

## **SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES FOR THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

Spiritual discipline is the only way we can become mature Christians, like Christ and holy. Some spiritual disciplines are personal – you need to practice them by yourself. Some spiritual disciplines are for the whole Church to practice together. Jesus was our role model for all the spiritual disciplines. He expects us to practice them faithfully. They will lead us to experience the joy of the Lord in our Christian life.

Why do we need spiritual disciplines?

God's eternal plan leads each one of us to become like Christ. The spiritual disciplines are changing us so that we will become like Christ.

**Romans 8:29 God knew them [the people He called] before he made the world, and he chose them to be like his Son so that Jesus would be the firstborn of many brothers and sisters.**

**1 John 3:2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and we have not yet been shown what we will be in the future. But we know that when Christ comes again, we will be like him, because we will see him as he really is.**

We are not supposed to just wait for Jesus to come again and make us holy. We are supposed to do everything we can to become holy now.

**Hebrews 12:14 Try to live in peace with all people, and try to live free from sin. Anyone whose life is not holy will never see the Lord.**

How do we become holy?

**1 Timothy 4:7 But do not follow foolish stories that disagree with God's truth, but train yourself to serve God.**

...train yourself to serve God. This is a command from God.

**1 Peter 1:15-16 But be holy in all you do, just as God, the One who called you, is holy. <sup>16</sup> It is written in the Scriptures: "You must be holy, because I am holy."**

Jesus expects us to train ourselves to be holy. We must learn from Jesus and train ourselves to be like Him.

**Matthew 11:29 Accept my teachings and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit, and you will find rest for your lives.**

**Luke 9:23 Jesus said to all of them, "If people want to follow me, they must give up the things they want. They must be willing to give up their lives daily to follow me."**

Spiritual discipline (becoming a true disciple of Jesus) is part of the fruit of the Spirit.

**Galatians 5:22-23 But the Spirit produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control. There is no law that says these things are wrong.**

What are Spiritual Disciplines? They are disciplines that help us grow spiritually. Spiritual Disciplines help us become more like God.

**1 Timothy 4:8 Training your body helps you in some ways, but serving God helps you in every way by bringing you blessings in this life and in the future life, too.**

Spiritual growth is a gift from God.

**John 7:17 If people choose to do what God wants, they will know that my teaching comes from God and not from me.**

**1 Thessalonians 5:23 Now may God himself, the God of peace, make you pure, belonging only to him. May your whole self—spirit, soul, and body—be kept safe and without fault when our Lord Jesus Christ comes.**

**Hebrews 2:11 Jesus, who makes people holy, and those who are made holy are from the same family. So he is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters.**

God gave us the spiritual disciplines to help us receive His grace. The disciplines are a way for us to grow more like God (godliness).

The fruit of Spiritual Discipline

Becoming like God (godliness) does not happen quickly. It takes time and self-control for godliness to develop in us.

**2 Peter 1:6 and to your knowledge, add self-control; and to your self-control, add patience; and to your patience, add service for God;**

We will continue to grow in godliness for the rest of our life.

Three things will help us grow in our spiritual disciplines: the Holy Spirit, fellowship with other believers, and determination to continue struggling to become godly.

The Holy Spirit will help us become disciplined.

**2 Timothy 1:7 God did not give us a spirit that makes us afraid but a spirit of power and love and self-control.**

God will help us keep working to become more like God even when we are tired.

God did not design us to follow Him alone. He made us part of His family. Fellowship with other believers is important. It will help us become more disciplined. God uses other people to help make us more like Him.

**Proverbs 27:17 As iron sharpens iron, so people can improve each other.**

God brings people into your life to help us become more like Christ. How has God used another person to make you more like Christ?

God uses circumstances, problems, and troubles in your life to help make you more like Christ.

**Romans 8:28 We know that in everything God works for the good of those who love him. They are the people he called, because that was his plan.**

Physical exercise helps us keep a healthy body. Spiritual disciplines help us keep a healthy spirit. Spiritual disciplines help us seek God and know Him better.

Two Bible stories teach us about men who wanted to know God better. They had to struggle to get to know Him, but they did not give up.

