

Disciplines

A Bible Study for Developing Spiritual Disciplines

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“The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.” Galatians 6:8

Through the centuries Christians have sown to the Spirit in order to grow spiritually. One of the ways they have done that is through the practice of various spiritual disciplines. These disciplines put us in a position to continually receive God’s grace. Richard Foster says, “The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that He can transform us...The Disciplines are God’s way of getting us into the ground; they put us where He can work within us and transform us. By themselves the Spiritual Disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where something can be done.”¹

This study was designed for you to read each set of Bible verses and to answer the questions that follow. You are encouraged to take extra time for further study, prayer and reflection.

At the end of each week’s study you will find suggestions for making it practical. It will be to your greatest advantage to select at least one and put it into practice.

Prayer

“The self-denial, the sacrifices which we make for our prayer-chambers, the frequency of our visits to that hallowed place of meeting with the Lord, the lingering to stay, the loathness to leave, are values which we put on communion alone with God...”² -E.M. Bounds

Day 1 - Matthew 6:5-8

What is Jesus saying about the heart attitude of prayer?

What are the rewards God gives for earnest, heartfelt prayer?

Day 2 - Acts 1:14; 2:42; 6:3-4

How would you characterize prayer in the early church?

How does it compare to your own experience?

Day 3 - Ephesians 6:18-20

What is the context of these prayer exhortations?

What part does prayer play in spiritual warfare?

How do you “pray in the Spirit?”

Day 4 - James 5:13-18

What makes a prayer “powerful and effective?”

What kinds of things happen when a prayer is “powerful and effective?”

Is this a mark of your prayers? Explain.

Day 5 - Ephesians 3:14-19

What stands out to you about Paul’s prayer?

In what ways does it challenge you?

Day 6 - 1 Timothy 2:1-2, 8

Day 7 - 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

Making It Practical

(Choose one or more)

1. Set a specific time and length to meet secretly with God in fervent prayer. If this is already established in your life add 5-10 minutes.
2. Begin a prayer journal. (Write out your prayers; make lists of people and circumstances; record answers; record prayer encounters with others, jot down Scripture)
3. Find a group of people who have a heart for prayer and meet together for prayer regularly.

Fasting

“Simply to deprive ourselves of a natural benefit (such as food or sleep) is not of *itself* fasting. We must devote ourselves to God and worship Him. Unless there is the devotion of heart there is no lasting benefit.”³

-Warren W. Wiersbe

Day 1 - Matthew 9:14-15

When did Jesus say the disciples would fast?

What is the purpose of fasting?

Is it required of a Christian? Is it assumed?

Day 2 - Matthew 6:16-18

Why are motives important when fasting?

What are some wrong motives?

Does God honor fasting because we are going without food or because we are setting aside our needs and desires to seek Him?

Day 3 - Acts 13:1-3

What was the purpose of the prophets and teachers fasting at Antioch?

What happened as a result?

Day 4 - Daniel 9:1-6

What was the purpose of Daniel's fast?

Whether a personal, family or national confession what kinds of concerns might bring you to fasting and repentance?

What does the Lord mean when he says through Joel to “rend your heart and not your garments?”

Day 5 - Ezra 8:21-23

What was the purpose of Ezra's fast?

Besides prayer what often accompanies fasting?

Day 6 - Joel 2:12-14

Day 7 - Psalm 35:11-14

Making It Practical
(Choose one or more)

1. Consult your doctor before you fast if you have serious health problems or questions about your health.
2. Set aside one meal and use that time to worship and seek the Lord.
3. Determine your purpose and spend a day in fasting and prayer. Try this hourly format: (1) Worship - 15 minutes; (2) Prayer - 35 minutes; (3) Break - 10 minutes

Study

“The Bible will never be a living Book to us until we are convinced that God is articulate in His universe... If you would follow on to know the Lord, come at once to the open Bible expecting it to speak to you.”⁴

-A. W. Tozer

Day 1 - Hebrews 4:12-13

As we examine God’s Word what does it do with us?

What does that mean for us in a practical sense?

Why is study important for you in this process?

Day 2 - Psalm 119:15-18

What does the Psalmist say he will not do?

What causes neglect in studying God’s Word?

Day 3 - 1 Peter 2:1-3

What does it mean to “crave” pure spiritual milk?

What are the benefits for you?

Day 4 - 2 Timothy 2:14-15

What did Paul have in mind when he said to present yourself to God as one approved?

What is involved in correctly handling the word of truth?

What “tools” aid you in Bible study?

