out how you can plug in and serve in a ministry area. Not only will you serve others, but you may just experience God serving you by bringing some biblical community into your life.

## Extra Resources

### Some Things to Read:

- *Saturate* by Jeff Vanderstelt
- *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- *Rediscovering Discipleship* by Robby Gallaty

### Some Things to Listen To:

- Podcast: “Ransomed Heart” with John Eldredge

# Spiritual Disciplines Guide

## Conclusion

We began this guide by asking you a question: in 5 years from today, how much will your faith have grown and what are you going to do about? The truth is, you don't really know where your faith will be in 5 years, but you can make a pretty good prediction that if you will train yourself for godliness, you will genuinely be more like Jesus in 5 years than you are today.

Yes, it will be difficult at times and yes, there will be times when you feel like you're not growing at all. The truth is we rarely ever feel ourselves growing while it's happening. It's like walking up to an apple tree and just starrng—waiting to see the fruit expand in size, shape, and color. Good luck doing that for an hour.

You're better off coming back to the tree after several weeks and observing the contrast between the fruit of today with the fruit of two weeks ago. That's how spiritual growth works too—spiritual fruit doesn't just burst out of our skin, declaring to the world how conformed to the character of Christ we are. No, it's a slow and steady process, but over time people begin to notice—and you will too.

- Your prideful spirit becomes more humble
- Your pessimism and negativity have become more balanced with faith and hope
- Your love of money and possessions has been reduced by a generous spirit
- Your anger or bitterness is less intense, being steadily replaced by forgiveness and grace.
- Your lack of passion for Jesus is slowly being exchanged for a deep love for Him

These are just a few examples, but they are genuine experiences for you to know personally if you will commit to “train yourself in godliness” (1 Timothy 4:7). Never forget, however, that the way you become more like Jesus is not by simply doing the disciplines, but doing them as a *means* to grow in your *love* for God and others.

By the power of His Spirit, Jesus can use these practices to produce more joy in your life than you could imagine. It won't be perfect, but it will be worth it.

If you keep my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that *my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.* — John 15:10–11 CSB

## Recommended Reading on Spiritual Disciplines

- *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald Whitney
- *Growing Up* by Robby Gallaty
- *The Life You've Always Wanted* by John Ortberg
- *Habits of Grace* by David Matthis
- *The Lost Virtue of Happiness* by J.P. Moreland and Klaus Issler

# Spiritual Disciplines Guide

## Appendix

### A Forgotten Discipline: Rest and Solitude

As strange as this may feel, we want you to try something. Are you ready? Ok, here it goes: imagine *you* are *Jesus* and you've just started your public ministry (we told you this might feel strange).

There are more needy people around you than you can count. This person needs to be healed, that person needs a demon exercised, this religious leader is being a jerk, and to top it all off your disciples don't seem to have a clue what's going on. Needless to say, you're a busy person with lots of high-level responsibilities.

And yet, when we read about Jesus' life, we discover an interesting practice many of us in the West seem to have forgotten:

But the news about him spread even more, and large crowds would come together to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. Yet *he often withdrew to deserted places and prayed.* — Luke 15:15–16 CSB

Ask yourself this question: as a follower of Jesus, are you following Jesus in the area of rest and solitude? If you're like most—especially in the crazy-busy pace of the Permian Basin—the answer is a resounding *no*. It may be safe to say this is one of the most difficult spiritual disciplines to practice in today's society. We think we need to “do it all” for ourselves, for our families, for our kids, for our employers. And yet, *Jesus* didn't do it all. Kevin DeYoung explains:

Jesus didn't meet every need. He left people waiting in line to be healed. He left one town to preach to another. He hid away to pray. He got tired. He never interacted with the vast majority of people on the planet. He spent thirty years in training and only three years in ministry. He did not try to do it all. And yet, He did everything God asked him to do.<sup>8</sup>

If Jesus is our example, then we should be people who are not constantly burned out, burned up, or burning the candle at both ends. No doubt, we should work hard and be productive. But we must remember that hard work and rest are not contradictions. Rather, they are two necessary ingredients to a wholesome life. One without the other creates problems—rest without work is laziness, but work without rest is burnout. Both are bad. Balance is needed.

But you may be asking: *Why does this matter? What does this even look like?*

First, rest and solitude matter for the Christian because Jesus set us an example for how to live the most powerful and satisfying human life. Even *He* took time away to rest and devote undistracted time to be with the Father. Moreover, when God gave the 10 commandments, He commanded His people to “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8).

Why would God command this? Because *we are not Him*—we don't have an unlimited supply of energy, power, or resources. Every time we sleep, we participate in a declaration of human limitation. We need rest because we are not God. But its not just unconscious, bed-time rest

---

<sup>8</sup> Kevin DeYoung, *Crazy Busy: A (Mercifully) Short Book About A (Really) Big Problem* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 50.

## Spiritual Disciplines Guide

that we need. We need times to *be awake* and *rest*—times when we focus our minds upon the truths of God, sit quietly in His presence, and listen to His Spirit speak to our hearts.

There's a story in Luke's Gospel that illustrates this well:

While they were traveling, he entered a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who also *sat at the Lord's feet and was listening to what he said*. But *Martha was distracted by her many tasks*, and she came up and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? So tell her to give me a hand." The Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, *you are worried and upset about many things, but one thing is necessary*. Mary has made *the right choice*, and it will not be taken away from her." — Luke 11:38–42 CSB

Did you catch that? Martha was busy working *around* Jesus and taking care of all the work in the house, while Mary was content to just *be with* Jesus and hear his instruction. No question, we need to work hard and take care of our commitments (more on this below), but we also need to be people who make rest and solitude with Jesus a priority.