**Luke 18:35-43 As Jesus came near the city of Jericho, a blind man was sitting beside the road, begging. <sup>36</sup> When he heard the people coming down the road, he asked, “What is happening?” <sup>37</sup> They told him, “Jesus, from Nazareth, is going by.” <sup>38</sup> The blind man cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” <sup>39</sup> The people leading the group warned the blind man to be quiet. But the blind man shouted even more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” <sup>40</sup> Jesus stopped and ordered the blind man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, <sup>41</sup> “What do you want me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, I want to see.” <sup>42</sup> Jesus said to him, “Then see. You are healed because you believed.” <sup>43</sup> At once the man was able to see, and he followed Jesus, thanking God. All the people who saw this praised God.**

Notice that the blind man (Bartimaeus) wanted to know God better. He did not let anyone else stop him from knowing God better.

**Luke 19:1-10 Jesus was going through the city of Jericho. <sup>2</sup> A man was there named Zacchaeus, who was a very important tax collector, and he was wealthy. <sup>3</sup> He wanted to see who Jesus was, but he was not able because he was too short to see above the crowd. <sup>4</sup> He ran ahead to a place where Jesus would come, and he climbed a sycamore tree so he could see him. <sup>5</sup> When Jesus came to that place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down! I must stay at your house today.” <sup>6</sup> Zacchaeus came down quickly and welcomed him gladly. <sup>7</sup> All the people saw this and began to complain, “Jesus is staying with a sinner!” <sup>8</sup> But Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “I will give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone, I will pay back four times more.” <sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, “Salvation has come to this house today, because this man also belongs to the family of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> The Son of Man came to find lost people and save them.”**

Notice what Zacchaeus did because he wanted to know Jesus better.

Spiritual Discipline brings us freedom, but it takes time and effort.

**2 Peter 1:3-6 Jesus has the power of God, by which he has given us everything we need to live and to serve God. We have these things because we know him. Jesus called us by his glory and goodness. <sup>4</sup> Through these he gave us the very great and precious promises. With these gifts you can share in God’s nature, and the world will not ruin you with its evil**

desires. <sup>5</sup> Because you have these blessings, do your best to add these things to your lives: to your faith, add goodness; and to your goodness, add knowledge; <sup>6</sup> and to your knowledge, add self-control; and to your self-control, add patience; and to your patience, add service for God;

**Think About This:**

**Luke 9:23** Jesus said to all of them, “If people want to follow me, they must give up the things they want. They must be willing to give up their lives daily to follow me.”

1. “Give up their lives daily” is not popular today. How is that teaching connected to Spiritual Disciplines?

**Galatians 5:22-23** But the Spirit produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control. There is no law that says these things are wrong.

2. Why is self-control one of the most obvious signs that your life is filled with the fruit of the Spirit.
3. What will you do to make sure you begin developing Spiritual Discipline in your life?

## Feasting on the Word of God

The most important Spiritual Discipline is feasting on the Word of God. You can't be a healthy Christian without a steady diet of the "meat" and the "milk" of the Word of God.

1. Have you developed a consistent (daily) habit of feasting on the Word of God?
  - a. If you have, describe it.
  - b. If you have not, what stops you from developing the habit?
- The Bible is the only place we can learn about God: who He is and what He has done.
- The Bible is the only place we can learn about the Law of God, and what Jesus did to set us free.
- The Bible is the only place we can learn about the will of God so we can live a life that pleases Him.

### Hearing/Seeing God's Word

We must discipline (train) ourselves to hear/see God's Word. It is not enough to see it only when you feel like it.

**Luke 11:27-28 As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out to Jesus, "Blessed is the mother who gave birth to you and nursed you." <sup>28</sup> But Jesus said, "No, blessed are those who hear [see] the teaching of God and obey it."**

Listening to (or watching) God's Word is not enough. We must apply His Word and obey it. That is what makes us become more like Christ.

**Romans 10:17 So faith comes from hearing [seeing] the Good News, and people hear [see] the Good News when someone tells them about Christ.**

**1 Timothy 4:13 Until I come, continue to read the Scriptures to the people, strengthen them, and teach them.**

### Reading God's Word

In 1989, *USA Today* reported a poll. Only 11% of Americans (Christians and non-Christians) read the Bible daily. Over 50% of Americans read the Bible once a month or never at all.

In 1988, a Christian group reported that 23% of people who say they are Christians *never* read the Bible.

In the 30 years since those polls, even fewer people read the Bible.

**2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for showing people what is wrong in their lives, for correcting faults, and for teaching how to live right.**

Since the Word of God is inspired, we should read it!!!!