Day 5 - Acts 17:10-12

What was involved in the Bereans examining the Scriptures daily?

What studies have you done in the past with great eagerness? What studies interest you for the future?

What results come from diligent study of the Bible?

Day 6 - James 1:22-25

Day 7 - John 8:31-32

Making It Practical
(Choose one or more)

1. Select a topic of great interest to you and spend a week or two studying it. Record your observations.
2. Read through a book or portion every day for a month. Journal your insights.
3. Structure a private retreat for two or three days that will give you opportunity for extensive study and prayer.

Meditation

“Suffer me to entreat you earnestly to give yourself to prayer and reading and meditating on divine truths. Strive to penetrate to the bottom of them, and never be content with a superficial knowledge.”⁵

-David Brainerd

Day 1 - Joshua 1:8-9

Study centers on examining Scripture, meditation centers on internalizing and personalizing the passage. How do you mediate on God's word?

In what specific ways do you believe it will make you prosperous and successful?

Day 2 - Colossians 3:15-17

What does it mean to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly?”

What part does meditation play in this?

Day 3 - Philippians 4:8-9

What kinds of things fit into the category of true, noble, right, pure, lovely, etc.?

Why should you “think about such things?”

Day 4 - Psalm 1

When does the person who is blessed meditate on the law of the Lord?

What evil do you avoid through meditation?

What benefits does it bring?

Day 5 - Psalm 119:11, 15, 27, 48, 97, 148

On what different things does the Psalmist meditate?

When does he meditate?

What is the difference between biblical meditation and eastern meditation?

Day 6 - Luke 2:16-20

Day 7 - Psalm 19:7-14

Making It Practical

(Choose one or more)

1. Select a passage and enter into it as an active participant. As you ponder it apply all your senses to the task. (Smell the stable, hear the shouts, feel the peace)
2. As you meditate turn to prayer in the context of the passage. (Meditation, prayer, meditation, prayer...)
3. Select a single text and mediate on it for a week.

Worship

“True worship comes from people who are deeply emotional and who love deep and sound doctrine. Strong affections for God rooted in truth are the bone and marrow of biblical worship.”⁶ -John Piper

Day 1 - John 4:19-26

What is the context of this passage?

What are the two key ingredients given for worship?

Explain what both mean and why they are important.

Day 2 - Matthew 15:7-9

To whom was Jesus talking?

How does a person worship “in vain?”

Day 3 - Romans 11:33-12:2

What is the point of the questions in this passage?

What is your spiritual act of worship?

Day 4 - Psalm 145:1-10

Worship is complimenting God. What might you compliment God about from this passage?

What expressions of worship are used?

Can a person worship without feeling or expressing emotion? Why or Why not?

Day 5 - Revelation 5:6-14

Who is the Lamb?

Who is praising Him?

What makes meaningful corporate worship?

Day 6 - Hebrews 12:28-29

Day 7 - Job 38:1-11; 40:1-10

Making It Practical

(Choose one or more)

1. Begin your worship time by surrendering yourself to “worship by the Spirit of God.” (Philippians 3:3)
2. Include a physical dimension in your worship. (Bow, lift your hands, shout, sing aloud, kneel, dance)
3. Prepare for corporate worship on Sunday by reading the Bible, singing a hymn, and praying Saturday evening.

Solitude/Silence

“Our solitude is a desert of time and space for uncluttered attention to Him; our silence, a climate of peace for listening. One penetrates the other and together they make up the environment of prayer.”⁷

-Carol Sachse

Day 1 - Mark 1:35-39

Why do you think it was important for the Son of God to go off to a solitary place?

When did He go and is it significant to us?

Day 2 - Luke 5:15-16; 6:12-14

What did Jesus do when He withdrew to lonely places? What do you think was the focus of that time?

How did times of solitude relate to His ministry?

Day 3 - Psalm 46:8-11

How does being still impact our relationship with God?

Besides prayer what other things might happen when you have a time of solitude?

Day 4 - Habakkuk 2:18-20

Describe God in His holy temple?

As you consider this concept how are you exhorted to respond? Why?

Day 5 - Isaiah 53:7-9

Why do you think Jesus was silent when He was oppressed and

afflicted?

What lessons are there to be learned in practicing silence?

Day 6 - Matthew 14:22-24

Day 7 - James 1:19-21

Making It Practical
(Choose one or more)

1. Set aside a day for no other purpose than practicing the presence of God in solitude. (Parks, resorts, cabins, camps, retreat centers, or motels are all good options.)
2. Try to live a specific period of time without any words at all. Do it as an experiment and not as a law.
3. Include your family in a morning of silence before you meet with the church for worship.

