

Spiritual DISCIPLINES

Biblical Tools for Cultivating a Life of Spiritual Growth and Health



*A*s faithful believers, we care about the condition of our spiritual lives. Whether it's a desire to cultivate spiritual growth or nurture a healthy spiritual life, we seek tools to aid and guide us on our journey in relationship with God.

The spiritual disciplines are practices that by design can help us create time and space for life transformation. Their purpose is to aid our growth as disciples of Christ and deepen our relationship with God. They are like training exercises for the spiritual life. But like all exercise, we have to choose to do them regularly to feel or see their impact on our lives.

Christians throughout the ages have chosen to engage in the spiritual disciplines because Jesus himself modeled and taught about them, as recorded in the Bible. The scripture passages below will guide our *Groundwork* discussions; we'll dig deep into these scriptures to explore not only the function of the individual spiritual disciplines, but also to reflect on how we might apply the disciplines to benefit our spiritual lives.

Listen to and study all six *Groundwork* spiritual disciplines episodes:

- *Why Practice Spiritual Disciplines* | [Titus 2:11-15](#) & [1 Timothy 4:7-8](#)
- *Prayer & Fasting* | [Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18](#)
- *Simplicity & Submission* | [Philippians 4:10-13](#) & [Matthew 6:19-33](#)
- *Silence & Solitude* | [Luke 5:15-16](#) & [1 Kings 19:11-13](#)
- *Service & Giving* | [Matthew 6:19-21](#) & [Luke 16:1-9](#)
- *Scripture: Study, Memorization, Contemplation & Meditation* | [Psalm 119](#)

Each episode includes an audio podcast and a devotional guide that will prepare and lead you in thoughtful reflection on what you've heard and how you can apply what you've learned in everyday life.

Whether this is your first encounter with the spiritual disciplines or you're rediscovering these practices once more, this study will help you look into scripture and discover the tools God gives us to help us grow in abundant life and relationship with him.

Courtney Jacob

Why Practice Spiritual Disciplines

TITUS 2:11-15 & 1 TIMOTHY 4:7-8

Awareness

Before listening, reflect:

- What is your current attitude toward or opinion of the spiritual disciplines?
- What do you already know about the spiritual disciplines?

The purpose of spiritual disciplines is to deepen our relationship with God. Studying examples of the spiritual disciplines in scripture gives us a basis for growing deep roots. It also ensures that our practices remain congruent with the gospel teaching presented in the Bible. Practices incongruent with scripture actually work against us and cause us to stumble in our faith. But practices in-line with scripture will complement and aid our biblical study, and deepen our faith and relationship with our heavenly Father.

“You work out your salvation, you train yourself—not in order to get saved, but because you already are, and now you want to stay in step with Jesus and stay in tune with him.”

– SCOTT HOEZEE

Reflection

After listening, consider:

- What do you want the natural outflow of your life to be? Consider the choices you've made the last few days about your priorities, how to spend your time, and to what to give your attention. Which of these choices have cultivated spiritual growth? Which of these choices have distracted you from life in the Spirit?
- Are the places you spend your time and the things that have your attention capable of assisting you on your journey toward a more disciplined spiritual life?
- Which strengths do you already possess in your spiritual practices? How can you build on the strengths you already have?
- Is there a spiritual discipline that might complement your strengths and deepen your relationship with God?

Conclusion

Spend a few moments in prayer. Ask God to reveal to you the reality of your spiritual state. Which areas are strong? Which areas need growth? Thank him for the provision of his Spirit and pray for awareness of the Spirit's work in your life. Consider this prayer from the early Christian, Clement of Rome:

*Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
Grant, we pray, that we might be grounded and settled in your truth by the coming of your Holy Spirit into our hearts.
What we do not know, reveal to us; what is lacking within us, make complete; that which we do know, confirm in us; and keep us blameless in your service, through Jesus Christ our Lord. ¹*

Related Passages for further study:

- [Galatians 6:6-10](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:24-27](#)

¹ Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). 1993. Book of Common Worship, Daily Prayer. Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox Press, p22.

Prayer & Fasting

MATTHEW 6:1-6, 16-18

Awareness

Before listening, reflect:

- What is the current state of your prayer life? What is good about it? What would you like to improve? How do you define the purpose of prayer?
- Based on your existing understanding, describe the discipline of fasting. How does thinking about it make you feel?