Jesus taught us that every believer should be reading the Word of God.

**Matthew 4:4 Jesus answered, “It is written in the Scriptures, ‘A person lives not on bread alone, but by everything God says.’”**

To discipline (train) yourself to read the Word of God:

1. Find the time to read the Word of God. Try to make it the same time every day.
2. Find a Bible-reading plan. Use a bookmark to keep reading every day. Or use a one-year Bible or other plan. Electronic Bibles usually have reading plans available.
3. Find at least one word, or one phrase, or one verse to think about more closely each time you read. Think about that for a while after you finish reading. You will understand more, and you will understand more about how it applies to your life.

**Revelation 1:3 Blessed is the one who reads the words of God’s message, and blessed are the people who hear this message and do what is written in it. The time is near when all of this will happen.**

### **Studying God’s Word**

Reading the Word of God is like riding across country on a fast-moving train and looking out the window. You will see many things, but there is no time to concentrate on any of them.

Studying the Word of God is like walking slowly and observing the dirt, the rocks, the grass, the flowers, the trees, and all the animals. Sometimes you stop and pick it up, taste it, smell it, feel it.

**Ezra 7:10 Ezra had worked hard to know and obey the Teachings of the Lord and to teach his rules and commands to the Israelites.**

1. Ezra worked hard to know the Word of God.
2. Ezra worked hard to obey the Word of God.
3. Ezra worked hard to teach the Word of God.

These ideas might make your Bible study more helpful:

- Write down some of the things you noticed in the verses you read.
- Write down some questions you have about what you read.
- Look for the key words or key ideas in what you studied.
- Make an outline of the verses you study.
- Study a book of the Bible. Study a character (person in the Bible). Study a topic (like giving, selfishness, faith...). Study a specific word or phrase.

### **Memorizing God’s Word**

Do you think you have a bad memory? Do you think you can’t memorize scriptures? What if I offered you \$1,000.00 for every verse you memorize in one week? Would you be able to memorize some verses?

Isn’t the Kingdom of God worth more than a few thousand dollars?

Memorizing the Word of God will make your faith stronger. You repeat the truth of God over and over in your mind. You are preaching the truth to yourself – repeatedly!

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter stood and preached to the crowds. He preached a long sermon. Most of Peter's sermon was preaching the Word of God – Old Testament verses that he had memorized. (Acts 2:14-40). The Holy Spirit helped Peter remember the verses *because* they were already hidden in Peter's heart.

When the Word of God is hidden in your heart, the Holy Spirit can help you remember it.

**Psalm 119:11 I have taken your words to heart so I would not sin against you.**

**Colossians 3:2 Think only about the things in heaven, not the things on earth.**

**Psalm 119:97 How I love your teachings! I think about them all day long.**

Tips for memorizing scripture:

- Write out the verses on paper. Post it somewhere you will see it often.
- Draw pictures to help remind you of key words in the verse.
- Find a friend to help keep you accountable for memory verses.
- Review some verses you have already memorized every day.

### **Meditating on God's Word**

Meditation means deep thinking on the truths and spiritual reality in the scriptures.

Worldly meditation = empty your mind and see what comes in.

Godly meditation = fill your mind with the Word of God, "chew on it," and see what God teaches you.

**Philippians 4:8 Brothers and sisters, think about the things that are good and worthy of praise. Think about the things that are true and honorable and right and pure and beautiful and respected.**

**Joshua 1:8 (NIRV) Never stop reading this Book of the Law. Day and night you must think about what it says. Make sure you do everything written in it. Then things will go well with you. And you will have great success.**

**Romans 12:2 Do not be shaped by this world; instead be changed within by a new way of thinking. Then you will be able to decide what God wants for you; you will know what is good and pleasing to him and what is perfect.**

### **Applying the Word of God to your life.**

The Bible promises the blessings of God on you when you apply the Word to your life.

**James 1:22-25 Do what God's teaching says; when you only listen and do nothing, you are fooling yourselves. <sup>23</sup> Those who hear God's teaching and do nothing are like people who look at themselves in a mirror. <sup>24</sup> They see their faces and then go away and quickly forget what they looked like. <sup>25</sup> But the truly happy people are those who carefully study God's**

**perfect law that makes people free, and they continue to study it. They do not forget what they heard, but they obey what God's teaching says. Those who do this will be made happy.**

**John 13:17 If you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.**

What will you do this week to develop the discipline (habit) of Feasting on the Word of God?