Confession

“Confession means not only that I confess my sin with shame but that I hand it over to God, trusting Him to take it away...O Christian, if you are seeking to have fellowship with Jesus, do not fear to confess *each sin* in confident assurance that there is deliverance.”⁸

-Andrew Murray

Day 1 - Psalm 139:23-24

What is it like to have God search your heart?

How often does He search your heart and what does He find?

Day 2 - Psalm 51:1-10

What about this confession of David's impacts you the most? Why?

How does confession promote spiritual growth in your life?

Day 3 - 1 John 1:8-10

What exactly is involved in confessing your sins?

What two things does God do when we confess our sin?

Day 4 - James 5:13-16

Why is it healthy to confess your sins to another person?

When should you and when shouldn't you share your struggles?

Day 5 - Acts 19:17-20

When should there be open public confession?

The Ephesians burned their sorcery scrolls after their confession. Why does some kind of action often follow confession?

What was the result of all this?

Day 6 - Hosea 14:1-2

Day 7 - Psalm 32:1-5

Making It Practical
(Choose one or more)

1. Incorporate Psalm 139:23-24 into your prayer life each day for a month.
2. Confess any known sin to God, and make any known wrong to another person right.
3. Find someone who is spiritually mature, wise, and compassionate for accountability in areas of struggle.

Submission

Submission “is the ability to lay down the terrible burden of always needing to get our own way. The obsession to demand that things go the way we want them to go is one of the greatest bondages in human society today.”⁹ -Richard Foster

Day 1 - Hebrews 5:7-10

In what ways was Jesus reverently submissive?

How does reverent submission to God benefit you?

Day 2 - 1 Peter 5:5-7

What is God’s approach to the proud?

How does a person’s life look who is living in submission and humility?

Day 3 - 2 Chronicles 7:13-16

To whom and on what occasion was this promise given?

What blessings might God give us today as we live before Him in humility?

Day 4 - Ephesians 5:21

What is the motivation for living in submission to one another?

What exactly does it mean to live in submission to one another?

How do you respond if you are misunderstood or wronged?

Day 5 - 1 Peter 2:13-17

Why are we to submit to governing authorities?

To whom else does the Bible specifically tell us to submit?

Day 6 - Acts 5:27-32

Day 7 - Ephesians 5:21; Hebrews 13:17

Making It Practical
(Choose one or more)

1. Begin a life of submission to others by submitting to the Holy Spirit to form kindness and gentleness in you.
2. Practice a spirit of grace toward others by saying nothing rather than demanding your way.
3. Give thanks for those in authority over you and pray for God's blessing in their lives.

Simplicity

“I soon found that I could live upon very much less than I had previously thought possible...My experience was that the less I spent on myself and the more I gave to others, the fuller of happiness and blessing did my soul become.”¹⁰ -Hudson Taylor

Day 1 - Proverbs 30:7-9

What is the danger of poverty? Of riches?

How do you find a life of simplicity?

Day 2 - Matthew 6:19-21

How does a heart for simplicity set you free from storing up your treasures on earth?

How does a person go about storing up their treasures in heaven?

Day 3 - Mark 8:34-36

What exactly are people trying to gain when they forfeit their souls?

What is the difference between being miserly and having a joyful unconcern for possessions?

Day 4 - 1 Timothy 6:6-10

How do you gain godliness and contentment in the area of possessions?

What are possible results of desiring money?

Do we rob others by all that we own? Explain.

Day 5 - Hebrews 13:5-6

Why is the promise of God's presence given in the context of love of

money and contentedness?

How is materialism a problem in your life?

Do you believe this passage is supporting extreme, strict self-denial?
Why or why not?

Day 6 - Hebrews 11:24-28

Day 7 - Luke 16:13-14

Making It Practical
(Choose one or more)

1. Develop the habit of giving things away. Try putting this into practice everyday for a month
2. Refuse to buy anything that for you is a status symbol, an addiction, or a compulsion.
3. Learn to enjoy nature and inexpensive pleasures.

Thanksgiving

“Not until the soul is given up fully to God, does it feel that spontaneous uprising of thankfulness to Him for the smallest benefits. ‘Never did I feel true gratitude in my heart until I had yielded myself up fully to God to either live or die for Him’.”¹¹ -John Fletcher

Day 1 - Psalm 118:19-29

For what specific things does the Psalmist give thanks?

What is one thing you are particularly thankful to God for this week?

Day 2 - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

What is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus?

Why does God want this for us?

Can you give thanks in *all* circumstances? How?