Prayer is a common practice among Christians of all backgrounds; whether actively engaged in the practice or not, the majority of Christians are familiar with prayer. In contrast, the practice of fasting is much less common and an individual's familiarity is likely dependent upon their background and Christian tradition. Both of these practices can significantly contribute to a disciplined spiritual life. Yet, individuals tend to have questions about the reality of what both prayer and fasting look like in practice.

“We do not pray to tell God what he does not know or to inform him...God knows what we need before we even ask him; so, prayer is not so much for his sake as it is for ours; and it is the way probably that we most exercise and develop our intimacy with God—our relationship with God.”

— DAVE BAST

Reflection

After listening, consider:

Recall your earlier reflection on the state of your prayer life and knowledge of fasting.

- Are there questions, concerns, or fears that keep you from incorporating the practice of fasting in your spiritual life?
- During the Groundwork conversation in segment 2, our guest Sue commented that sometimes people fast when they need to make an important decision. Do you face any major decisions or events in your life that might benefit from the intentional time spent with God that fasting provides? Has your understanding of fasting changed?
- What obstacles prevent you from improving your prayer life? Which are within your control to change?
- What is one change that you're willing to incorporate this week to intentionally make space for prayer, or to improve your prayer life in some way?
- How does modeling the practice of prayer for children, grandchildren, and believers new to faith look different than the public prayers described in [Matthew 6:5](#)?

Conclusion

Consider this closing thought from Lauren Winner: “Sure, sometimes it is great when, in prayer, we can express to God just what we feel; but better still when, in the act of praying, our feelings change.” Then, in prayer or fasting, step into the sanctuary and be with the Lord. Listen to him. Share with him the reality of your spiritual life and any truths you discovered during reflection. Ask him to give you the resources to overcome any obstacles or fears you identified that interfere with your prayerful communion with him. And then ask him to reveal to you unidentified fears or obstacles about prayer and fasting. Pray that God would align your will with his.

Related Passages for further study:

PRAYER:

- [Matthew 7:7-12](#)
- [Matthew 26:36-46](#)
- [Philippians 4:4-7](#)

FASTING:

- [Luke 18:9-14](#)
- [Acts 13:2-3](#)
- [Luke 4:1-2](#)
- [Isaiah 58:3-12](#)

Simplicity & Submission

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-13 & MATTHEW 6:19-33

Awareness

Before listening, reflect:

- How do you spend your free time (i.e. time not working, caring for family and household, volunteering, etc.)?
- Are you content with your life? If so, what makes you content? If not, what do you think will make you content?

It's easy to think that the spiritual discipline of simplicity means living with nothing, but simplicity is different from poverty. The practice of simplicity as demonstrated in scripture doesn't mean never owning anything, rather it calls us to evaluate our motives, and our relationship to things, in order to grow in relationship with God and other people.

“Rather than simplicity being equated with sacrifice, it is equated with actually enriching our lives. You may...feel like you have to give something up, but you gain so much more in return.”

– RENA DAM

Reflection

After listening, consider:

During the Groundwork conversation in segment 2, host Dave Bast, says simplicity is about “reclaiming our lives for the sake of relationship.” With that in mind recall your earlier reflections about time and contentment.

- Are there areas of your life that you want to reclaim? What changes are you willing to make to reclaim them? What underlying beliefs might be influencing your resistance?
- In segment 2, guest Rena Dam noted “rather than simplicity being equated with sacrifice, it is equated with actually enriching our lives.” What do you regard as sacrifices, and how might they actually be enriching your life?
- What relationships would you like to invest in more? What is one aspect of your life that if reclaimed it would result in deeper investment?
- Re-read [Matthew 6:25-34](#). How does contentment relate to worry?
- What danger might exist in being legalistic about practicing simplicity?

“We need to de-clutter our lives, not simply as an end in itself, but for the sake of other people, of relationships with them and with God.”

– DAVE BAST

Conclusion

Evaluate the things in your life that receive your time and attention. In prayer, request God's wisdom and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Reflect on the sacrifices you make, but also consider the ways these sacrifices enrich your life. How does that fit with your desired priorities and your ability to seek God's will for your life?