## Prayer – Making us more like God

Prayer is a very important spiritual discipline. We must pray to become like Jesus. If we do not pray, we will not be like God. God expects us to pray. God hears all our prayers.

### God expects us to pray.

Matthew 6:5 When you pray...

Matthew 6:6 When you pray...

Matthew 6:9 When you pray...

Luke 11:9 ask...search...knock

**Colossians 4:2 (NIRV) Give a lot of time and effort to prayer. Always be watchful and thankful.**

### 1 Thessalonians 5:17 Pray continually

- If your schedule is busy, how can you obey Colossians 4:2 and 1 Thessalonians 5:17?

**Hebrews 4.16 Let us, then, feel very sure that we can come before God's throne where there is grace. There we can receive mercy and grace to help us when we need it.**

- If you don't see a friend for a long time, you don't know what is happening in their life anymore. It is the same way when we don't pray for a long time.

Jesus prayed.

**Luke 5:16 but Jesus often slipped away to be alone so he could pray.**

- Why do you think it is important to be alone when you pray?

We need prayer!

**John 15:5 "I am the vine, and you are the branches. If any remain in me and I remain in them, they produce much fruit. But without me they can do nothing."**

### We can learn how to pray.

The best way to learn how to pray is to pray!

Learn to pray by meditating on Scripture.

**Psalms 5:1 (NIRV) Lord, may these words of my mouth please you. And may these thoughts of my heart please you also. You are my Rock and my Redeemer.**

- How are prayer and meditation connected?

Learn to pray by praying with others.

Learn to pray by reading about prayer.

Before Amen: The Power of a Simple Prayer by Max Lucado  
Start with Prayer: 250 Prayers for Hope and Strength by Max Lucado  
Battle Prayers: Faith to Move Your Mountains by Michael A. Klassen  
The Daniel Prayer: Prayer that Moves Heaven and Changes Nations by Anne Graham Lotz  
The Circle Maker: Praying Circles Around Your Biggest Dreams and Greatest Fears by Mark Batterson  
Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference? by Philip Yancey  
When You Don't Know What to Pray: 100 Essential Prayers for Enduring Life's Storms by Charles F. Stanley

When you learn how to pray, your prayer life will keep getting stronger and better.

- Has anyone ever taught you about prayer? If yes, who? If no, who can you ask to teach you about prayer?

**God answers prayer.**

**Psalm 65:2 You hear our prayers. All people will come to you.**

**Matthew 7:7-8 “Ask, and God will give to you. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will open for you. <sup>8</sup> Yes, everyone who asks will receive. Everyone who searches will find. And everyone who knocks will have the door opened.”**

Here are some things that might stop or hurt your prayers.

You might not get an answer if:

- You are not patient, or you give up quickly
- You are praying for selfish reasons
- You have sin in your life, and you have not repented
- You ask for things that are not in God's will
- Maybe God *did* answer, but you just didn't notice because it is not what you expected!

Have you ever felt like your prayer didn't work? What happened?

How has the devil tried to sidetrack or distract you from prayer?

Think about a time when you had a lot of joy because God answered your prayer. Share that with others. It will encourage them, and even encourage you, too!

## **Worship – Making us more like God**

**Matthew 4:10 ...You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.**

When God speaks to us or when God ministers to us, worship is our answer to Him. Worshipping God is our duty. Worshipping God is our privilege.

Worship often includes words and actions. But worship is more than that. Worship involves our hearts and minds, too.

God wants us to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

**John 4:24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.**

We cannot become like God without worship.

**Psalms 95:6 Come, let's worship him and bow down. Let's kneel before the Lord who made us**

But be careful! Some people only pretend to worship. If your heart and mind are not connected to God, your worship is worthless.

**Matthew 15:8-9 These people show honor to me with words, but their hearts are far from me.  
9 Their worship of me is worthless. The things they teach are nothing but human rules.**

**Worship is focusing on God and responding to Him**

He is worthy of all the honor and value we can give Him.

In heaven, everyone knows He is worthy.

**Revelation 4:11 You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power,  
because you made all things. Everything existed and was made, because you wanted it.**

**Revelation 5:12 The Lamb who was killed is worthy to receive power, wealth, wisdom, and  
strength, honor, glory, and praise!**

When we realize He is worthy, we want to worship Him!

We should worship God in private. And we should worship God when we are together in church.