Somewhere in the matrix of work, family, and obligations, we need to prioritize the discipline of rest and solitude. Especially in the information age where so many distractions abound, we must make diligent efforts to unplug and say with the Psalmist, "Return to your rest, my soul, for the Lord has been good to you" (Psalm 116:7). As two authors have put it:

One of the key benefits of solitude is that when we unhook from our support systems, our defective strategies of coping with life and our negative feelings that lie just beneath the surface manifest themselves. Then we have a chance to feel and think about them and invite Jesus to give wisdom and support in developing healthier habits and strategies.<sup>9</sup>

This is why rest and solitude matter. We need temporary breaks from the pursuits that occupy our minds in order to honestly feel and respond to the deeper needs of transformation Jesus wants to work in us. John Ortberg says, "Solitude is the one place where we can gain freedom from the forces of society that will otherwise relentlessly mold us."<sup>10</sup>

Now, an important disclaimer: we're not talking about a life free from responsibilities, commitments, or even busy-ness. That's just life and the Scriptures make it clear that we should be people who have strong work ethics and take care of our priorities:

A slacker's craving will kill him because he refuses to work. — Proverbs 21:25 CSB

"If anyone isn't willing to work, he should not eat." — 2 Thessalonians 3:10 CSB

But if anyone does not provide for his own family, especially for his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. — 1 Timothy 5:8 CSB<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> J.P. Moreland & Klaus Issler, *The Lost Virtue of Happiness: Discovering the Disciplines of the Good Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 54.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 84.

<sup>11</sup> See also: Proverbs 12:11, 13:4, 24:27, 28:19, Colossians 3:22, & 1 Thessalonians 2:9.

# Spiritual Disciplines Guide

These passages make it clear that hard work and faithfulness to Jesus are hand in glove. One of the ways we evidence our faithfulness to Jesus is by working hard, providing for our families, and taking on the commitments that come with that.

When we talk about rest and solitude, we're not advocating that you forsake any of this. What we're *not* saying is that you should stop working or being busy. What we are saying is maybe you should stop *over*-working and being *crazy*-busy.

If you run your car at full throttle all the time, you'll burn out your engine. If you run your life at full throttle all the time, you'll burn out your heart. Sadly, this happens all the time and there are more people running on empty than they would like to admit.

This is why rest and solitude must be a spiritual discipline of God's people. As Donald Whitney says, "The busier you are and the more hectic your world, the more you need to plan daily spaces of silence and solitude...If you're body had an emergency, you would take the necessary time to deal with it. Don't do any less for an emergency of the soul."<sup>12</sup>

So, what could this look like for you practically? Every situation and person is different, but here are some ideas and questions to help you think through the idea of implementing some rest and solitude into your life:

1. **Ask God for Help.** First and foremost, as you consider how to input rest and solitude into your life, you may have no idea how to begin this process. You know you need to, but you don't know how. Ask God for the wisdom and guidance to know how to do this. "Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). In addition to asking God for wisdom, consider some of the following ideas as well.
2. **15 Minutes.** Is there 15 minutes in your day—in the morning, at lunch, in your car, before bed that you can spend alone with Jesus—reading a Psalm, a Proverb, or spending time in prayer?
3. **A Day Off.** Do you have the occupational freedom to take a day off and *rest*? Sleep in, take a nap, play a sport, go to a movie, play with your kids, *have some fun*? Don't let anyone fool you: one of the ways God renews our spirits is through active-rest—recreational activities that relieve stress and replenish our hearts.
4. **Intentional Solitude.** Would you consider planning a 1–2 hour segment of time in the next month to spend some intentional time reading Scripture, praying, or anything that brings spiritual renewal? One idea is carving out a lunch hour and making it like any other appointment on your calendar. It's a meeting just like any other, but this meeting is with your King and its to experience His rest and renewal.
5. **Embrace Busy Seasons, but don't Prolong Them.** Without question, there are seasons in life when we are going to be busier than normal. More obligations, tighter schedules, extra responsibilities—this is not a bad thing. When these seasons come, we prepare for them and strap in for the ride. But, these seasons need to be balanced with other seasons of less busy-ness, more flexible schedules, and more margin for rest. It's good to have seasons where we look more like Martha—busy, active, and getting things done. But we also need to have more intentional seasons to be like Mary—less busy, less active, and having more time to sit at the feet of Jesus.

---

<sup>12</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 244, 246.

# Spiritual Disciplines Guide

6. **Make Wise Trade Offs.** Sadly, in our pursuit of success and happiness, we can easily “gain the world” and yet “lose our soul” (Mark 8:36). This is not a good trade off and yet it’s one we frequently experience in our hearts, our relationships, and our lives in general. As you look at your life, are there some things you know you can begin to say “No” to so that you can begin to say “Yes” to intentionally taking care of your soul?
7. **Identify your Priorities and Write them Down.** A very helpful guide to making decisions and avoiding unnecessary busy-ness is knowing what priorities need to take a front-seat on a regular basis. If you know that you’re regularly sacrificing healthy relationships with your family at the altar of personal or financial success, then you may have your priorities turned around and need to recalibrate them. If your family is frequently exhausted and on edge because of the never-ending nature of your schedules, then it may be time to re-examine what needs to stay and what needs to go. Again, gaining the world and losing our souls is not a trade-off worth making. We always pay for it in the end.

## Extra Resources

### Some Things to Read

- *Crazy-Busy* by Kevin DeYoung
- *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* by Pete Scazzero

### Some Things to Listen To

- Podcast: “Dad Tired and Loving It”
- Podcast: “Emotionally Healthy Leadership” with Pete Scazzero