Day 3 - Ephesians 5:19-20

How does a person develop a thankful spirit in everything?

What does it mean to give thanks in the name of Jesus?

Day 4 - Philippians 4:4-7

What should accompany thanksgiving when you are anxious?

What results does God bring into your life?

At what time in your life have you experienced this principle?

Day 5 - Romans 1:21-25

What happened to the minds and hearts of those who knew God but refused to give Him thanks?

Where did it all lead?

What happens in your life when you aren't a thankful person?

Day 6 - John 6:10-11

Day 7 - Daniel 6:10-14

Making It Practical
(Choose one or more)

1. Make a list of 101 things for which you are thankful. Enter His gates with thanksgiving for these things.
2. Set aside a specific time at the end of your day to reflect back. Give thanks as you reflect.
3. Meet with another person(s) for a time of prayer and thanksgiving.

Service

“The One who could have been or done anything, consciously and voluntarily, chose to be one who served, one who gave. So then, if we are to become increasingly more like Christ then we, too, are to give and serve.”¹²
-Charles Swindoll

Day 1 - Joshua 24:14-24

What was the context of this statement?

What all was involved for the people when they said they would serve the Lord?

What “gods” are in your life that keep you from fully serving the Lord?

Day 2 - Mark 10:35-45

Why did the Son of Man come?

How specifically do you see Jesus’ words impacting your life?

Day 3 - 1 Peter 4:7-11

How does a person offer service that brings praise to God and at the same time avoid self-righteous acts?

What part does divine prompting play in your service?

Day 4 - 2 Corinthians 8:1-5

What was the key to the Macedonian believers service to the saints?

Is service one radical self-denial or a series of many deaths? Explain.

Do you believe you should voluntarily be willing to be taken advantage of when serving? Explain.

Day 5 - 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

What determines if your service is wood, hay and stubble or gold, silver and costly stones?

Contrast service in the flesh and service in the Spirit.

Day 6 - Galatians 5:13-15

Day 7 - Luke 4:5-8

Making It Practical
(Choose one or more)

1. Approach the day with the mind set that service is wrapped up in the mundane, ordinary, trivial and unrecognized.
2. Get out of your comfort zone to serve someone you would not naturally choose to serve.
3. Determine what spiritual gift(s) you have that will allow you to most effectively serve others.

Community

“God’s Word gives clear and distinctive direction for our life together—directions we must take seriously
...if we are to tap the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit released when God’s people come together as the Body of Christ:...the transforming community.”¹³

-Lawrence Richards

Day 1 - Ephesians 4:1-6

In what ways are we “one” in community?

What efforts do you think should be made to keep the unity of the Spirit?

Day 2 - Acts 2:42-47

What kinds of things did the early church do that strengthened them in community?

Which of these do you think is most needful for us in today’s church? Explain.

Day 3 - John 13:31-38

How do others know that we are Christ’s disciples?

How is a deep love for one another expressed?

Day 4 - Romans 12:9-13

What “one another’s” are given here?

What other “one another’s” does the Bible give that help bring unity to the body of Christ?

Day 5 - John 17:20-23

What things did Jesus pray for believers?

Is the universal church living in unity? What do you think would enhance community among churches?

How do you find the balance between complete unity and not compromising truth?

Day 6 - Psalm 133

Day 7 - Proverbs 27:17; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Making It Practical
(Choose one or more)

1. Join a small group with whom you can pray, study, share and practice community.
2. Make a study of and a plan for practicing the “one another” passages.
3. Meet with others from various denominations to have times of prayer.

End Notes

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2. E. M Bounds, *Purpose in Prayer* (Baker Book House, 1920/Reprinted 1978), p.74
3. Warren W. Wiersbe, *Fasting for Spiritual Break Through* (Regal Books, 1996 by Elmer Towns). p.216
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5. David Brainerd, “Psalm 119: The Christian’s Golden ABC by Dr. Maxwell Coder,” *Moody Monthly*, April 1959/Reprinted 1982, p.105
6. John Piper, *Desiring God* (Multnomah Press 1986) p.65
7. Carol Sachse, *Charter of Life* (Carmelite Communities Associated) p.1
8. Andrew Murray, *God’s Best Secrets* (Kregel Publications, 1993), p.20
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11. John Fletcher, *Royal Insignia* (Harvey Christian Publishers, by Edwin & Lillian Harvey 1992) p.90
12. Charles Swindoll, *Improving Your Serve* (Word Books, 1981) p.211
13. Lawrence Richards, *Youth Ministry* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1972) p. 221