When we worship, God is in the center of our thoughts and our feelings.

No matter what you are doing or saying, if your heart and mind are not focused on God, you are not worshipping! The only way to worship God is with your heart and mind focused on Him.

**Worship must be in spirit and truth**

Worship comes from the inside out. If the worship is not from your heart, then it is probably just words.

Worshipping God in truth means we are worshipping the true God of the Bible. Not just man-made ideas about God. The truth about God that we can read in the Bible.

Worshipping in spirit and truth means we worship with our heart and our head. We worship with our emotions and our thoughts.

Why is it dangerous to worship **only** in spirit, letting your emotions or feelings guide you?

Why is it dangerous to worship **only** in truth, letting your knowledge about God guide you?

### **Worship must be both private and public**

**Hebrews 10:25 You should not stay away from the church meetings, as some are doing, but you should meet together and encourage each other. Do this even more as you see the day coming.**

God designed us to be together to worship. We (the church) are a family, a body, and a spiritual building.

We need to have wonderful and powerful worship when we are together. And we need to have wonderful and powerful worship when we are alone.

**Luke 5:16 but Jesus often slipped away to be alone so he could pray.**

The Lord Jesus Christ is willing and eager to meet with you every time you worship Him!

What happens in your life when you do not have any private time for worship?

### **Worship must be practiced so it becomes a discipline**

If we do not discipline ourselves to worship, our worship will be weak.

Worship is our way of showing God how much we love Him. Keeping your love for God strong requires discipline. Practice worshipping Him every day.

What will you do this week to improve your worship?

What is the difference between going to church and worshipping God?

## Evangelism – to help us grow in God

1. When you see the word *evangelism*, what do you think it means?
2. Why do you think many Christians are afraid to evangelize?

We must discipline ourselves to want to witness for Christ. We need to practice sharing about our faith so it is easy, and we are not afraid.

What is evangelism?

Evangelism is to present Jesus Christ.

And to present the power of the Holy Spirit.

All Christians are supposed to evangelize.

TO: Sinful people

WHY?

- So they can put their trust in God through Jesus Christ.
- And so they can make Him their Savior.
- And so they can serve Him as their King.
- And so they can fellowship with His Church.

Evangelism can be with signs, written words, mime, drama, pictures or videos. Evangelism can be to one person or to a whole crowd of people.

Jesus commanded us to evangelize.

**Matthew 28:19-20** So go and make followers of all people in the world. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you, and I will be with you always, even until the end of this age.

**John 20:21** Then Jesus said again, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, I now send you.”

What is *successful evangelism*? Does that mean all the people get saved? NO!  
Only some of the people who listened to Jesus got saved. But Jesus was not a failure!

*Successful evangelism* means we shared the gospel. It doesn't matter if people get saved or not.

The Holy Spirit gives us power to evangelize.

**Acts 1:8** But when the Holy Spirit comes to you, you will receive power. You will be my witnesses—in Jerusalem, in all of Judea, in Samaria, and in every part of the world.

We don't all evangelize the same way, but we all are supposed to evangelize.

When we share the gospel, the gospel has the power to save people.

**Romans 10:17** So faith comes from hearing the Good News, and people hear the Good News when someone tells them about Christ.

**Matthew 5:16** In the same way, you should be a light for other people. Live so that they will see the good things you do and will praise your Father in heaven.

**1 Peter 3:15** But respect Christ as the holy Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to answer everyone who asks you to explain about the hope you have,

Why do you think God commands all Christians to evangelize? Why doesn't God call only the people who are comfortable sharing the gospel?

What does 1 Peter 2:9 teach us about evangelism?

**1 Peter 2:9** But you are a chosen people, royal priests, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. You were chosen to tell about the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

What do you learn from Colossians 4:5-6? What can you change in your witnessing?

**Colossians 4:5-6** Be wise in the way you act with people who are not believers, making the most of every opportunity. <sup>6</sup> When you talk, you should always be kind and pleasant so you will be able to answer everyone in the way you should.

Write down the names of 2 people you want to evangelize to. Pray about them this week. Ask Jesus to give you a plan for how you will talk to them.

## Serving – doing what Jesus did

God commanded us to serve the Lord with gladness. We need to discipline ourselves to serve Christ and serve His Kingdom.

Serving God is not always easy, and it is not always fun. Sometimes we serve in public where other people can see us serving. Sometimes we serve in private where no one else sees us serve. But God always sees our serving.