Related Passages for further study:

- [Luke 12:13-34](#) (note particularly verse 15)
- [James 5:1-5](#)
- [Deuteronomy 8:6-18](#)

Silence & Solitude

LUKE 5:15-16 & 1 KINGS 19:11-13

Awareness

Before listening, reflect:

- How do you respond to times of unanticipated silence? Is your reaction to silence different when you are surrounded by others than when you are alone?
- What is your experience with solitude? Has solitude been a matter of coincidence or intentional planning in your life? What have you learned in your experiences with solitude?

The spiritual disciplines of silence and solitude are distinct and can be practiced individually, however, as personal practices they naturally work in tandem. Both disciplines focus on removing distractions to create space for being with God and hearing his still, small voice.

“It seems like the silence and the solitude, was not just purposeless down time. He [Jesus] was fully alert, in communion with God, and that is what energized him to go back to do more.”

– SCOTT HOEZEE

Reflection

After listening, consider:

- How do scriptural and cultural perspectives on silence and solitude compare and contrast?
- In segment 2, host Scott Hoezee mentions that times of silence and solitude were not just purposeless downtime for Jesus. What benefits do you glean for your own relationship with God by observing Jesus' model of silence and solitude?
- Where can you carve out time and physical space for silence and solitude? What small adjustments might you make—time of day, rearranging furniture, etc—to shape a more conducive space for yourself?

“So often in scripture we see how God prefers to operate, and apparently God prefers to speak to us when we are silent. It worked for Jesus, so who are we to try to improve on Jesus?”

– SCOTT HOEZEE

Conclusion

In a time of silence and a place of solitude, listen for God. Do not try to empty your mind, rather sift through the thoughts that arise. If you need to write down to-do list items so you don't forget them, go ahead, and then return to quiet listening. Press into ideas that rise to the surface of your thoughts. Ask God about them. Reflect on scriptures that come to mind. Might God be speaking to you through these scriptures? Ask him to reveal to you the state of your heart or your relationship with him.

Close your time by praying the words of the psalmist in [Psalm 19:14](#), “*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.*”

Related Passages for further study:

- [Mark 6:30-31](#)
- [Ecclesiastes 5:1-7](#)
- [Matthew 14](#)
- [Habakkuk 2:20](#)

Service & Giving

MATTHEW 6:19-21 & LUKE 16:1-9

Awareness

Before listening, reflect:

- What is your understanding about tithing and what are your honest feelings about it? What about doing volunteer work? How do these relate to your own faith and discipleship?
- Do you think money is good or bad for relationships? Does it make a difference if it's a family relationship, a friendship, or your relationship with God?

Service and giving are common words in a Christian's vocabulary, but they aren't always welcome words. To many, they are simply Christian "to-dos" or biblical commands that are uncomfortable to talk about. But, there is a lot more to service and giving. They are included in the list of spiritual disciplines because they can aid our spiritual growth and relationship with God.

“One of the purposes, maybe a chief purpose of money, is to actually build relationships. When people are generous with [money]—when they have an open hand—it can be used to build relationships rather than to destroy relationships.”

— JEFF MUNROE

Reflection

After listening, consider:

- Based on guest host Jeff Munroe's comments in segment 2, should tithing 10% be the floor or ceiling for you? Is it a good goal to reach for, or is it a goal you can easily, comfortably surpass?
- Evaluate your generosity in other areas of your life beyond money. Are there areas where you could cultivate and celebrate a more generous spirit?
- Why does helping others reflect your commitment to discipleship?
- Consider Jeff's closing question: "Do I go through life squeezing, grasping, holding, or do I have an open hand?" Reflect on this, and not just with money, but with your time, talent, and possessions. Do you share these things freely?

“By giving money—by being generous with it—we convert the money of this world into a kind of eternal currency.”

— JEFF MUNROE

Conclusion

Prayerfully consider your relationship to money, possessions, time, and your talents. Consider making it a practice to periodically evaluate the motives behind where and why you invest these assets. Seek God's insight and ask him to uncover any stinginess that may be hindering your spiritual growth.