Every believer is expected to serve.

**1 Peter 4:10 Each of you has received a gift to use to serve others. Be good servants of God's various gifts of grace.**

Jesus has made us born-again. He washed away our sins. He died so that we can serve Him.

**Hebrews 9:14 How much more is done by the blood of Christ. He offered himself through the eternal Spirit as a perfect sacrifice to God. His blood will make our consciences pure from useless acts so we may serve the living God.**

**Psalm 100:2 Serve the Lord with joy; come before him with singing.**

**Why should we serve the Lord/**

We serve because we are obedient.

**Deuteronomy 13:4 Serve only the Lord your God. Respect him, keep his commands, and obey him. Serve him and be loyal to him.**

We serve because we are grateful.

**1 Samuel 12:24 You must honor the Lord and truly serve him with all your heart. Remember the wonderful things he did for you!**

We serve because we are glad.

**Psalm 100:2 (NLV) Be glad as you serve the Lord. Come before Him with songs of joy.**

We serve because God has forgiven us.

**Isaiah 6:6-7 One of the heavenly creatures used a pair of tongs to take a hot coal from the altar. Then he flew to me with the hot coal in his hand. <sup>7</sup> The creature touched my mouth with the hot coal and said, "Look, your guilt is taken away, because this hot coal has touched your lips. Your sin is taken away."**

**1 John 2:12 I write to you, dear children, because your sins are forgiven through Christ.**

We serve because we are humble.

**Philippians 2:3** When you do things, do not let selfishness or pride be your guide. Instead, be humble and give more honor to others than to yourselves.

We serve because we love Him.

**Galatians 5:13** brothers and sisters, God called you to be free, but do not use your freedom as an excuse to do what pleases your sinful self. Serve each other with love.

**Mark 12:29-31** Jesus answered, “The most important command is this: ‘Listen, people of Israel! The Lord our God is the only Lord. <sup>30</sup> Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’ <sup>31</sup> The second command is this: ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’ There are no commands more important than these.”

Serving the Lord can be hard work.

**Ephesians 4:12** Christ gave those gifts to prepare God’s holy people for the work of serving, to make the body of Christ stronger.

**Colossians 1:28-29** So we continue to preach Christ to each person, using all wisdom to warn and to teach everyone, in order to bring each one into God’s presence as a mature person in Christ. <sup>29</sup> To do this, I work and struggle, using Christ’s great strength that works so powerfully in me.

If we want to become like Christ, we must become servants.

**Luke 22:24-27** The apostles also began to argue about which one of them was the most important. <sup>25</sup> But Jesus said to them, “The kings of the non-Jewish people rule over them, and those who have authority over others like to be called ‘friends of the people.’ <sup>26</sup> But you must not be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the leader should be like the servant. <sup>27</sup> Who is more important: the one sitting at the table or the one serving? You think the one at the table is more important, but I am like a servant among you.

*Worship gives us the power to serve; serving demonstrates our worship.*



## Stewardship – helping us become more like Christ

We need discipline in how we use our time and how we use our money. The discipline of time and the discipline of money are very important for a godly life.

Jesus only had a short time of ministry – 3½ years. He had to discipline His time so that He was able to finish everything the Father wanted Him to do.

**John 17:4 Having finished the work you gave me to do, I brought you glory on earth.**

Why should we discipline our time?

1. We live in evil times.

**Ephesians 5:15-16 So be very careful how you live. Do not live like those who are not wise, but live wisely. <sup>16</sup> Use every chance you have for doing good, because these are evil times.**

Our natural mind leads us to do evil. Our bodies want to stop working. We become lazy.

2. Wise use of our time prepares us for eternity.

Nothing is more valuable than time.

3. The time is short.

We don't know how much more time we will have before we die.

**James 4:14 But you do not know what will happen tomorrow! Your life is like a mist. You can see it for a short time, but then it goes away.**

4. Time is passing away.

Imagine your life like an ice cube on the kitchen counter. It is slowly melting away. It will keep melting until it is all gone.

**Proverbs 27:1 Don't brag about tomorrow; you don't know what may happen then.**

5. Time lost cannot be regained.

Once time is gone, it is gone.

**John 9:4 While it is daytime, we must continue doing the work of the One who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.**

6. You are responsible for how you use your time. God is watching you.

**Romans 14:12 So each of us will have to answer to God.**

7. Time is easily lost.

**Proverbs 6:6 Go watch the ants, you lazy person. Watch what they do and be wise.**

8. In eternity we will realize how valuable time is.

**Luke 16:25 But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember when you were alive you had the good things in life, but bad things happened to Lazarus. Now he is comforted here, and you are suffering.**

We must be disciplined in how we use our money. A biblical use of money is part of our growth in Godliness.

God already owns everything you have.

**Psalms 24:1 The earth belongs to the Lord, and everything in it—the world and all its people.**

God wants us to use our money and enjoy the things we buy. But we must remember that it all belongs to Him. We need to use our money to support His Kingdom.

Giving is a way we worship God.

**Philippians 4:18 And now I have everything, and more. I have all I need, because Epaphroditus brought your gift to me. It is like a sweet-smelling sacrifice offered to God, who accepts that sacrifice and is pleased with it.**

Giving to the work of God is worship.

Our giving demonstrates our faith in God. It shows we really believe God. We trust that He will provide all that we need.

**Luke 16:10-13 Whoever can be trusted with a little can also be trusted with a lot, and whoever is dishonest with a little is dishonest with a lot. <sup>11</sup> If you cannot be trusted with worldly riches, then who will trust you with true riches? <sup>12</sup> And if you cannot be trusted with things that belong to someone else, who will give you things of your own? <sup>13</sup> “No servant can serve two masters. The servant will hate one master and love the other, or will follow one master and refuse to follow the other. You cannot serve both God and worldly riches.”**

Our giving should be sacrificial and generous.

We give to God because we love Him; not because we have to give. Give willingly. Give thankfully. Give cheerfully.

**2 Corinthians 9:7 Each of you should give as you have decided in your heart to give. You should not be sad when you give, and you should not give because you feel forced to give. God loves the person who gives happily.**

Our giving should be planned.

**1 Corinthians 16:1-2** Now I will write about the collection of money for God's people. Do the same thing I told the Galatian churches to do: <sup>2</sup>On the first day of every week, each one of you should put aside money as you have been blessed. Save it up so you will not have to collect money after I come.

...**On the first day of every week**... whatever day you decide, be faithful and consistent.

...**each one of you**... every believer should demonstrate their stewardship of God's money.

...**as you have been blessed**... the more money you have, the more you should be giving.

Giving generously brings many blessings to us.

**Luke 6:38** Give, and you will receive. You will be given much. Pressed down, shaken together, and running over, it will spill into your lap. The way you give to others is the way God will give to you."

## Fasting, Silence, and Alone Time – to help us grow more like God

Fasting means we voluntarily stop eating food for spiritual reasons. It is not the same as dieting.

There are many kinds of fasts.

- A normal fast means we do not eat any foods at all, but we do drink water.
- A partial fast means we limit the foods we eat, but we do eat some food.
- An absolute fast means we do not eat any food or any liquids.
- A supernatural fast means God supernaturally “feeds” us (like Jesus in the wilderness for 40 days)
- A private fast means fasting in a way that no one else knows you are fasting.

**Matthew 6:16-18** “When you fast, don’t put on a sad face like the hypocrites. They make their faces look sad to show people they are fasting. I tell you the truth, those hypocrites already have their full reward. <sup>17</sup> So when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. <sup>18</sup> Then people will not know that you are fasting, but your Father, whom you cannot see, will see you. Your Father sees what is done in secret, and he will reward you.

- A congregational fast means everyone in the church family fasts together.  
**Joel 2:15-16** Blow the trumpet in Jerusalem; call for a day when everyone fasts. Tell everyone to stop work. <sup>16</sup> Bring the people together and make the meeting holy for the Lord. Bring together the elders, as well as the children, and even babies that still feed at their mothers’ breasts. The bridegroom should come from his room, the bride from her bedroom.  
**Acts 13:2** They were all worshipping the Lord and fasting for a certain time. During this time the Holy Spirit said to them, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul to do a special work for which I have chosen them.”
- A national fast means the whole nation fasts together.  
**Esther 4:16** “Go and get all the Jewish people in Susa together. For my sake, fast; do not eat or drink for three days, night and day. I and my servant girls will also fast. Then I will go to the king, even though it is against the law, and if I die, I die.”
- In the Old Testament there was one day each year when everyone fasted – the Day of Atonement.

Jesus expected us to fast.