Related Passages for further study:

- [Mark 12:38-44](#)
- [Genesis 14:17-24](#)
- [Matthew 25:14-30](#)
- [1 Peter 4:9-11](#)

Scripture: Study, Memorization, Contemplation & Meditation

PSALM 119

Awareness

Before listening, reflect:

- What do you believe about the Bible? How much time do you spend with scripture each week?
- Have you ever memorized verses or passages of scripture? What was that process like for you? Can you still recall them from memory? How did that process affect your faith?

Scripture is the common thread tying together the many spiritual disciplines. Study, memorization, contemplation, and meditation all encourage us to interact with and engage scripture, the medium through which God chose to reveal himself to us. What better way to grow in relationship with God than to try these techniques and spend time with the book he inspired and shared with us?

“Jesus is in the wilderness for 40 days and Satan comes to him and tempts him. And Jesus responds three times: “as it is written, as it is written, as it is written.” He did not grab the scroll or bring it with him. He actually had ingested it—he had internalized it.”

— JON BROWN

Reflection

After listening, consider:

- Of the four disciplines discussed in the program, which ones inspire you to try them? Do any of them intimidate you? Why do those particular disciplines excite or intimidate you?
- What external circumstances, or internal thoughts and perceptions about yourself, keep you from spending the amount of time with scripture that you desire?
- In the second segment, hosts Dave and Scott, discuss with guest, Jon Brown, the Bible’s command to “eat this book” and what it means to internalize scripture. What did you learn from this conversation? How did it challenge you? In what ways are you already consuming scripture and making it part of you?
- What are realistic commitments that you can make to improve your practice of these scripture related disciplines?
- How have you seen the living, active word of God at work in you and your life?

“It is not enough just to know God from nature, or have a general idea of God. The only way you can really come to know God is through his revelation in the Bible.”

— DAVE BAST

Conclusion

Ask the Lord to open your ears to hear him speak through his word; ask him to open your eyes to recognize his work and movement in your life. Request his Holy Spirit to enlighten you and make the word part of you as you spend time with it and internalize it. Tell him your commitments and request accountability. Close by praying through [Psalm 119](#). Consider praying through small segments of Psalm 119 each day before spending time with scripture.

Related Passages for further study:

- [Ezekiel 3:1](#)
- [Joshua 1:7-9](#)
- [Romans 15:4-6](#)

Recommended Resources for Further Study

Books

- ***Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*** by Richard J. Foster. Copyright 1998 by HarperCollins.
- ***Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformations*** by Ruth Haley Barton. Copyright 2006 by InterVarsity Press.
- ***Spiritual Classics: Selected Readings on the Twelve Spiritual Disciplines*** edited by Richard J. Foster and Emilie Griffin. Copyright 2000 by HarperCollins.
- ***The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*** by Dallas Willard. Copyright 1999 by HarperCollins.
- ***The Way of the Heart: Connecting with God Through Prayer, Wisdom, and Silence*** by Henri J.M. Nouwen. Copyright 2003 by Ballantine Books.

From Words of Hope

ON PRAYER

- [!\[\]\(3b1126276ab595460f0818d2b853c7d3_img.jpg\) Courage to Pray](#) by William C. Brownson
- [!\[\]\(18a430fad4445223720b3b803f3b536f_img.jpg\) Pilgrimage in Prayer: One Man's Journey](#) by Bill Brownson
- [!\[\]\(1c11dbbf2503e3c9d2827247bd88426e_img.jpg\) Living Generously](#) by Jeff Munroe

ON STUDY

- [!\[\]\(d691176a0c8c25c55a5ec880b4a44829_img.jpg\) Read the Bible in a Year](#) by Harry Buis

[WORDS OF HOPE DAILY DEVOTIONAL](#)

- "Following Jesus", a series of daily devotionals available January 16-31, 2017

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FAMILY FIRE

- [!\[\]\(c3e7bc3bc7da093b811c5d01744dd350_img.jpg\) "Spiritual Disciplines: Family Fasting"](#) by Kim Sullivan
- [!\[\]\(10d283171388eea6836313866d9e42df_img.jpg\) "Spiritual Disciplines for Family Life"](#) by Rev. Dr. Rob Toornstra

TODAY DAILY DEVOTIONAL

- [!\[\]\(5c758da1fe7bd907e83e3be3e175ae69_img.jpg\) "Getting \(Back\) Into Spiritual Shape"](#), March 2015