**Matthew 6:16-17** “When you fast, don’t put on a sad face like the hypocrites. They make their faces look sad to show people they are fasting. I tell you the truth, those hypocrites already have their full reward. <sup>17</sup> So when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face.

Fasting is not a requirement. It is a privilege and an opportunity to seek God.

We should fast for a specific purpose. Remember: fasting is not to earn God’s favor. Fasting is not to impress God. Fasting is not to earn God’s acceptance.

We fast to strengthen our prayer. Sometimes our needs are so urgent we pray *and* fast. It is not like a hunger strike where we are trying to force God to answer our prayer. Fasting does not change God – it changes us and the way we pray.

We fast to find God's direction for our life.

We fast to express our grief. It could be grief for a death, grief because of our sins, or because of other people's sins.

**Judges 20:26 Then the whole Israelite army went back to Bethel to meet with the Lord. They sat there and they wept. They did not eat any food that day until evening. They offered burnt offerings and peace offerings to the Lord.**

We fast to seek deliverance or protection from God.

We fast to express repentance. Repentance is a change of mind that leads to changed behavior.

We fast to humble ourselves before God.

We fast to help others.

**Isaiah 58:6-7 "I will tell you the kind of fast I want: Free the people you have put in prison unfairly and undo their chains. Free those to whom you are unfair and stop their hard labor. <sup>7</sup> Share your food with the hungry and bring poor, homeless people into your own homes. When you see someone who has no clothes, give him yours, and don't refuse to help your own relatives."**

We fast to overcome temptation.

**Matthew 4:2-3a Jesus fasted for forty days and nights. After this, he was very hungry. <sup>3</sup> The devil came to Jesus to tempt him...**

We fast to express our love and worship to God.

### **Silence and Alone Time with God**

We need a balance between silence and alone time and fellowship time. The Bible gives us many reasons to discipline ourselves to have times of silence and alone time with God.

Jesus regularly had silent and alone times with God.

**Matthew 14:23 After he had sent them away, he went by himself up into the hills to pray. It was late, and Jesus was there alone.**

**Mark 1:35 Early the next morning, while it was still dark, Jesus woke and left the house. He went to a lonely place, where he prayed.**

**Luke 4:42 At daybreak, Jesus went to a lonely place, but the people looked for him. When they found him, they tried to keep him from leaving.**

We can hear God's voice better when we are away from distractions.

**Galatians 1:17** I didn't go up to Jerusalem to consult with those who were apostles before I was. No, I went away into the deserts of Arabia and then came back to the city of Damascus.

**1 Kings 19:11-13** The Lord said to Elijah, "Go, stand in front of me on the mountain, and I will pass by you." Then a very strong wind blew until it caused the mountains to fall apart and large rocks to break in front of the Lord . But the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. <sup>12</sup> After the earthquake, there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. After the fire, there was a quiet, gentle sound. <sup>13</sup> When Elijah heard it, he covered his face with his coat and went out and stood at the entrance to the cave. Then a voice said to him, "Elijah! Why are you here?"

We can learn to express our worship to God without words, signs, or sounds.

**Habakkuk 2:20** The Lord is in his Holy Temple; all the earth should be silent in his presence."

**Zephaniah 1:7** Be silent before the Lord God, because the Lord's day for judging people is coming soon. The Lord has prepared a sacrifice; he has made holy his invited guests.

We can learn to express our faith in God.

**Psalms 62:1-2** I find rest in God; only he can save me. <sup>2</sup> He is my rock and my salvation. He is my defender; I will not be defeated.

We can learn to seek our salvation.

**Lamentations 3:26** It is good to wait quietly for the Lord to save.

We can be refreshed.

**Mark 6:31** Crowds of people were coming and going so that Jesus and his followers did not even have time to eat. He said to them, "Come away by yourselves, and we will go to a lonely place to get some rest."

We can learn to control our speech.

**Proverbs 17:27-28** The wise say very little, and those with understanding stay calm. <sup>28</sup> Even fools seem to be wise if they keep quiet; if they don't speak, they appear to understand.

**James 3:2** We all make many mistakes. If people never said anything wrong, they would be perfect and able to control their entire selves, too.

Let us decide to discipline ourselves to:

- **Feast on the Word of God**
- **Pray**
- **Worship**
- **Evangelize**
- **Serve**
- **Be good stewards of our time and money**
- **Fast, be silent, and have alone time with God**